

Peace & Grace

Romans 5:1-2

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This morning, I want us to turn, as we prepare our hearts for the Lord's table, to the book of Romans. We'll come back to Matthew, Lord willing, next time, but I want us to reflect on the heart of the gospel today.

Several months before Sheila and I were married, her mom found, and you ladies will appreciate this, the perfect mother's dress for the wedding. Now, for reasons that I don't understand, the most exciting thing to her actually was that it was on sale. She paid for the dress, the clerk draped it in a dark plastic bag, tied the bag at the bottom, and mom headed home glad to have one more item off of her wedding checklist. A few days later, dad saw the bag hanging in their closet. Now, it hadn't been opened since the clerk had bagged it, so dad decided to check out this great find. When he opened the bag, he was shocked. And that evening when mom was home, he showed her what was in the bag and she nearly fainted. Because instead of a moderately priced aqua green mother's dress, in that bag there was a mink coat worth several thousand dollars. Knowing dad, I'm sure he made some joke about it being a little too formal for an afternoon wedding. But when I think about that story, I'm reminded of that common phrase: "She definitely got more than she bargained for."

This morning, as we prepare for the Lord's table, I want to focus on a passage in Romans where Paul explains the results of our justification, and we learn in this passage that we got so much more than we bargained for. This is one of my favorite passages. In fact, its truth has been the bedrock of my soul since I first really came to understand it. And that's my hope and prayer for you this morning.

Now, let me begin by setting the context. It's been a while since we've studied Romans now. The theme of Romans is the gospel of God. After the first 17 verses, which introduce the letter, Paul begins in 1:18, through the end of chapter 4, with the gospel explained. And at the heart of the gospel of God is justification by faith alone. That's what the gospel is about. Then you have, beginning in verse 1 of chapter 5 and running through chapter 8, the gospel experienced, where

Paul details the security of our justification. In these chapters, Paul demonstrates the certainty of our salvation, the utter absolute security of the Christian.

I want us to look at the first few verses of Romans 5 this morning. In Romans 5:1-11, Paul lays out the immediate benefits of our justification. There are seven of them. Obviously, we're not going to have time to cover them all this morning. I wish we could, but I want to focus on just the first couple of these benefits that are ours. Let's read it together. You follow along, Romans 5:1-2: "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God." The grass withers, and the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever.

You'll notice that verse 1 begins, "Therefore, having been justified by faith." That expression really is Paul's summary of everything that he's dealt with so far in the book of Romans. He's explained that reality from 1:18, through the end of chapter 4. The good news that sinners can receive a right standing before God as a gift by His grace, a gift received not by any works of ours, but by faith alone, and a gift that is based solely not on our works or our merit or our efforts, but on the merits and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, His life, His death, His resurrection. You see, the problem stems from the fact that every single sin you and I have ever committed carries enough guilt to deserve God's wrath. I don't know if you ever think about that or not. Every sin carries enough guilt to merit God's wrath. But God has promised to justify the believing sinner.

Now, what does it mean to justify? Well, the word *justify* means *to declare someone righteous*. Its opposite is *to condemn*. When a judge condemns someone, he's not making them guilty. He's declaring them to be guilty. And when a judge justifies someone, he's not making them righteous (although with justification eventually comes sanctification), but in justification, he is declaring us to be right with God. That's what it means to be justified. So justification then — some of you grew up in a Roman Catholic background — justification is not a process. Justification is a legal decision that God as Judge has already made about everyone who believes in His Son. It's not

something subjective that happens inside of you. No, justification is objective. It's something that happens outside of you in the courtroom of heaven. It's a legal decision. That's justification.

Now, technically, justification involves three legal decisions. You need to think about this. You need to meditate on this. First of all, in justification, God credits our sins to Jesus Christ. He imputes them to Him. He puts them in His account. Second Corinthians 5:21: God made Christ, "who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf."

How does this work? Go back to Romans, chapter 3, and look at verse 23: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," so how can sinners be made right with God? Verse 24: Any sinner who's made right with God, it happens like this. He or she is justified as a gift by His grace, and how can God do that? Through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. That's a general way to say it. It's because of what Christ did. But what exactly did Christ do? Well, look at the next verse, verse 25: God publicly displayed Jesus — that's the cross — God publicly displayed Jesus as a propitiation. The word *propitiation* means the satisfaction of His wrath against sin. This is how it works. God credited your sin, Christian, to Jesus. Not *en masse*, but individually; your sins, Peter says. He bore our sins in His own body on the tree. Every sin you ever have or ever will commit, God credited to Jesus on the cross, and Christ bore the wrath of God for every one of those sins. That's the first legal decision in justification.

The second legal decision is God credits or imputes or puts into our account Christ's perfect righteousness. He gives us the gift of a right standing or a right status before Him, not based on us, not based on anything we have done, but based on the perfect life of Jesus Christ. In other words, God treats us as if we had committed all of those acts and thoughts and words of righteousness that Jesus did. Second Corinthians 5:21 goes on to say, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf." There's the first legal decision. But then he says, "so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

The third legal decision is on the basis of those first two: On the basis of crediting our sins to Christ and satisfying His wrath against our sins on the cross, God forgives our sins. And on the basis of crediting Christ's righteousness to us, He declares us forever righteous in His sight.

Many years ago, Sheila and I were young, just getting started in marriage, and every dollar counted. And I got my bank statement one month, and in that bank statement, there was a deposit for \$200 that I knew I had not made. I knew it wasn't my money, and I felt sort of bound in conscience to try to correct this. Now, being young and somewhat naive, I thought, since the mistake was in their favor, that the bank would be eager to have this money back, that this wouldn't be a problem. But that's not the reality. I spoke with several different people. I wrote a couple of letters, and you know what happened. Invariably, they said to me, Mr. Pennington, look, this is just your mistake. This is a mistake you made. So I gave up and spent the money.

But I remember thinking, you know, if I can get somebody else's deposits, maybe somebody else can get my bills. Beloved, for those who are in Jesus Christ, that's exactly what happens in justification. Christ pays all my bills, and I get all of His deposits. It's a magnificent exchange. Christ gets the blame for my sin and I get the credit for His obedience. He gets my rightful declaration of guilty and I get His rightful declaration of righteous. He suffers the punishment for my sin, and I receive the reward for His obedience. That's justification.

As my mentor puts it so beautifully: Christian, on the cross, God treated Jesus as if He had lived your sinful life so that forever He could treat you as if you had lived Jesus' perfect life. Now, that's justification. And with chapter 4, Paul has finished his explanation of justification.

And so he begins chapter 5, notice that word, that hinge word, *therefore*. Now he wants us to know the benefits or the blessings that come from this change in our standing before God. You see, justification is not an end in itself. God's purpose in changing our standing is to bring us into a relationship with Himself.

In 5:1-11, Paul identifies several amazing benefits of justification. And if you are in Christ, these amazing benefits are yours. More than that, God put them here because He wants you to find comfort in these realities. He wants you to find a sense of peace and security in this truth, in these great truths.

Now, these amazing benefits are ours because we have been justified by faith. I want us just for a few minutes to consider just the first two of these seven great benefits. Benefit number one, if you have been justified — if you've repented of your sins, and believe in Jesus Christ, if you've been declared right with God, not because of who you are, but because of who Jesus is and what He did — number one, we have peace with God. Verse 1: "Therefore, having been justified by faith," because that's a reality, "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Now, you'll notice Paul does not say we have the peace *of* God, although that's certainly true. He says we have peace *with* God. Literally, we have peace toward or in regard to God.

What's he talking about? Look at verse 10. He's saying there was a time when we were God's enemies, but we have now been reconciled to God through the death of His Son. That's the peace he's talking about. It's describing peace, not something we feel. It's describing peace that's external to us, an objective reality. It's reconciliation with God. It's the fact of peace between God and the justified sinner.

Now, if you stop and think about that for a moment, it's actually quite troubling because it means that before I was justified, if you repented of your sins and believed in Christ, before you were justified, or if you're here this morning and you've not trusted in Jesus Christ, you are at war with God. That's the point. As rebellious sinners, that was on our side. We were hostile toward God. We worshiped everything but God. We worshiped idols, maybe stone, but more likely idols of the heart, things that supplanted the place of God our Creator, exalted us in our pride, added to our guilt, and we made ourselves God's enemies.

You know, a lot of people who aren't believers say, you know, I'm not God's enemy. Well, that's not what God says. James the Apostle, the half-brother of Jesus Christ, writes this [James 4:4]: "Friendship with the world is hostility toward God. [Therefore] whoever wishes to be a friend of the world" — listen to this — "makes himself an enemy of God." If you don't want God, but you want friendship with everything opposed to God, then you have declared yourself to be His enemy.

But that's not our worst problem. Before Christ, God was also hostile toward us. He had formally declared war against us and our rebellion against Him. Paul's already pointed this out several times in Romans. Go back to Romans 1:18. In Romans 1, he's dealing with the pagan. That is the person who doesn't claim to have any relationship with the God of the Bible. And notice what Paul says about him in verse 18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven," literally *is being revealed*. God's angry right now. Why? Because of all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. One of those words talks about our relationship to God. People walk around without a relationship with God, even an antagonism toward God. And the other has to do with how we treat other people, unrighteousness. And we suppress the truth in unrighteousness. That's what pagans do. They just refuse to believe there is a God, even though God has written it in their hearts, even though He's put it in their conscience, He's made it clear in His creation. They suppress that truth because they don't want God's rule over them.

So that's the first problem. But what about those who claim to have a relationship with God? Go to 2:4. If they've not believed in His Son, here's their story: "[Or] do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" Friend, if you're here this morning and you've never repented and believed in Jesus Christ and your life is filled with good things, you need to know those good things come from God, your Creator.

He's good and He's been generous with you. He's given you life. He's surrounded you with good things and love and all kinds of goodness. But that's not because everything between you and He is good. No, here's why He did it. It's to lead you to repentance. But what happens if we don't? Verse 5: "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS." Like it or not, believe it or not, that's coming.

[In] John 3:36, John the Apostle writes: "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life," — listen to this — "but the wrath of God." Literally in the Greek text, *is remaining on him*. If you've not repented and believed in Jesus, it's as if the thunderstorm of God's anger against your rebellion hangs over your head every day, every

moment, every place you go. The truth is God is at war with every unbeliever. But verse 1 of our text says, "having been justified," literally, *we are having peace with God*. That's an amazing reality because the Jews taught that justification, that declaration that we're right before God will only [occur] in the end, on the day of judgment. But Paul says, no, not true. The verdict of *justified* has already been decided for the person who believes in Jesus. God has already brought the gavel down. If you've repented and believed, you have been justified. You have been declared forever right with God. One day that will be formalized at the judgment, but it's a reality today. And because of that, you already have peace with God. There's no longer a question about your standing before God. The verdict isn't out. The verdict has been offered. Even though you were and are a sinner, God is no longer angry with you, and He no longer sees you as His enemy. You have peace. And notice verse 1: This amazing peace with God comes through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Friend, if you think that you know God and you think that you have peace with God, but you've not embraced Jesus Christ, you're dead wrong. There is no other way to have peace with God. Through His apostle, Jesus said this in Ephesians 2:14: Jesus "Himself is our peace." The only peace with God comes through Jesus Christ. He is the basis of every spiritual blessing we enjoy, and it's through Him alone that we enjoy peace with God. Now, don't misunderstand this. We have objective peace with God. The war is over. We've been reconciled to God. But because of that objective peace with God, we also have peace subjectively in our hearts and our consciences. If you really understand this, your conscience can be at rest. Hebrews 10:1-2 says, listen, once you really understand that your sins have been paid for and forgiven, then you will have no more sins or consciousness of sins in the sense that you'll know it's been cared for. It's done. When we have confidence that our sins have been forgiven, that the war between us and God is over. When we've been cleansed, when we no longer are conscious of anything between us and God, then our consciences, our hearts, can find peace as well.

Sadly, that is not universally true. There are times when the objective peace is true. We have peace with God, but an individual Christian doesn't sense that, doesn't know that, doesn't experience that. Sadly, when many true believers sin, they immediately begin to question their salvation, to doubt their justification. Because of one sin, they begin to doubt their standing

before God. And I get that. Early in my own Christian life, that was a struggle. But let me just say this. I learned this myself, and I would say this to you. If you do that when you sin, then it shows that you don't yet fully understand the gospel. You don't fully understand the doctrine of justification and what happened to you at the moment of your salvation. When the gavel came down, God declared you once and forever righteous, not because you are righteous, but because His son is righteous. Let me encourage you to go back, read Romans 1 to 4, study it, go through the messages I preached on it, understand this reality. But if you have been justified, Paul says in verse 1, you are having, as a continuing reality, you are having objective peace with God.

Now, this does not mean that we don't occasionally have times of doubt. Christians do. Real Christians do. We'll talk about that in just a second. But true faith is like the needle of a compass. I have a compass in my office here at the church to remind me to live not by the urgent, but try to live by what's important. And that compass, if you put a magnet near that compass, what happens to the needle? It draws off of true north. Or if you shake it, what happens? The needle moves off of true north. That can happen even with our sense of that assurance that we have been justified. But what happens with that compass when you remove the magnet or when you stop shaking it? What always happens? The needle comes back to magnetic north. The same thing is true with real faith. It can be shaken. It can swing even like that needle wildly at times, but it's always coming back to Christ and His cross.

At the same time, and this is important to understand, there is also such a thing as false peace. That is, there are people who think they're Christians, but who really aren't. They have a peace. They think that everything's good between them and God, but it's not. How do you recognize if you have false peace? Martin Lloyd-Jones very helpfully identifies the characteristics of false peace. Number one, you think faith is just believing certain facts about Jesus in the Gospel. Listen, the demons believe in Jesus. It's not enough to believe the facts about Jesus. It's to own him as Savior and Lord. Secondly, you're resting on your own faith rather than Christ and His work. Thirdly, and this is an interesting one, you can know you have false peace if you never experience any doubts about salvation. You say, well, wait a minute. What does that mean? Well, listen, if you're a true Christian, what happens when you sin (and you do sin)? What happens when you sin? You understand above all people the gravity of sin, and you hate it, and it

wrecks your heart, and that shakes your confidence. And that's not an evidence that you're not a Christian. The irony is it's evidence that you are. Number four, you're only interested in forgiveness of your sins but not personal holiness. In other words, all you want is a life insurance policy to get you out of hell, but you're not interested in being like Jesus Christ. That's false peace. You're not a real Christian. Or you take your sin lightly, often deliberately choosing to sin with a cavalier expectation of God's forgiveness. Oh, well, I'll sin because, you know, God will forgive me. If that's your attitude toward your sin, you're not a real Christian. Because God changes our hearts and he causes us to hate our sin. We still sin, but we don't love it anymore, we hate it.

Now if those statements describe you, then you have false peace. But on the other hand, for those who've been truly justified, there is a true peace with God. The war is over. There's no more fear of judgment, no more fear of the wrath of God. Romans 8:1: "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." The word *condemnation* means *guilty verdict and the punishment that comes with it*. It's gone. That's the first great benefit of justification. We are having peace with God.

The second is found in verse 5:2: We stand in God's grace "through whom," that is, through Christ, "also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand." Literally, Paul says, *through whom we have had our introduction*. In the past, we were introduced, and the results continue. The word translated *introduction* here was used in secular Greek of *being introduced to someone who was important*. It was used of being presented at court, introduced to the king. When I was in college, a friend of a friend ran the General Services Administration at the White House. And so a group of us were traveling together, and we got a private tour of the White House, including getting a chance to see the Oval Office. It was a great experience. But you can't just drive up to the front gate of the White House and ask to meet the president. I promise you, it won't turn out well. Someone has to introduce you. Paul says, we have had our introduction. But what he says next is surprising because we expect him to say, we've been introduced to God. Instead, he says, we've had "our introduction [by faith] into this grace." What does that mean?

Well, remember, justification is a new status, a new standing with God, a new permanent status with God. And what's the nature of that new status, that new standing? We stand in grace. Before justification, we all had the same standing. [Romans] 3:23, "[For] there is no distinction; [for] all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." That was our standing universally. But we now stand in grace. We're fixed in grace. We're secure in God's grace. Grace is the spiritual air we breathe. Grace is the kingdom we live in. Grace rules.

Christian, you don't fall in and out of God's favor. You stand in God's grace. And it's never going to change. God constantly treats us with the goodness we don't deserve. He not only accepts us, He delights to receive us and to bless us. And think about this, before we stood under God's wrath and curse, now we stand not simply as no longer His enemies, not simply as pardoned criminals, now we stand because of His grace as His sons and daughters. If you have repented of your sins and trusted in Jesus Christ, then the New Testament authors make it clear under the authority of Jesus Himself that God has adopted you as His son, as His daughter. That's the reality.

Who introduced us into this grace in which we stand? Verse 2 says, "through whom?" — that is, through Christ. Jesus Christ introduced us into our new standing in grace. Believer, let me ask you a question. I understand this as well, but let me just ask you, are you ever tempted to think that because you have done something good, God now owes you? Do you think that when you obey God, you accumulate some kind of points with God, like frequent flyer miles? It's in my account now because I did something good. Or, on the other hand, are you tempted to think that after you've sinned, you've somehow forfeited God's favor? Listen, you don't understand grace. What you do neither forces God to remove His grace from you or to show it to you. Grace, by definition, means that He treats you without regard for what you deserve. It's all unmerited.

Christian, God never, never gives us what we deserve. Instead, He overwhelms us with undeserved kindness. Now, perhaps this morning you realize, as you sit here, that you still stand before God as a condemned sinner. You stand under His wrath, that God is still at war with you. Let me just plead with you. If you will turn from your rebellion and you will embrace Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, God has promised, and God never lies. He's promised to give you

righteousness, the gift of a right standing with Him solely because of the work of Jesus Christ and solely because of His grace. In a moment's time, you can go from being His enemy to being His son, His daughter. How can God do that? Because of what He did through His Son on the cross 2,000 years ago.

Today, to borrow Paul's words, I am an ambassador for Jesus Christ. God is making an appeal to you today through me. I beg you, be reconciled to God. For God made Christ "who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." And if you're here this morning and you already are a Christian, I want you to get the reality of this. You have been declared forever right with God, and it'll never change. You have peace with God. The war is over. You're His son. You're His daughter, and you stand in grace, and it'll never change. Now and forever, all you will experience is the unmerited goodness of God because you are in Jesus Christ.

In the Lord's table, we celebrate the great exchange that stands behind those gifts. Take a moment and prepare your heart as the men come.

Our Father, we are truly overwhelmed by Your goodness. Lord, we find ourselves thinking like the prodigal son in the story Jesus told. How could we ever have doubted Your goodness when You've given us so much, when You've given us Your Son, Your only Son, to reconcile us to Yourself? Lord, I pray if there are any like the prodigal here this morning who've prostituted all of Your good gifts, who've walked away from You, rebelled against You: Oh God, wake them up to the reality of their situation. Remind them that the Father's good, that You're open with welcoming arms to receive them.

And Lord, for the rest of us, as we come to celebrate the Lord's table this morning, I pray that You would give us a fresh sense of what we celebrate in the Lord's table, that great exchange in which You credit our sins to Jesus, and He pays the debt in full, our debt, and You credit His perfect life to us, and you treat us now and forever as if we were Him.

Father, thank you for that great exchange that happened at the cross, and I pray that as we celebrate it together, you'd fill our hearts with joy.

Lord, we come first confessing our sins. You've forgiven us our sins as our Judge, but now we come confessing them to You, our Father. We've offended You. We've sinned against You in thought and attitude and word and action. Lord, bring specific sins to mind, those sins in us that grieve You. Bring those specific sins to mind and help us even now to confess them by name to You, seek Your forgiveness, knowing that You are ready to forgive. You are good and ready to forgive, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon You.

And Father, tune our hearts now for those of us who know and love You to truly worship You in this act that the Lord gave us to remember Him. Receive our worship, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.