

III. The Promise of the Gospel - Salvation in Confident Hope (5:1-8:39)

From the point of his formal introduction of the gospel in verse 1:16-17 Paul progressively unfolded the doctrine of *justification by faith* as constituting its very marrow. In so doing he provided profound insight into the human condition and psyche, showing how human sinfulness both necessitates and staunchly opposes the gospel (1:18-2:29). The nature of sin is such that men suppress the knowledge of God in order to worship and serve themselves. In their fallen state all people have rejected their true identity and role as image-bearers, and are utterly incapable of self-recovery. If they are to be restored it must be God who does so. At the same time, because sin is self-idolatry, it is not innately set against righteousness; it simply insists upon *self-righteousness*. People within every culture and religious tradition recognize and value what is right, but their response is to pursue righteousness in themselves; they love righteousness but they hate the gospel. There is nothing more alien and repugnant to human sensibility than the concept that man's righteousness is to be found only and entirely in entrusting oneself to the God who justifies the ungodly (3:21-4:8).

The marrow of the gospel is that true human righteousness is divine righteousness, reckoned to unrighteous men by their faith in Jesus Christ. The righteousness with which alone men can be clothed is God's own, granted to them, secured for them, and perfected in them by His power and grace in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:18-31; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21). And precisely because the gospel proclaims God's own righteousness as His sovereign gift to ungodly men - a gift simply to be received with the confidence and submissive gratitude of faith - it cannot fail to produce in those who embrace it a settled, exultant hope; that is, *the assurance of glory*.

The centrality of *hope* to the biblical gospel was introduced by Paul in the previous context, where he showed it in its proper relation to *faith*. Because faith steadfastly believes God in spite of what meets the eye, it expresses itself in a hope *against hope*. Like Abraham, every Christian in his self-consideration sees only the incapacity of "deadness," and yet he is called to believe in the One who "*gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist*" (4:16-21). Though he now sees sin and corruption on every hand, he is to reckon himself dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus (6:1-11). Even as he is presently a new creature in Christ, so he lives in the secure and confident hope of the final and full renewal when Christ returns (8:1-25; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1-28; 2 Corinthians 4:1-5:17; Philippians 3:1-21; Colossians 3:1-4; 1 Peter 1:3-9).

And so, as Paul revealed righteousness by faith to be the very *essence* of the gospel, so he proclaimed confident, exultant hope to be the *promise* of the gospel. The gospel of reckoned righteousness for the ungodly calls men to the response of faith, and this faith expresses itself in a life of settled hope. Douglas Moo makes this observation:

"The verdict of justification, which Jews relegated to the day of judgment, has, Paul proclaims, already been rendered over the person who believes in Jesus. But can that verdict, 'hidden' to the senses, guarantee that one will be delivered from God's wrath when it is poured out in the judgment? Yes, affirms Paul. Nothing can stand in its way: not death (5:12-21), not sin (chap. 6), not the law (chap. 7) - nothing! (chap. 8). What God has begun, having justified and reconciled us, he will bring to a triumphant conclusion, and save us from wrath."

Thus, having established the principle of justification by faith alone, it is appropriate that, in the next large section of the epistle (5:1-8:39), Paul should turn his attention to the Christian's hope. In considering it he treats it as standing upon the realities of:

- *substitutionary sacrifice* (5:1-11),
- *imputed righteousness* (5:12-21),
- *deliverance from sin* (6:1-23)
- *deliverance from law* (7:1-25),
- *the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit* (8:1-30),
- *the promise of divine faithfulness* (8:31-39).

Together these truths combine to construct an enduring edifice of confidence for the believer; the confidence that nothing shall be able to separate him from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (ref. 8:31-39).

A. Hope by Virtue of Substitutionary Sacrifice (5:1-11)

1. Paul's Summary Introduction of Hope (5:1-2)

In addressing with the church at Rome the matter of the believer's hope, Paul properly began *at the beginning*. That is, even as hope is the natural and necessary expression of faith, so faith is directed toward the God who justifies the ungodly. In turn, this justification is through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, the One whom God displayed as a propitiation in His blood (3:21-26). In other words, the Christian's hope ultimately rests upon Christ's *propitiatory*, self-sacrifice for sinners.

"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." (5:1-2)

This introductory declaration provides Paul's transition from the previous section of the epistle into the succeeding one. That these verses are transitional no one questions, but there has been much discussion regarding whether they should be more closely attached to that which precedes them or that which follows.

- The fact that Paul began with the inferential conjunction rendered *therefore* indicates that his intention was to draw out an important inference from his previous instruction, which argues for joining 5:1-2 to the preceding context.
- At the same time, these two verses clearly serve as his introductory springboard into the larger context that follows.

In the end, the fact that this introductory inference finds its own focal point in the *exultation of hope* provides important insight into its relation to what precedes and follows. It was previously noted that Paul first introduced the concept of *hope* in the midst of his argument concerning Abraham and his receipt of the promised heir (4:18). So also this concept is thematic through the end of the eighth chapter. This being so, it may be fairly concluded that Paul's intention in verses 5:1-2 was to draw out a vital implication of his previous instruction regarding the gospel, and that for the purpose of providing the foundational content for what follows in the succeeding four chapters. *Moreover, when chapters 1-4 are considered in their overall content and relation to chapters 5-8, these two verses may be viewed as the hinge that binds together the doctrine of the gospel and its practice in the lives of those who have embraced it in faith.*

As such, the foundation laid in these short verses - and further developed throughout the balance of the fifth chapter - has monumental importance in the movement of Paul's thought. For not only does it serve to focus all of his preceding argumentation regarding justification by faith, it is indispensable to one's proper interaction with the practical issues of sanctification to be introduced and addressed later in chapters 6-8.

As verses 5:1-2 are considered it becomes immediately evident that they present an inference set in all three timeframes of *past, present, and future*. The way in which they are correlated is as follows: Paul's fundamental declaration concerning peace with God is presented as a *present reality* that exists by virtue of a *past activity*, and that further looks with confidence to a *future promise*.

- a. Together these two verses constitute one extended sentence. The kernel clause is the simple statement: *We have peace*. It is this affirmation that comprises the heart of the present reality enjoyed by the Christian, which reality stands upon the *preceding* matter of his justification. Not surprisingly, Paul again noted explicitly that this justification is *by faith*, and he here employed a prepositional construction that, other than one occurrence each in Hebrews and James, is unique to his writing. Most literally, it carries the sense of "out of faith." Some have argued that it is purely stylistic, which is certainly possible.

At same time, this particular expression is consistent with Paul's theology of justification, in which he understood that personal justification proceeds out of personal faith. Faith is the not *ultimate* source of righteousness, but it is the *effectual* source of it, in the sense that a person's own justification, and all that results from it, originates in his own experience by his personal faith in Christ.

- b. Having been justified by faith, *peace* has now become the overarching and defining reality for the Christian. What must be noted from the outset is that the concept of peace has monumental redemptive-historical significance. For throughout the Old Testament the entrance and permanence of peace are presented as a core aspect of the coming of the kingdom of God. In a preeminent way, the kingdom would be characterized by peace (Isaiah 9:1-7, 11:1-9, 66:1-13; Jeremiah 33:1-26; Micah 4:1-4, 5:1-5; Zechariah 3:1-10).

- 1) This peace that marks the establishment of the kingdom pertains to God; the believer in Jesus has peace *with God* (5:1a). Paul here used a prepositional phrase that has a notable *relational* connotation. That is, he was not simply speaking of a species of peace that has *reference* to God (although this is certainly true), but a peace that points specifically to a person's *relationship* with God. Paul's language carries a "face-to-face" connotation that indicates that his emphasis was upon *relational reconciliation*. In other words, he was not so much concerned with identifying the particular *parties* implicated in the matter of peace, as identifying the *core issue* of peace, namely the complete reconciliation and restoration of true intimacy between the involved parties.
- 2) Paul further attached a second prepositional phrase to his assertion: the believer's peace with God is *through our Lord Jesus Christ* (5:1b). Again, his language is deeply significant, for it identifies Jesus Christ as the *intermediate agent* in the bringing in of peace. By identifying Jesus in this way Paul must not be construed as seeking to somehow minimize His crucial role as the focal point of the Christian's justification.

Rather than seeking to minimize Christ, Paul's intent was to exalt the *Father's* role in justification and the believer's resulting peace. This is crucial, especially given the tendency among Christians to think of Jesus as "stepping between" God and men in order to prevent His Father from destroying them. Far too often Christ's sacrificial work is viewed and presented as Jesus saving men from God, as if He kept God from doing what He was desiring to do, and otherwise would have done.

By phrasing himself as he did, Paul was insisting to the Romans that, what Jesus did in His propitiatory work at Calvary, He did entirely in accordance with the determination and desire of the triune God. Christ did not save men *from* God, He saved them *for* God in order to fulfill the Father's fervent desire according to His eternal, boundless love (Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 11:1-12:6, 19:19-25, 43:1-44:8, 45:18-25, 49:1-55:13; Jeremiah 30:1-33:26; Ezekiel 34:1-31, 36:1-37:28; Hosea 1:1-3:5; also John 3:1-17, 6:22-58, 17:1-26; Romans 5:1-11, 8:28-39; Ephesians 1:3-12, 2:1-7; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17; 1 John 4:1-19; etc.).

Thus the Christian's *present* peace with God stands upon His *past* act of justification in Christ. This is a vital observation, for it establishes the permanent and unchangeable nature of this reconciliation. Since a person's reconciled relationship with God depends upon nothing in him, but only God's own purpose, power, and accomplishment, it can never be compromised, forfeited, or withdrawn. As all of God's promises to men are "yes and amen" in Christ, so those promises are forever secured in all their fullness for all who have put their trust in Him (2 Corinthians 1:18-20; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:4-9).

The God who has promised to give life to the dead (4:16-17) has fulfilled His oath by raising His Son, who Himself is the firstfruits guaranteeing the final resurrection of all those joined to Him (4:23-25, 6:1-11, 8:1-11; 1 Corinthians 15:1-58; 2 Corinthians 4:1-18, 13:4; Ephesians 1:3-14; etc.).

- c. As much as *peace with God* is the defining reality of the Christian life, so also that relational peace exists in the context of *grace*. According to Paul, grace is the determinative as well as the operative domain in which the believer lives out his reconciled relationship with God: Christ's self-sacrifice has obtained for us both our *introduction into* and our *standing in* grace (5:2a).

Moo makes the important observation that Paul's use of the term "grace" in this passage does not denote "*the manner in which God acts, or the gift that God gives, but the 'state' or 'realm' into which God's redeeming work transfers the believer. It is the realm in which 'grace reigns' (5:21), a realm that is set in contrast to the realm or domain of the law (6:14-15).*"

Furthermore, with a marvelous insight that is easily overlooked, Paul here emphasized that grace plays a vital past *and* present role in the Christian life. Whereas justification is oriented toward the past, and peace with God is oriented toward the present, the principle of grace serves to bind them together: *as the Christian's past justification represents an introduction into grace, so his present life from that point forward is defined by a standing in grace.*

- 1) He was not justified by the effectual power of grace only to be sanctified by personal effort; in his justification the believer was brought into the domain of grace where he *abides* permanently, held and transformed by its operation through the Spirit until the day he is presented complete in Christ. Having begun in grace, he continues in, and will be completed in grace (Galatians 3:1-5; Colossians 1:3-23; Hebrews 13:5-15).
 - 2) Paul emphasized the determinative and permanent quality of grace by both his choice of verb and his grammar. The verb "stand" has a two-fold implication, connoting a posture of *triumph* as well as *immovability* (cf. 14:1-4; Ephesians 6:11-17; Philippians 4:1; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17). But this present permanence is further emphasized by his use of the perfect tense; this grace is the *domain* in which God has made His people to stand, and in which they will continue to stand without fail.
 - 3) And it is precisely because this gracious standing has its sole ground in Christ's propitiatory self-offering that it continues to the end, ultimately to attain its own triumph in the Christian's full conformity to the Savior.
- d. Finally, Paul drew all of the previous components of Christian reality together by showing how they find their own ultimate significance in a future promise; *the hope of the glory of God* (5:2b).

- 1) This expression looks back to both 3:23 and 4:19-20. With respect to the former, all men, by virtue of their willful suppression of the knowledge of God, have come short of His glory in that they have failed to live up to their created nature, status and purpose. Man's very existence as image-bearer was intended to bear witness to God's nature and glory, but his insistent self-idolatry causes him to testify only of his own perversion.

In their fallen state men are unable even to bear witness to true *humanness*, and so also cannot testify of the One whose image they bear; in every way they fall short of the glory of God. But faith is the way in which this lost glory is restored, not only as it pertains to man's innate *display* of God's glory, but also his *declaration* of it in every aspect of his life. Thus, as Abraham grew strong in faith he also "gave glory to God." And in the day when faith will be sight, the fullness of this divine glory will be the hallmark of every one of the Lamb's redeemed brethren.

- 2) In the present context Paul associates this glory with the believer's future hope. *Once again present reality is the basis and surety of what is hoped for.* And the believer's hope is his future, full share in the glory of God as it will be revealed to him and manifested through him in his restored and perfected humanity.
- 3) Furthermore, Paul presented this hope of glory as the *ground* of the believer's confidence and joy. So the NASB: "*we exult in hope of the glory of God.*" The verb he employed is best understood as a confident boast, though not in the sinful sense of prideful boasting. It is expressive of an open and unashamed confidence, but not a confidence that has any reference to self. The reason is that this boast is grounded upon the believer's *hope*, which hope stands entirely upon the veracity of God's promise and the invincibility of His power.
- 4) Lastly, in view of all that has been seen, it is evident that this hope, which constitutes the confident boast of the believer, has its *object* in the glory of God. Thus Paul's climactic proclamation by which he closes out this transitional introduction can well be rendered: "*we boast upon the basis of the hope that finds its object in our sure participation in the glory of God.*" In the most glorious of contrasts Paul's insisted to the Romans that, whereas on the one hand the gospel of righteousness by faith *excludes* boasting (3:27-28, 4:1-3), on the other hand it *demands* it.

"'Boasting' in human achievement is excluded by the gospel, but 'boasting' because of the gracious provision of God in Christ is entirely appropriate. As in 3:23, 'the glory of God' is that state of 'God-like-ness' which has been lost because of sin, and which will be restored in the last day to every Christian (cf. 8:17, 18, 21, 30). A joyful confidence in this prospect, overcoming our (proper) frustration at our present failure to be all that God would want us to be, should be the mark of every believer." (Douglas Moo)