

Justified by Faith

By [Wayne Jackson](#)

The text is thrilling beyond the human tongue to express:

Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; through whom also we have had our access by faith into this grace wherein we stand; and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God (Romans 5:1-2).

The Exegesis

Bible passages brim with inspired information worthy of careful examination. Unfortunately all too often the holy words are treated superficially. It is a tragedy of no small magnitude that this lovely citation is so seriously misunderstood by a sizable segment of “Christendom.” Let us give it a focused investigation.

The Contextual Background

It should be noted first that the text is prefaced with the conjunction “therefore” (oun), the design of which is to draw a logical conclusion from previously stated premises. Though we cannot develop the entire preceding context in this brief article, we must note two important facts set forth in the final verse of chapter four. Christ “was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification.”

These compound phrases set forth two great acts in the divine plan of human redemption. (a) Christ was “delivered up” to death (cf. Acts 2:23) for our “trespasses.” A trespass is an infraction of divine law—an action against either God or man. The human family has been ruined by sin (cf. Romans 5:12), and there is no remedy for such apart from Christ (Acts 4:12). (b) Jesus was “raised for our justification.” Both the death of Christ and his subsequent resurrection were key elements in the sacred program enacted for humanity’s salvation. From this foundation springs the important passage cited above.

Justification

The noun, “justification,” is found ninety-two times in the New Testament (fifty-eight times in Paul’s letters), while the verb “justify” occurs thirty-nine times (twenty-seven times in Paul’s writings). Justification is the legal **standing** that results from the **process** of “being justified.” To say that one is justified from sin is not to claim that he is **innocent** of the crime; far from it. Rather, the term suggests that the offender has been exempted from the penalty he justly deserves. The “death sentence” (cf. Romans 5:12; 6:23) has been set aside, consistent with the righteous Judge’s system of justice.

In the case of the sin-guilt of a rebellious people (which all accountable souls have been – Romans 3:10,23), both the problem and the solution are set forth in Romans chapter three. The issue is this: how may God be **just**, and yet **justify** sinners (cf. 3:26). The answer is found in the gift of Christ. God set forth his Son to be the “propitiation” for sin (hilasterion), i.e., an offering of atonement, a covering for sin (cf. Hebrews 9:5). The sinless “lamb of God” takes the penalty for the sinful individual who submits to the conditions imposed by the Judge, God (cf. Isaiah 53:4-6). Paul affirms that these “beloved of God . . . saints” in the city of Rome have been “justified” (a past tense act with an abiding result). Practically speaking, justification is the equivalent of forgiveness, as well as the “in Christ” relationship (cf. Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27).

By Faith

The battleground on this passage, and numerous others of similar import, is the meaning of “by faith” (ek pisteos). The preposition ek has been variously translated as “by” (KJV, ASV) or “through” (NIV). The term basically means “out of” and it reveals the human side of the salvation equation. Out of a genuine faith flows submission to God in response to sacred instruction (Romans 10:17). The sinner’s “faith” is essential to his justification. This affirmation, of course, negates the baseless theories of “universal salvation” and “unconditional election.”

The major controversy, however, is over the meaning of “faith.” Is this merely the willingness of the sinner to accept the historical facts about Christ, and the surrender of one’s soul to “trust” the Lord for his salvation? This is a common perception, but is it accurate? Though this view gained the strong support of the early Protestant Reformation in its

opposition to the Roman Catholic dogma of justification upon the basis of meritorious works, the theory has no support in the larger context of the book of Romans, or, for that matter, elsewhere in the New Testament. In J.H. Thayer's discussion of the verb *pisteuo* ("believe"), he supplements the idea of trust with that of "obedience to Christ" (1958, 511), and this is amply supported by the biblical text. Note the following facts:

1. In his letter to the Romans (and elsewhere), Paul never divorces faith from obedience. Valid faith is that which yields obedience, and obedience derives its genesis from faith (1:5; 16:26). This is such an established biblical principle that gospel obedience in the book of Acts is characterized as being "obedient to the faith" (6:7). Faith, aloof from submission to God, is simply viewed as non-faith, redemptively speaking (cf. James 2:24).
2. In chapter six, Paul aligns himself with the Christians in Rome and characterizes all as "we who died to sin" (v. 2). Later, the apostle complements the earlier affirmation by this supplementary phrase: "for he who has died is **justified**" (v. 7). If, therefore, one learns what transpired between verses two and seven, he will know precisely how justification was effected. Paul's explanation is clear. He contends that dying to sin essentially is a resolution to no longer live the unrestrained life of sin (v. 2). The one who dies to the love and reckless practice of sin will submit to being buried in baptism, just as Christ was buried following his death. Moreover, as Jesus was "raised," so it is the case that when one emerges from immersion, he enjoys "newness of life" (v. 4), i.e., justification from sin (v. 7). Later, in the same context, the apostle describes the process as being "obedient from the heart," hence being "delivered" and "made free from sin" (vv. 17-18).
3. Since Paul uses the plural "we" to join himself with the Romans, in terms of what each did in procuring justification, and inasmuch as we elsewhere learn that Saul's sins were "washed away" at the point of baptism (Acts 22:16), one must conclude that justification occurs at the point of immersion. This is a part of the broader process of being "justified by faith." One has not the liberty, therefore, to isolate the initial act of belief/trust from the full complement of conditions (e.g., "repentance" and "confession" of one's faith – 2:4; 10:9-10) that lead to the point of actual justification.
4. In chapter ten of this book, the apostle discusses the problem of Jewish disbelief. What was at the core of that problem? They sought to make themselves right with God by adopting a mode of "righteousness" on their own, rather than submitting themselves to the "righteousness of God," i.e., God's plan for constituting one as righteous (10:1-3). When one obeys the first principles of the gospel, he is accounted to be "righteous" (*dikaios* – see Matthew 25:37), which is the equivalent of "justified" (*dikaioo*). Subsequently in this chapter the apostle quotes scripture (Isaiah 28:16) to the effect that whosoever "believes on him" [Christ] "shall not be put to shame" (v. 11). This last phrase is the negative form of the positive terms "saved" or "justified." He then references a parallel sentiment from Joel (2:32), "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (v. 13). From the book of Acts one learns that "calling upon the name of the Lord" in order to receive salvation, occurs when one repents of sins and is immersed in the name of Christ—at which point he receives "forgiveness of sins" (cf. Acts 2:21,38). But, by way of contrast, what was the plight of many of the Jews? Tragically, "they did not all **obey** the gospel" (10:16). Thus, "believing" (v. 11), and "calling upon the name" (v. 13), are the equivalents of obeying the gospel. Faith obeys!

Clearly, a full consideration of all the facts leads the careful and honest student only to the conclusion that while being justified is by faith, the initial act of believing does not represent the total plan of justification. Faith is the guiding principle of obedience; it is, however, only the beginning of the process that leads to further obedience. Faith does not justify without that submission. For further study, see [The Use of 'Believe' in Acts](#), (Jackson 2005, 415-418).

Peace with God

Paul affirms that the goal of justification is "peace with God." The phrase asserts by implication that those estranged from the Lord, steadfastly pursuing their own ambitions in life, are enemies of the Creator; they are at war with him. The Psalmist well described the attitude.

Why do the nations rage, and the peoples imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel against Jehovah, and against his anointed, saying, "Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their cords from us" (Psalm 2:1-3).

The arrogant will not submit to divine restraints.

The Bible plainly describes some as enemies of God. It is clear enough that Satan is an enemy (Matthew 13:25,28,39), but so also are men who oppose the truth (Matthew 22:44; Luke 19:27; Acts 13:10; Romans 5:10; Philippians 3:18). The war/peace relationship is at the very heart of the biblical doctrine of "reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:17-20).

In secular Greek "peace" basically suggested the absence of war, together with a new environment of order and tranquility. But as Professor Spicq noted, when one enters the realm of the Old Testament, it is as if he is entering a new world (1994, 426). "Peace" (salom – some 250 times in the Old Testament; eirene in the LXX; ninety-two times in the New Testament) signifies "prosperity, well-being, health, completeness, safety" (Mounce 2006, 502).

In the sense of this passage, peace is a state of being, not a mere emotion—though emotion should naturally follow. Unfortunately, too many people have a deceptive emotional sense of peace, when actually they still are at war with God. And sadly, some who have entered the state of justification seem still to be searching for peace of mind!

Through Christ

Again it must be emphasized that Christ is the only avenue to justification. Observe that justification and peace with God are available only "through" (dia) the Lord Jesus Christ. The preposition dia suggests a secondary agency; in other words, the peace derives from God, but is bestowed by means of the sacrificial mission of Christ (cf. again Romans 4:25).

The full expression "Lord Jesus Christ" is found sixty-five times in the New Testament. Three things are emphasized: (a) He is "Lord," thus one who exercises authority. "Lord," as applied to Christ, corresponds to Yahweh (Jehovah) in the Old Testament—an emphatic inference to Jesus' divine nature. (b) He is Jesus (Savior), for his mission was to seek and save the lost (Matthew 1:21; cf. Luke 19:10). (c) He also is the promised "Messiah" (Christ – John 4:25-26), i.e., the one who fulfills hundreds of Old Testament messianic prophecies.

Grace Accessed

It is also "through" (dia) Jesus that we are able to "access" God's grace (v. 2). The apostle affirms that through Christ "we have had our access by faith into [eis – from the outside to within the inside] this grace," i.e., a state of grace—salvation itself. It is an "amazing _disgrace,"_ and thoroughly disheartening, that so many are untaught regarding the details of "amazing grace."

The verb rendered "have had" (v. 2a) is in the perfect tense, hence the access has been received already and is retained still (Robertson 1931, 355). "Access," used only here and twice in Ephesians (2:18; 3:12), derives from two Greek roots signifying "to lead to," hence "a way of approach, access" (Danker et al. 2000, 876). Thayer described it as an access to a friendly relationship with God by which we are assured that he is pleased with us (1958, 544).

Take note of the joint relationship that is involved in the access of grace. It is through the work of Christ, in conjunction with the by-the-faith process that is implemented on the part of those seeking grace. For the significance of "by faith," see above. [Note: Some ancient texts and modern translations omit "by faith" in v. 2. But there is adequate evidence to support it; some copyists may have omitted it, feeling it somewhat redundant to the phrase of v. 1 (Metzger 1971, 511-512).]

Grace is a wonderful, though much misunderstood, theme. The term charis occurs about 155 times in the New Testament. The word is related to the Greek, chairō, meaning "to rejoice." Grace conveys the ideas of favor, gratification, or gratitude, depending upon the context. There is significant stress upon the fact that salvation is the result of God's grace (Ephesians 2:8-9), but there are several important aspects to this matter.

1. Heaven's grace is made available to "all men" (Titus 2:11), contrary to the claims of Calvinism, which alleges it is bestowed only upon certain "elect" ones.

2. Divine grace is accessed by means of a system of intellectual instruction (Titus 2:12; cf. John 6:45); it is not arbitrarily bestowed.
3. Grace is extended conditionally (cf. Genesis 6:8; Hebrews 11:7)—again, contra Calvinism. The Ephesian Christians had been saved “by grace” (Ephesians 2:8), but their salvation occurred at that point in time when they were “cleansed by the washing of water” (5:26). This is a reference to their baptism—a fact almost universally conceded by scholars.
4. Grace excludes merit; salvation can never be earned (Romans 6:23; cf. Matthew 18:24-27). On the other hand, the offer of grace must be “received” (2 Corinthians 6:1; cf. John 1:11-12), and it is received by responding to certain divinely required conditions (Titus 3:4-7; cf. John 3:3-5).
5. As noted already, within the sphere of grace one can be at peace with God, and in achieving that, he becomes an heir of “the grace of life” (1 Peter 3:7).

Stand Fast in Grace

Paul affirms that in “this grace . . . we stand.” The verb “stand” is a perfect tense form. This “carries the sense of something firm and lasting, the opposite of a short-term, fair-weather relationship with God” (Edwards 1992, 135). The solid stand results from the sustained faith upon which the Christian positions his life (cf. Romans 11:20; 2 Corinthians 1:24).

The sphere of grace is not an environment in which the child of God irrevocably remains—**irrespective of his own will-power**. It is imperative that the Christian “continue in the grace” he has received (Acts 13:43), and “grow” therein (2 Peter 3:18). If one does not, he will “fall away” from divine grace (Galatians 5:4; cf. Hebrews 12:15), and the grace previously accessed will have been “in vain” (2 Corinthians 6:1; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:10).

Rejoicing in Hope

Because of our justification, the peace we enjoy with God, and our access to Heaven’s grace, we “rejoice” or “glory” (see ASVfn). The Greek word for “rejoice” is *kauchaomai*, which sometimes (depending upon the context) refers to an evil boasting or glorying (see 1 Corinthians 3:21; 4:7; Ephesians 2:9). But on the other hand, as in this case, it can express a healthy glorying, a rejoicing in things spiritual (as in 5:2-3; cf. 2 Corinthians 10:17; Galatians 6:14).

Here the rejoicing is in the “glory of God.” The phrase can suggest two ideas. First, it doubtless denotes the eventual joy of being in the very presence of the Lord God himself, and basking in his blessed radiance (cf. Revelation 21:3-4; 22:4-5). More than that though, there is a **limited** sense in which we will **share** divine glory. Not that we become deity, as some allege, but that “we will have a glorious body like the glorified human body of Christ” (Cottrell 1996, 315; see Philippians 3:21; 1 John 3:2).

Conclusion

This sentence (5:1-2) in Paul’s letter to the Christians in Rome is heavy with meaning, serious in its implied responsibility, and sweet in its wonderful promises. Savor it and be motivated to a greater level of service thereby.

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Scripture References

Romans 5:1-2; Acts 2:23; Romans 5:12; Acts 4:12; Romans 5:12, 6:23; Romans 3:10, 23; Hebrews 9:5; Isaiah 53:4-6; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27; Romans 10:17; James 2:24; Acts 22:16; Matthew 25:37; Isaiah 28:16; Acts 2:21, 38; Psalm 2:1-3; Matthew 13:25, 28, 39; Matthew 22:44; Luke 19:27; Acts 13:10; Romans 5:10; Philippians 3:18; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20; Romans 4:25; Matthew 1:21; Luke 19:10; John 4:25-26; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 2:11; Titus 2:12; John 6:45; Genesis 6:8; Hebrews 11:7; Ephesians 2:8; Romans 6:23; Matthew 18:24-27; 2 Corinthians 6:1; John 1:11-12; Titus 3:4-7; John 3:3-5; 1 Peter 3:7; Romans 11:20; 2 Corinthians 1:24; Acts 13:43; 2 Peter 3:18; Galatians 5:4; Hebrews 12:15; 1 Corinthians 15:10; 1 Corinthians 3:21, 4:7; Ephesians 2:9; 1 Corinthians 10:17; Galatians 6:14; Revelation 21:3-4, 22:4-5; Philippians 3:21; 1 John 3:2

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