

THEREFORE: Romans 5: 1-2

(Part 1)

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Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom indeed we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and exult in hope of the glory of God (Romans 5: 1-2, my translation).

I will be bold and suggest, that if we would soak in the truth of these words from Paul's pen, then our Christian lives would be revolutionised. At least it has been so in my own Christian walk.

From the time I was a young man and began to breathe in the heavenly oxygen of these inspired verses, my relationship with the God of the Bible has been dynamically impacted. When zeal fades, when prayer is hard, when emotions bounce all over the shop, when depression lurks, when discouragement looms, when heartache crushes, Romans 5:1-2 brings much needed assurance and renewed hope.

So, let's unpack this little gem. May God open our eyes to see it's sparkling beauty!

ELEMENTARY DEAR WATSON!

“Therefore, having been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ...”

It is common practice for Bible teachers to say, “When you see the word ‘therefore’, be sure to see what it's there for!” ‘Therefore’ connects what has previously been discussed with the logical deductions that now follow. Martyn Lloyd-Jones expresses it better than I could;

I sometimes think that the whole secret of the Christian life is to know how to use the word ‘Therefore’. The Christian life is in many ways a matter of logic, a matter of deduction. The Christians who have shined most brightly throughout the centuries have always been those who have been able to use this ‘Therefore’. Correspondingly most failures in the Christian life are to be traced to an inability to use this word, and to deduce what we should and what we ought, from this great doctrine [justification or being made right with God] ¹

Now that's a huge claim --- *the whole secret* of the Christian life is to know how to use the word ‘therefore’!? Wow, do you mean the health of our Christian life is determined by how well we connect the dots? Do we really imagine that logical thinking is critical to our whole spiritual temperature? That it all depends on how we use the word ‘therefore’? Is it really that elementary?

Unfortunately, there are not a few folk who seem to think that the mark of being a ‘spiritual’ believer is to stop thinking: Just switch off your brain and get in tune with your inner self is the modern mantra.

Let's not underestimate the insidious creep of this New Age philosophic approach into our churches. The idea that we can find God-consciousness by emptying the mind of all distractions to reach inner solitude is ubiquitous. Oh, but of course, we can put a Christian spin on it and sell it with a text like, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean upon your own understanding” (Proverbs 3: 5). There you go, we are assured, your own understanding can't be trusted. Just let ‘the Spirit lead you, brother’. Just give yourself up to inner enlightenment and trust the voice that ministers to the inner soul.

However, a little reflection on what the wise man in Proverbs is really saying would save us from this error. Look at the context of Proverbs 3:5. Go back to verse 1. **“Do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments”**. Remember. The wise teacher is actually advising us to use our brains. Write this teaching in your

¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *ROMANS: Exposition of Chapter 5: Assurance*. Banner of Truth, Edinburgh. 1974. pp 1-2.

heart. No blank space here! *Think* about the direction of your life. Don't imagine for a moment that you know how to live right in God's world without His wisdom.

I find the Septuagint version of **Proverbs 3 verse 4** fascinating,

*And **think beforehand** on the good things before the LORD and men!* ²

That's exactly how the Psalmist advises the "blessed man" to meditate,

*In His [i.e. God's] law **he meditates day and night** (Ps. 1: 2).*

Surely the spiritual man is a thinker! His mind is actively engaged in God's word and teachings. He doesn't sit cross-legged concentrating on the dot in front of his closed eyes all the while humming, "Om, Om, Om." He's always thinking ahead of time.

But be warned. If you lean upon your own understanding and follow your own heart's inclinations, you will make a shipwreck of your life. Your own self-styled philosophy will dissipate your life. But if you base your life upon the word of God, if you absorb His teaching, if you understand His Mind, then His wisdom will guide you, His thinking will lead you. Your way will be "straight" and you will know "health" and yes, "peace" (Prov. 3: 8-9).

So, Martyn Lloyd-Jones observes correctly, that on the positive side, the Christians who have shined most brightly for God have always been those who have been able to think logically. *Therefore ... use your head man!*

On the negative side, if you are having a dry time in your Christian experience, it's because you are failing to think straight. You are losing the mind games. In the particular context of our text from Romans 5: 1-2, you are not thinking right about the great teaching of "justification by faith" --- "**Therefore, having been justified by faith ...**" Which is to say, you are not understanding your right standing before God in Christ. You are not drawing the inevitable conclusions, the logical deductions, from all that God has done in Christ and promised through Christ for you.

SO WHAT IS 'JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH'?

Remember the parable Jesus told about the two men who went up into the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-collector (Luke 18: 10-15)? (You expected I would start to answer that by first going to the apostle Paul, didn't you? Be honest now!) Anyway, back to Jesus the author and the definer of our faith (Hebrews 3: 1; 12:2).

The Pharisee congratulated himself for his fine performance ... I am not a swindler, I am not dishonest, I am not an adulterer. I fast often, I pay the tithe of all my earnings. I am not like others and certainly not like this tax-collector!

But Jesus says he "**was praying to himself**", which only goes to prove that talking to yourself is the definition of insanity! God turned a deaf ear. The Pharisee was rejected by heaven.

However, the tax-collector stood far away and could not lift his eyes towards God in heaven. He was in an agony of guilt beating his fists upon his chest. He felt condemned by God and by men. All he could manage to pray over and over again was, "**God, be merciful to me the sinner**". ³

Jesus explained the outcome, "**I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted**" (Lk. 18: 14).

Which is to say, God accepted him as righteous in His sight. This self-confessed sinner went home a forgiven man, totally acquitted of his sin. Heaven's court sent him home totally cleared of all guilt, and in good standing as a son of Israel's community.

That's the doctrine of "justification by faith" in a nutshell as explained by Jesus. Take your place as a self-confessed sinner who comes empty-handed. All you can do is hope for the mercy of God. Salvation is all of God's grace, so

² *Pronou* means to think ahead of time, perceive beforehand.

³ The Greek verb tense indicates he kept on saying this. Also note the definite article, for the tax-collector confessed he was "the sinner".

there'll be no boasting in our achievement here. No self-congratulating. We'll be saved by God's grace or not at all, for the glory belongs totally to Him.

OBJECTION!

Now I can hear the howls of protest. But Greg! You haven't mentioned anything about Christ's finished work on the cross. You haven't said anything about "faith in Christ alone". You haven't said a word about being justified by the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Where's the blood of Jesus to guarantee our standing before God?

Not so fast my friend! When the tax-collector cried out, "God, be merciful to me the sinner!" he actually said, "God be *propitious* towards me".⁴ This son of Abraham knew God had provided and promised forgiveness and full acceptance on the basis of the sacrificial blood sprinkled on the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies. He hoped in God's grace, His unmerited favour, in other words.

So the tax-collector not only confessed his own sinfulness but also God's faithfulness and mercy provided in the mercy seat in that Temple. God's faithful word of promise was his only hope! And nothing has changed since Calvary, apart from the wonderful truth that Jesus' offering of his righteous life on the cross of Calvary has fulfilled and finished that old Levitical system once for all. God is satisfied with the righteousness of Jesus on our behalf.

That's what **Romans 4: 22** means,

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe, for there is no distinction; for all have sinned ...⁵

Somehow Christians have got the wrong idea that God saved Jews under the old Covenant a different way than He now saves us through Christ. Nothing could be further from the truth. Actually, the apostle Paul anticipated this objection. In his day there were those who thought God had one way of saving the Jew and another way of justifying the Gentile.

Paul vigorously refutes this idea. He affirms, "there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3: 22-23). Jew and Gentile are sinners equally standing in need of God's grace. **There is no distinction!**

THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD AND ONE WAY TO BE SAVED

Jesus' parable about being 'justified' by God's mercy apart from our own efforts proves, that before Calvary, God always saved by His lovingkindness alone through faith. All we can do is be like the poor beggar who extends his empty hand out in expectation of His loving provision. All grounds for personal boasting by the Jew or the Gentile are excluded. Paul asks,

Where then is boasting? It is excluded ... by the law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also --- if indeed God is one --- and He will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith (Romans 3: 27-30).

Whether under the old Levitical Covenant of Israel or under the new Covenant initiated by Jesus, God has always justified the one who looks to Him in faith. No works of righteousness can help here. The Pharisee's fasting and tithing and clean living before men can't save. His reliance on his social class or ethnicity won't make him right with God. And his wickedness won't debar him either.

Under the old system God accepted the self-confessed sinner who came empty handed. God turned no-one away who repented and cried to Him for mercy. And although there was no intrinsic merit in the Levitical priesthood and

⁴ *Hilasthete* ... aorist passive imperative 2 singular, meaning be appeased to me on the basis of the mercy You have provided and promised at the mercy seat covered with blood in the Holy of Holies.

⁵ The more accurate translation would be that the righteousness of God comes to us through Christ's obedience of faith towards God, that is, "**the faith of Jesus Christ**". For a full discussion of this instructive theme see my article [Did Jesus Really Live By Faith?](#)

all the animal sacrifices, the Jew knew that God had declared he would be justified if he listened to God's word and acted on it. The Jew who had faith in God's teaching --- His Law --- was justified, that is, accepted in right standing with Him.

This faith that justifies before God is defined by Paul in Romans 1:5 as **"the obedience of faith"** (also Rom.16:26). The justified person is the one who takes God's word as true and acts on it.

Just so, with the advent of the New Covenant, God declares that He has **"publicly displayed"** Jesus **"as a propitiatory sacrifice in his blood"** and that everybody who accepts His word on it is declared right in His sight. We may **therefore** rest in the knowledge that **"God made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him"** (2 Cor. 5:21).

So let's be absolutely clear here. Justifying faith listens to God's word. God declares righteous in His sight all who come to Him believing His Gospel word in Christ. The faith that saves obediently pays attention to God's declaratory word as taught by Jesus. Jesus is **"the source of eternal salvation"** only **"to all those who obey him"** (Hebrews 5:9)!

ASSURANCE

So let's ask ourselves an obvious question: How do I know I have been justified by faith? How may I have the assurance that I can go down to my house --- like that tax-collector --- in right standing before the God of heaven? Jesus has already told us in his parable that justification before God is based on God's free mercy and grace to all sinners.

Paul gives us the same answer in the previous chapter of Romans. He uses Abraham's example of the obedience of faith as the prime illustration of justifying faith. God gave a promise to Abraham, vowing that he would be the father of many nations. And although he was an old man and although Sarah was well past the age of child-bearing, Abraham took God at His word. He walked before God as though the promised future was already reality.

Abraham believed God. Sure, it was not always a strong faith or a perfect faith. Abraham occasionally thought God needed a bit of a hand in working things out! But the overall direction of his life and the overall orientation of his life was that he was, **"fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform"** (Romans 4: 21).

And here comes our word of logical deduction again ... **"Therefore also it was reckoned to him as righteousness"** (Romans 4: 22). But this was written **"not for his sake only ... but for our sake also, to whom it will be reckoned, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, [he] who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised for our justification"** (Romans 4: 23-25).

So, how do I know if I have been justified by faith? How may I have the assurance that I can go down to my house --- like the tax-collector and indeed Abraham --- in right standing before God? Well, have I accepted God's word on the matter that He justifies every person who cries out for His mercy on the basis of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus will be declared righteous and will enter His promised glory? And is my life oriented towards His coming Kingdom?

I hasten to add that I am not referring only to an intellectual assent to these facts. Sadly there are multitudes who say they believe Jesus is the Son of God, and that he died on the cross and even that he rose again but it makes not a skerrick of difference in the way they live. They have no joy in God and the great mercy He has offered them. (The one who has been forgiven much, will love God much.) They have no sense of awe and a feeling of overwhelming gratitude that God's mercy should extend to them the promise of "eternal life", which is, to inherit the Life of the Age to Come.

No. Believing certain propositions, even Bible facts, makes no difference in their lives at all. This is not saving faith, not justifying faith! It's possible to believe all these things in your head and still be lost. It's possible to recite the Apostle's Creed and still be a stranger to God. Certainly the Pharisee in Jesus' parable was "orthodox" in doctrine. He believed in the one God. He loved the holy Scriptures. He even believed in the resurrection of the dead. But he did not know the character of God! He knew nothing of God's mercy and grace to sinners!

The believer “justified by faith” knows he once was lost, but now has been reconciled to the God of heaven. He is, she is, the friend of God. God and man walking hand in hand.

The example of Abraham’s life proves we are talking about more than just believing certain doctrines. The faith that justifies certainly has Biblical content, but it is more. Saving faith as we have said, carries the element of committal and obedience to God’s word. I believe God when I abandon myself to His promises. **“The obedience of faith”!**

So the faith that justifies is the faith that makes its boast in the gift of God. It knows, “But for the grace of God in Christ, I am a sinner unclean and undone. Without God I am without hope in this world or the next.”

Have you made this logical deduction? Have you connected the dots, and come to the same conclusion? Have you correctly understood this “therefore”? It’s the secret to a joyful and useful Christian life.

THE ERROR OF DISPENSATIONALISM

As a little aside, I cannot in this context help but again comment on the doctrinal error called Dispensationalism. This is the teaching that maintains there is still a real distinction between the way God treats Jews and Gentiles. Some even go so far as to say this distinction will persist throughout eternity, that the Church will be in Heaven and the Jewish nation will be on earth.

As a corollary of this, Dispensationalism asserts there are different Gospels. There is the ‘Gospel of the Kingdom’ offered to Jews and there is the ‘Gospel of grace’ now offered to non-Jews. I have fully discussed this false teaching in my article *Beefing Up Paul*, but all I have space for now is to affirm that there is only one Gospel, the Gospel of the Grace of God. It is the only Gospel that admits any repentant sinner a saving entrance into His Kingdom.⁶

The New Covenant position is that we Gentiles are now made “fellow-heirs” and “fellow-members with the saints” --- with the Jews who had believed before Jesus came along. It’s always been by God’s grace through faith in His word. As far as the distinction between Jew and Gentile for salvation is concerned, it’s gone! Forever. Never to come back. There is only one Gospel of salvation for Jew and Gentiles alike. To repeat,

Where then is boasting? It is excluded ... by the law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also --- if indeed God is one --- and He will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith (Romans 3: 27-30).

Whether we are talking about the old or the new Covenants, whether we are talking about salvation for Jews or Gentiles, there is only one God, there is only one Gospel of grace, there is only one category of humanity (sinners), there is only one faith that saves --- the faith that takes God at His word that He justifies sinners, on the basis of the perfect faith and sacrifice of the beloved Son of God. Jesus --- whose faithfulness to his Father God has opened the way for all to enter on his terms --- is the door that leads to eternal life.

This is to say, that whoever cries out to God for mercy on the basis of God’s provision through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, and whoever trusts in Jesus’ Gospel-word of the coming Kingdom, will be saved. All of God. All of grace. All on the merits of Christ Jesus. Now I humbly walk in that knowledge. For, **“it is by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption” (I Cor. 1:30).**

On the negative side, it’s “just-as-if-I’d” never sinned”. On the positive side, God declares me righteous in His sight, fit to enter His glorious Kingdom. His friend! More of this in part 2. But meantime, I can’t contain myself ...

Hallelujah, ***therefore*** we too may go down to our house as it were, with the heaviness of our guilty past lifted forever. We rejoice in His merciful provision in Christ Jesus knowing we have been justified by faith, apart from any merit in ourselves. Saved by God’s grace alone, through Christ alone, apart from any help from our hands. This is the gift of God through Christ Jesus our Lord: **“Therefore, having been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”.**

⁶ Paul defines “the Gospel of the grace of God” as none other than “preaching the Kingdom” (Acts 20: 24-25)!

