

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,  
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, February 14, 2016**

## **THE BENEFITS OF GRACE**

### **Romans 5:1-5**

Several years ago, over a period of three or four Sundays, I preached on this passage from Romans 5 as part of an almost-year-long series of messages on the meaning of grace. I won't repeat everything I said back then, but I will say that Paul's message here of the meaning of grace and its benefits is of incalculable importance to our understanding of the gospel and its implications for our lives. It is, we might say, revolutionary. One candidate (Bernie Sanders) seeking his party's nomination for President of the United States is asking people to join him in bringing about a new political revolution in our country. *This* – Paul's message of grace and its benefits – is truly revolutionary. Spiritually revolutionary. It will revolutionize your life in the best and most important way possible, if you let it.

Recall what we have already seen in our "Journey on the Romans Road." After stating his theme in Romans 1:16-17 –

I am not ashamed of the gospel,  
because it is the power of God  
for the salvation of everyone who believes:  
first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.  
For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed,  
a righteousness that is by faith from first to last,  
just as it is written:  
"The righteous will live by faith." –

Paul proceeds to show that our sinfulness is both universal and terminal. All of humankind is infected with the sin-virus, and we are helpless to overcome it in our own power. Paul quotes from the Old Testament Book of Psalms (14:1-3; 53:1-3) in stating his conclusion that "there is no one righteous (before God), not even one" (Romans 3:10).

But then, after so starkly explaining the bad news of the gospel, Paul goes on, starting in 3:21, to show how God justifies or saves undeserving sinners by His free and sovereign grace, which we receive through faith alone. Paul then presents Abraham the patriarch as Exhibit A of this revolutionary truth in Romans 4.

All of which brings us to Romans 5, where the apostle speaks of the benefits of God's grace, the blessings of being justified or declared righteous in the sight of God by the grace of God through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Savior of sinners, who demonstrated the love of God for us by giving His life for us on the cross, to save us from our sins and reconcile us to God.

## **FOUR BENEFITS**

In the first five verses of Romans 5, we see four transformative benefits of God’s grace. Each of them is a grace-gift from God meant for you and me. Here they are:

First, “since we have been justified (declared righteous in God’s sight) through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:1). Peace with God. A reconciled, restored relationship with God Himself. What could be better than this?

Second, we have “access by faith into this grace in which we now stand” (5:2a). We have the privilege of unhindered, unrestricted access to the presence of God Himself and His grace for every situation and every need.

Third, we have “the hope of the glory of God” (5:2b), which is a joyful and confident expectation for the future that rests not on the election of any political candidate or the success of any political party in fulfilling its agenda, but on the certainty of God’s promises and the fullness of God’s glory to be revealed when He makes all things right.

Fourth, just as we rejoice in the hope of God’s glory, we are also given the grace as followers of Jesus to rejoice in our sufferings, in the troubles and trials and temptations of this life, because we know that God can use them for our good and His glory (5:3-4). Even when we face hardships in life, we can hold onto hope, knowing that our hope in God will never let us down, because the God in whom we hope – the God who “has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us” (5:5) – will never let us down. He will be with us to the end, just as He has promised. Not only *with* us, but *for* us. And if He is for us, who can ultimately stand against us? (Romans 8:31)

Let’s look at these benefits more closely.

## **PEACE WITH GOD**

First, as it says in verse 1, “we have peace with God.”

I should note that verse 1 begins with the word *therefore*. You know – or, if not, I hope you will learn today – that whenever you see the word *therefore*, you should ask: What is it there for? *Therefore* always refers back to something that has been said previously. It is a connecting word. It establishes a link between what has been said already and what is about to be said. You could replace *therefore* with “as a consequence” or “because of this.” In this case, in Romans 5:1, *therefore* refers back to what Paul has said about justification by faith beginning in 3:21 and continuing through the end of chapter 4. After explaining justification as the act by which sinners are reconciled to God and declared righteous in His sight, a gift of grace that is received through faith alone, not by any works we have done or any merit in us, Paul now says: “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have” – what? – “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:1).

There it is: the grace-gift of peace with God. If you have not been justified before God through faith in the saving work of Jesus, if you have not been declared righteous in God's sight, you *do not* have peace with God. But if you have been justified in God's sight through faith in Jesus His Son, if Jesus has taken the guilt of your sin upon Himself and has clothed you in His righteousness, if you have been found not guilty in the court of heaven and declared righteous on the basis of Jesus' atoning death on the cross for you, you have peace with God. You can say: "It is well with my soul."

Peace is a universal human longing, isn't it? Not everybody believes in God. But doesn't everybody long for peace? Doesn't everybody want to bring an end to the war that takes place in our hearts, the battle between the kind of people we are and the kind of people we want to be, along with the feelings of guilt and shame that dog so many of us? Doesn't everybody want to know the secret to real, lasting peace – peace of mind, peace with other people, peace among nations, and peace with God?

The Bible says there is only one way. There is only one way to have true peace with God. There is only one way to be reconciled to God and at peace with Him. There is only one way to experience the peace that comes from being right with God. The only way to obtain this peace, says Paul, is "through our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:1). The only way is through faith in Jesus and what He did for us – what He did for *you* – in His suffering and death on the cross.

Do you see that? Peace with God is not something you can achieve by being religious or through a lifetime of doing good. That is not where peace with God comes from. You cannot buy peace with God. You cannot buy forgiveness. You cannot buy a clean heart. It is not for sale. It is free. It has already been bought for you. It has already been purchased for you. Jesus paid for it. Jesus paid it all. It is a gift of grace that comes free of charge to people who don't deserve it and never will. Which is to say, people like you and me.

The only way to obtain and experience real peace with God is through Jesus and His saving work for us. There is no other way. This offends some people today who want to believe there is any number of different paths to peace with God. They believe it is supremely arrogant of Christians like us to contend that there is only one way. My answer to this is to point out that Jesus is the one who says there is only one way to God the Father (John 14:6) – only one way to be saved and to have peace with God. We didn't make it up. It comes straight from our Leader and Lord, from the Head of the Church. And, it seems to me, the amazing thing is not that there is only one way to God, only one way to be made right with God, only one way to have peace with God, but that there is any way at all. The peace with God that comes from being justified in God's sight through faith in Jesus is a gift of grace, pure and simple. It is the only way.

Dear friends, if you have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, you need not fear the wrath or judgment of God. Though Satan the Accuser may continue to accuse you (because that is what the Accuser does), your sins have all been washed away by the blood of Jesus. All of them. When God looks at you, He sees not your sins but the righteousness of His Son, who bore all your sins in His body on the cross (1 Peter 2:24).

I'm getting a little ahead of myself, but I think of what Paul says in Romans 8:1-2: "There is therefore (there is that word again!) no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life has set (us) free from the law of sin and death." No condemnation.

You need not fear losing your salvation, because if you have been justified by His grace through faith in Jesus Christ, if you have received the gift of peace with God, He will never ever let go of you. It won't happen. He will never leave you nor forsake you (Deuteronomy 31:6; Hebrews 13:5). That is a promise from God Himself.

Don't allow fear or worry or temptation or doubts about your standing with God or any of the circumstances of life in this world to cloud your faith or rob you of the peace with God that is your birthright as a child of God through faith in the Lord Jesus. Trouble is an unavoidable fact of life. Jesus told His disciples matter-of-factly: "In this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33). Paul told new disciples that "we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Troubles, hardships, temptations, and disappointments are all part of life in this world. Nevertheless, the gift of God's peace abides with us as we fix our eyes on our all-sufficient Savior and trust Him to work out His purposes in us and in the world.

Peace with God is the first revolutionary benefit of God's amazing, astounding, astonishing, extraordinary, incomparable, transformative grace. But it is far from the only one. I'll mention just one more very quickly today.

### **ACCESS TO GRACE**

In verse 2, Paul says that "through (Christ) we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand." The grace of which Paul speaks here is not so much God's quality of being gracious as it is what John Stott calls "the sphere of God's grace" – that is, our privileged position of acceptance by God (Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 140). We are, after all, adopted and beloved children of our Heavenly Father through faith in Jesus Christ (John 1:12-13) and citizens of God's kingdom (Philippians 3:20).

True, this world is not our home. We're just passing through. We are aliens and strangers in this world (1 Peter 2:11-12), but this does not mean that we are homeless or that we are cut off from God and the blessings of His grace. No. In and through Christ we have the privilege of ongoing, unrestricted access to the grace we need at every moment for any situation we will ever face in life. Hebrews 4 says it this way: "Therefore (there it is again!), since we have such a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (4:14-16).

Restricted access is a fact of life in this world. You can't just walk into the White House uninvited to have a meeting with the President. The same is true of tea with the Queen, an

audience with the Pope, or coffee with the CEO of Apple. It doesn't happen that way. You also have to have the right security clearance to have access to classified information.

But, because we have been justified in God's sight through faith in Jesus and His saving work for us, you and I have unrestricted, permanent, uninterrupted access 24/7 to the throne of grace – to the throne of God Himself. Grace is the place where we stand. In the place of grace we stand secure. Grace is the place where we live as followers of the Lord Jesus. This world is not our home. But we are permanent residents in the land of grace.

People talk about falling in and out of love. Whatever you think about that, we do not fall in and out of grace. Our standing depends not on our performance or our feelings but on God and His unchanging grace.

### **CONCLUSION**

Do you know how rich you are? I don't mean in material wealth but in spiritual blessings. Peace with God and ongoing, unrestricted access to His presence and grace are God's grace-gifts to you and to all who are justified through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do not let Satan or anyone else rob you of the grace and peace, the fellowship and joy, the strength for today and hope for tomorrow that are yours in Christ and Christ alone.

Lord, let it be so in us, now and always. Amen.