

Reading: Romans 5:1-11

Theme: Peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Last week we looked at something of what it means to be justified through faith. We noted it was a legal term and justification occurs in the appeal court of heaven and it is a declaration about those who trust in the Lord Jesus which removes them from under God's condemnation and moves them to being declared innocent, not guilty and credited with Jesus' perfect righteousness on us. It is not so much about what occurs in us, but about our legal standing with and before God. It is one of the blessings and wonders of salvation. The declaration about our being justified stands for all eternity against our account record in heaven and God always views us as justified.

Straightaway we have underlined for us the certainty and assurance of our salvation - for it is out of our reach, our meddling, our spoiling, our losing and our doing. It is a legal work and declaration of God and it stands in heaven for all who have trusted the Lord Jesus as their Saviour. That is why we need to understand what justification by faith includes and involves, for it gives us a firm foundation. Yet, we also need to recognise the consequences, the fruit that springs up, cascades down to us from this awesomely magnificent truth - which is what Romans 5-8 especially, deals with. In v1-2 Paul draws our attention to 3 magnificent truths: ***Firstly, Peace with God. Secondly, Placed in the Standing of Grace. Thirdly, Prospect of Future Glory.***

All I intend to do in this message is to consider this first area of **Peace with God** and to do so I have 5 headings which I am taking from the word PEACE.

1. Personal.

When we are justified by faith, as a part of God's saving work in us when we are brought to trust the Lord Jesus, we have peace with God. Our justification by faith removes all our offences, credits to us Jesus' righteousness and we are reconciled to God, that means we are at one - there are no barriers between God and us, or us and God.

Until we are justified by faith we are at odds with God, He, by His righteousness, is separated from us and we are His enemies for we are sinners and have no true desire for God. We may be moral, religious, nice, even live good lives, but our basic nature is not towards God, but biased toward sin. We may rebel inwardly, resent God spoiling our fun, our lives and the like; or we may be openly rebellious against God and His ways. We are all rebels, rebels without a cause against this great God. Most seriously our sins and sinful nature means we are His enemies as v10 says. As rebellious enemies, are under this holy God's condemnation, judgement and wrath.

In our justification the reasons for the hostility on both sides are removed and amazingly are reconciled, at peace. God is personally at peace with us as individuals, also we are personally at peace with Him; the legal declaration of peace is made on the basis of our justification. We are not to think of this peace as some of the times of peace declared by warring factions, where it is a tense, standoffish, fragile peace. This peace is an eternal peace. God is really, truly eternally and perfectly reconciled to those who deserve His wrath and such ones are reconciled to Him - all through what the Lord Jesus Christ has accomplished. It is a just, true and everlasting peace. Psalm 85:10 says that "*righteousness and peace have kissed one another*" (what a lovely phrase and truth!) In his hymn '*Here is love, vast as the ocean*', William Rees wrote "*Grace and love, like mighty rivers, poured incessant from above, and heavens peace and perfect justice, kissed a guilty world in love.*" [MP 987:2]

Is it only me, but do you also find this incredible? Isn't it amazing that hell deserving, guilty sinners such as you and me, that we have peace with God through our Saviour!?! It comes as part of the salvation package, the whole work of God in salvation. This needs to be recognised and applied as personal. If anyone here is not a

Christian, then you are not justified and you are certainly not at peace with God. Moving on we see it is:

2. External.

This peace is not primarily a feeling or a wonderful experience, nor a calm rest inwardly. It is not primarily an inner feeling of well-being, happiness or calm. People may speak of such in or after their conversion experience and while what they feel is true, this is not what is spoken of here. What they feel is the peace **OF** God, peace and joy in believing which is felt and experienced in glorious ways; we can even feel it in greater ways than we can explain it - "*better felt than telt!*" Yes, there is a great peace and joy in the Christian life as Paul notes in Philippians 4:6 where he mentions the peace of God.

Here this is not the peace **OF** God, but "*peace WITH God*" - it is outside, external to us and our subjective, emotional feelings. At the end of WW2 victory and peace had been declared in Europe, but there was still rationing, people were still away from home and in uniform, still had hardships, but there was peace, the nation was at peace. Our peace is peace **with** God and we will never know the peace **of** God until we have peace **with** God. Only as we appreciate more fully this peace **with** God will we have an assurance, a growing awareness of the peace **of** God - that all is well with our soul.

Until we recognise that this peace with God is outside of us, that it is our eternal, external, legal standing with God as a believer, we may well be plagued with fears, doubts, worries, up and down yo-yo feelings. Here is the theological basis for the practical personal and pastoral outworking as found in Philippians 4:6-7. This is the theme that we as a church are to make it our business to proclaim - "*Peace with God*". Many people proclaim feelings of calm, peace well-being and these can be delusional and deceptive feelings only and have no foundation of reality about them (*sell the smell!*) We are able to proclaim guaranteed peace **with** God only through the Lord Jesus Christ. It means that when circumstances change, storms rock our

lives, we worry, we are devastated, we may go to pieces but our legal state of peace *with* God is even then still in place, has not changed and stands eternally secure. When we as individuals go through death and face God, that peace with God is still intact, because it is external to us, our fears, highs, lows and feelings.

3. Availability.

Most years at Christmas, there is the must-have toy for children and stocks can run low, so long queues form and there has even been fights over such toys due to limited availability. Thankfully, with this peace with God there is both unlimited availability and limited availability! What do I mean by that? It is **unlimited** because it is for “*whosoever will believe*” on the Lord Jesus as their Saviour, but it is **limited** only to those who go to God “*through the Lord Jesus Christ*” i.e. by who He is and by what He has accomplished. It means we confess and forsake our sin, our own attempts to be right with God to justify ourselves and we rely on Jesus and Him alone, solely to make us right with God - salvation and justification included.

We often hear of people on a peace mission, are the go-between, the mediator between 2 warring parties to bring them together. Jesus is the only mediator between God and us, us and God, to bring us to a position of reconciliation and peace. Peace with God is only available and possible through the Lord Jesus. That is why we as individuals and as a church must stress that wonderful truth over and over again, for without Him as their Saviour, no matter how nice people are, they are lost and under God’s condemnation even now. There is no halfway house - it is under His wrath or at peace with Him. That is why we must question where we are at this moment.

4. Checks.

Do we say to this “*Well, it’s theological and I can’t even spell the word, let alone understand it, I may as well forget it*”? No, not at all, this glorious truth has consequences and evidences in our life. Here is a brief checklist to help us recognise where we are:

A. Do we grasp the concept of justification by faith? Please ignore my waffling and confusing statements, but do we recognise that justification by faith means we are in and have a new relationship with God? It is not brought about what we have done, but by what He has done outside of us when we went to Him for saving, rescuing from all that our sin deserves from Him. It will mean we have recognised something of God's holiness, justice and the guilt of our sin before Him, that we cannot get right with Him on our own, but then we have also realised something staggering - "*God justifies the ungodly*". We see how He will forgive us as an individual. We need to have understood something of that - an intellectual grasp is a beginning, but it needs to be applied to our lives personally.

B. Do we recognise that God also loves us in spite of the fact we were a sinner? We have grasped God's holiness and justice, our own failures, sin and guilt, but instead of leaving us in despair, we have come to recognise that in the Lord Jesus God is declaring His love to you and me **personally** (5:8). There we were, fearing for our very life, for acceptance with God and then we recognised the love of God for us in Christ Jesus personally - that we are included in the word "*whosoever*" and we can put our own name there.

C. Can we answer the accusations of the devil and our own conscience? We all know what it is to feel useless, failures, to fall into sin yet again - even the same temptation. We find the devil will accuse us and our own consciences to "*Call yourself a Christian and you said, did, thought...? You can't really expect God to love you, to be at peace with you?*" Yes, in our lives there may be times when we doubt God's care, love and wisdom and in doing so, we feel even worse because we did such! We may not feel peace and joy in our lives, in fact we feel downright miserable. Do such accusations affect our peace with God? No, not one little bit. Our answer to such doubts is best summed up in the hymn "Before the throne of God" "*When Satan tempts me to despair, and tells me of the guilt within, upward I look and see Him there, who made an end of all my sin. Because*

the sinless Saviour died, my sinful soul is counted free; for God the just is satisfied to look on Him and pardon me.” In such situations we go back to our justification as the ground of our peace with God, of our acceptance by Him, not looking to what we do or feel or failed to do or even failed to feel - we turn our eyes to our Saviour.

D. Do we face our death and the day of judgement with confidence? This is a solemn question, but picture yourself on our deathbed going into our dying process and then a few milliseconds after our death and facing God. How would we feel? What reasons and arguments will we use? The first 2 verses of a hymn by Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf are a great summary of our only secure hope - *“Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness, my beauty are, my glorious dress; midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed, with joy shall I lift up my head. Bold shall I stand in that great day, for who aught to my charge shall lay? Fully absolved through Thee I am, from sin and fear, from guilt and shame.”* It is nothing at all to do with our feelings, deeds, actions, attendance at church, but rests totally on all Jesus did and achieved for us.

Those are four brief checks for us concerning true peace with God. We could have a false sense of peace and be deceiving ourselves, we can have a purely intellectual or emotional faith – maybe we were been encouraged to repeat some phrases and then someone proclaimed that we are saved, but it could be an intellectual or an emotional response only and while it affects us on the surface, it does not affect our heart, our innermost soul and being, but remains on the superficial. Such ones when challenged may say *“I have faith”* or can even challenge others *“Where is your faith?”* These ones rest on their faith, on their very act of believing and turn their faith into an act of self-deliverance - as if it is their work of faith that saves them and they rely on that and not on Christ alone and what He has done.

A person with false faith is rarely bothered by doubts as the devil is pleased to have them contentedly go to hell and he leaves them alone. Yet false faith shows itself in being interested only in forgiveness, but not living holy and righteous lives; such ones are not concerned about godly living, but take the attitude *“I am forgiven and free to do as I want”*. There is no counterbalance of righteousness; for justification will evidence itself in sanctification - living in a godly way to please God first and foremost. Such ones with false faith will treat falling into sin so lightly- *“It is fine as I am saved and therefore, I am ok!”* False faith will give false peace and accompanying low views of sin. Whereas a child of God, justified by faith, at peace with God, will be troubled and feel sin and falling into sin. We need to check where we are at, but see:

5. Experience.

What is our experience of this peace with God in the light of the things we’ve looked at? Being justified by faith and at peace with God will affect us, will show, will out in our life experience. Yes, justification occurs external to us, but it will affect us internally and will be revealed in and through our lives. We cannot, as it were, stare into hell, realising that is what we rightly deserve, but are set free, justified reconciled and at peace with God and it not affect us. It will cause us to be serious about the things of God - heaven and hell, eternal life or damnation, people lost or saved. They are not light, superficial matters, for we must be serious about them for ourselves and others.

There should be within us a sense of awe, wonder, amazement even that sense of *“And can it be, that I should gain an interest in the Saviour’s blood...”* There will be a sense of praise and wonder in our lives; one day in heaven we will fully understand these things and be lost in wonder, love and praise - so start considering and practising now! As we consider what God has done for us, it is to cause us to be humble as we have nothing to boast of, to draw attention to, no matter how amazing our conversion seems or the

gifts that we have in life. We do not want to draw attention to things, but draw attention to our Saviour and realise that He must increase and we must decrease.

Because of all that God has done for us we are to be careful, ever so careful as to how we live, think and speak. Not that we will be more justified or more secure, for that is impossible, but because we are justified and have this peace with God - we then want to do all we can to walk worthy to please our Saviour. Having this hope, we purify ourselves and live to please God. Living in such a way assures to our minds and hearts that we are God's, we have peace with Him and we do nothing to hinder or block the flow of the peace of God into and throughout lives. Godly living will not add to our eternal security one little bit, but it proves to be a source of great comfort in our lives.

Peace with God is the first fruit of justification by faith. We can have it and delight in it. Do we enjoy it out working in our life? If so, we can sing and mean are closing hymn "*It is well with my soul*".