



## **Now That We Are God's Friends**

### **Grace Reigns: God's Gospel for All Peoples Series #33**

Romans 5:9-11

David Sunday

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Let's continue in our amazement at God's grace as we open His Word together to Romans 5. I want to spend one more week in this Grand Canyon of the gospel (verses 1-11), particularly focusing on verses 9-11. God Himself is speaking to us every time we hear or read His Word. Worship doesn't end when we stop singing, but grows as we listen reverently, rejoicing in what God has spoken, being transformed by His Spirit through His Word.

*<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup> Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup> More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup> and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

*<sup>6</sup> For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—<sup>8</sup> but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

*<sup>9</sup> Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. <sup>11</sup> More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

Thank You, Lord, for Your living Word to us. Amen.

True or false? You can know for sure that when you die, you will experience everlasting joy, life, undiminished glory, perfect peace in God's presence forever. In other words, you can

know for sure that when you die, you will be with God in His glorious presence in heaven and in the new creation. True or false? It's absolutely true. You can know for sure you are saved. You can know for sure that you will experience eternal life with God in Christ.

This is something only the Christian gospel teaches. This is an assurance that can only be given through the knowledge of what God has done for us in Christ. And it is this assurance that the Apostle Paul is so intent on bolstering in this passage—so intent that he builds an argument here, layer upon layer, repeating himself as a good teacher. Each layer is stated in a slightly different way to drive the point deeper. We're going to see even more glory shining from the cross of Jesus than we saw last week.

Paul wants our hearts to be thrilled with the goodness God has given us in the gospel, so he traces the benefits of justification by faith rather like a waterfall, all of whose cataracts are flowing over us. In verse one we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Then in verse two we have welcome access into God's presence, standing before God in a state of grace, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. This joy sustains us even in our sufferings, in the worst miseries we can experience (verses three and four).

But how can we know that this hope is sure and real? How can we know this isn't false hope? That's what Paul begins to drive toward in verse five, saying, "*Hope does not put us to shame.*" Or in the New Living Translation, "*And this hope will not lead to disappointment.*" How do we know this? Paul says we know in two ways.

First, we know it experientially and subjectively, through the Holy Spirit Who floods our hearts with the love of God (verse five). God has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love. This is an experience the believer has. It's intensely personal and real.

But this experience is rooted in an historical, objective reality: the doctrine that flows from Christ and the cross. So if we're doubting God's love, if our hope is wavering, where the Holy Spirit wants to direct our gaze is to the cross of Jesus Christ, where God came and rescued us when we least deserved it at infinite cost to Himself. The Holy Spirit uses this message of the cross as the spearhead of His thrust, breaking open our heart so God's love can be poured out into it.

That message is beautifully described by James Philip:

The cross is the 'place' where the great Creator God overshadows the chaos and darkness of human sin, and speaks the mighty word of power that brings forth light and life for men. It is there that light breaks in upon the darkness of their lives, there that grace touches sightless eyes, opening them to see the loveliness of Christ, there that mercy opens the prison door and puts a royal pardon in their hands.

Isn't that what we should be praying whenever we hear the message of the cross? "O Lord, shine into the darkness of my heart. Let me see the light of the knowledge of Your glory in the face of Jesus Christ. O Lord, enlighten my dim eyes, that my sight might be captivated more and more by the brightness of the love and glory of the One Who lived and died for me. Open the prison door. Set me free from my captivity to sin and fear and doubt." This is what the message of the cross does when empowered by the Holy Spirit in a person's life.

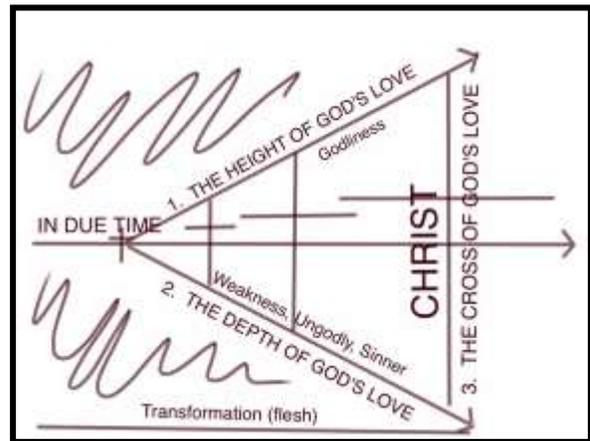
Let me read one more time Romans 5:6-8, this time from The New Living Translation. As I read, pray, "Lord, shine into my heart. Open my eyes. Unlock the doors where I'm living in bondage from which Christ has already set me free. Do these things, Lord, through the message of the cross. Do this in my life, Holy Spirit." Listen one more time, and marvel at the mystery and majesty of the cross.

*When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.*

Amazing love—how can it be? God wants His cross to grow larger and larger and larger in our affections. Here is a visual aid I found during a Bible study about 15 years ago. It was put out by World Harvest Mission and was then adapted by pastor Mike Graham in a little book called The Gospel-Centered Life. It helps us to visualize these words in Romans 5.

In due time—at just the right time—Christ died for the ungodly. The cross shows us both the height of God's love—we see that at the top line—and it also shows us the depth of God's love. We see the height of God's love in the sheer generosity of the gift He gave, the infinite cost to Him. We see the depth of God's love when we consider who were the recipients of this gift. God gave the most He could give to the most who were least deserving of it. We were weak, helpless, ungodly sinners, at enmity with God when Christ died for us.

Here's what God wants to be happening throughout the life of the Christian. He wants our knowledge of the height of God's holy love to be going up, and He also wants the knowledge of the depth of our sin and our need for His grace to be going deeper. As both are happening,



what gets larger and larger in our comprehension? The cross of Jesus because it is the only event, the only reality, large enough to span the gap between God's holiness and my utter unworthiness.

What happens if we deny our sin? What happens if we are judgmental, focusing more on others' sin than on our own? What happens if we are defensive or hardened toward our need for grace? Well, that bottom line just stays flat and static, and so does that top line. We'll think little of God's love because we think little of our need.

What happens if those lines don't grow out bigger and bigger? The cross gets minimized in our thinking. It stays smaller than it should. What Paul wants us to be doing is continually grow in our amazement at the cross of Jesus Christ. He wants it to grow larger and larger and larger in our thinking.

This is about where we left off last week. As one of our dear, godly members who's walked with Jesus for a long, long time walked out the door last week, he said to me, "Oh, David, I wish—after hearing that message—that I would have come in here unsaved so I could have gotten saved today! I want to get saved again." I said to him, "Oh, yes. But you can. You can." And by that I didn't mean he could lose his salvation and gain it again.

What I meant is God wants you to experience the reality of His salvation every day! He doesn't want salvation just to be some static event that happened in your past. He wants you to be experiencing the ongoing saving work of God in Christ today, and He wants you to know you will experience again His saving work in the future as well. Salvation is not just a thing of the past—it's also in the present and future. Paul stresses that in this passage. We have been justified by faith in the past, but there's an ongoing experience of His saving grace that He wants us to get in the present.

He also wants us to be confident about the salvation we're going to experience in the future. In Romans 5:9-11, Paul directs our gaze to the present and future aspects of our salvation. Even after the Grand Canyon of verses five through eight, Paul still has more he wants to say. We get that idea from a phrase he keeps repeating—in verses 9, 10, 11, 15 and 17—the phrase "much more."

Paul is employing argument and reason, making deductions from what he has said about the cross in verses five through eight. He says, "There's much more here for you to see. You can't get to the bottom of this; it's too profound, too magnificent, beyond comprehension. There's more you need to understand about what God has done for you in Christ because it will affect the way you view God's grace in the present and the confidence you will have in His grace in the future."

So in verses 9-11, Paul is going to make an argument from the greater—which is God's sending of His Son to die for us when we were still sinners and enemies—to the lesser. If God did that for us when we were still in opposition to Him, now that we are His friends how much more will He do?

I think the thrust of Paul's argument in these verses has been stated better by no one than by Martyn Lloyd-Jones: "We have no right to be uncertain or joyless"—no right to be lacking in confidence about our salvation or joyless in the face of such great salvation. "To be certain is not presumption and to be joyless is not being humble." So in light of what we've seen that God has done for us in Christ while we were still sinners, we should be certain and we should be joyful always.

Let's draw up those two applications together. First, verses nine and ten, now that we are God's friends we should never be insecure about our salvation. We see that, beginning in verse nine, "*Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood...*" Just take that phrase: "*...we have been justified...*" Paul keeps saying it because apparently we need it to be drilled into us—so I need to keep saying it. We know what justification means—right? But we have a hard time living in the good of it.

So what does it mean, "we have been justified"? Something has already been declared about us in the past. An irrevocable verdict has been made by the holy Judge of all men that we are no longer guilty, no longer under condemnation. To be justified means first that we've been forgiven—the slate of our sin has been wiped clean.

But we can't stop there. Justification is more than forgiveness. It also means you have been declared righteous, that God has taken the righteousness of Christ and credited that perfect righteous to your account. Or we could say God has taken the perfect robes of Christ's righteousness and clothed you—a filthy sinner in yourself—in those perfect robes. So now God sees you faultless, blameless, in Christ.

Paul says, "We have been justified. We're forgiven and we're declared righteous." He also introduces a new expression in verse nine: "*We have now been justified by his blood.*" It's the first time this has appeared in Romans. In Romans 3:24, he says we are justified freely "*by his grace*." Then in Romans 3:28, he says we are "*justified by faith apart from works of the law*." But here he says we are justified by His blood.

Paul wants us to understand that it's the grace of God that makes justification possible. It was God's idea—He came up with this. It was His overflowing kindness to the undeserving that ever put the idea in God's mind that He would declare ungodly sinners righteous. It was His grace that originated justification.

What does faith have to do with it? Well, faith is the channel or means by which we receive that justification. What is faith, really? It's just coming to God empty-handed and saying, "I have nothing to give. I can only receive." The hymn "Rock of Ages" includes these words:

Naked, come to Thee for dress;  
Helpless look to Thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly;  
Wash me, Savior, or I die.

(Rock of Ages by Augustus M. Toplady, 1776)

"I can't bring anything to You. I can only receive." That's faith.

So we're justified by faith. Faith is the means of receiving this righteousness, and it originates in God's grace. But the question remains: what's really at the bottom of it all? How can a gracious God declare sinners righteous only through faith? Paul says, "You need to understand this—it's through the blood of Jesus." That's what's at the bottom of it all. This sinless Savior died so your sinful soul could be counted free. His blood was shed to procure your justification before God.

Why is this so important? Well, it's important for us to understand that it's not our faith ultimately that justifies us. Faith isn't a transaction where because you contribute trust, God gives you a righteous status. No. And it's not because you've been born again that you are justified. No, God justifies the ungodly. Because you've been justified, the Spirit gives you life—new life in Christ. And it's not because you go on growing in holiness and living such a committed Christian life that you stay justified before God. It's all because of Jesus.

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.

(Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness by Nikolaus von Zinzendorf, 1739)

This is so important for us to get. It's not even the intensity of your faith that keeps you in a right relationship with God.

Recently D.A. Carson was speaking somewhere and gave a wonderful illustration of this. It can be found on Justin Taylor's [website](#). He said something like this: Imagine two rabbis on the night of the first Passover in Goshen, Egypt. They'd just experienced all these plagues—flies, gnats, blood in the river. Dreadful things. Finally God says, "I'm going to destroy the firstborn son in every household, and there's only one way to escape My judgment. You must take an

unblemished lamb and cover the doorposts, the lintels of your house, with the blood of the lamb. When I see the blood, I will pass over you and you will be safe.”

So in the afternoon, two rabbis are preparing together for Passover that night. One rabbi says to the other, “Aren't you nervous about what's going to happen tonight? Aren't you afraid of the destruction of the firstborns?” The other rabbi says, “No, I have covered the doorposts of my house with the blood of the lamb. God has said through His servant Moses, ‘When I see the blood, I will pass over you.’”

The first rabbi says, “Well, I too have covered the doorposts of my house with the blood of a lamb. I've obeyed. I have trusted in the word of the Lord. But I am still afraid. I mean, so much is at stake. I could lose my only son tonight.” The second rabbi says, “But God has spoken. His word is true. We can trust Him. The blood will cover us.” The other rabbi says, “I know. I know God has spoken, and I've covered the door with the blood. But I'm still afraid.”

So as nightfall comes, the second rabbi goes into his home. He lies down on his bed and sleeps in peace, for the Lord God is his safety. The first rabbi shuts the door and all night long he's peeking out the window. He's hearing the cries; he's trembling in his sandals. He's afraid.

Morning comes. Whose firstborn son is dead? Neither. Neither, because the door of each house was covered in the blood of the lamb. It wasn't the strength of one man's faith that saved him, nor did the weakness of the other man's faith that subjected him to wrath and condemnation. It was the blood of the lamb that was their protection.

What Paul is driving us to in verse nine is this, “*Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.*” He wants us to hear it and say, “I need no other argument. I need no other plea. It is enough that Jesus died and that He died for me.” I can rest secure in that as I approach the Day of Judgment. I need not tremble in fear. I know I can stand before God faultless and with great joy because I will be covered by the blood of the Lamb and clothed in His righteousness. How much more “*shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.*” Do you believe in the wrath of God? Do you believe it's a fearful thing for an uncovered sinner to stand before the living God?

For about a hundred years there's been a theology that has influenced the way many people think—or maybe it's a theology that itself has been influenced by the way people think. It's been described by Reinhold Niebuhr like this: “A God without wrath brings man without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.”

That thinking has prevailed in our cultural mindset, so much so that recently a mainline denomination was preparing a new hymnal and they wanted to include the hymn “In Christ Alone,” because it's such a popular song. But they couldn't stand that line in verse three:

'Til on the cross when Jesus died  
The wrath of God was satisfied."

They said, "No, we can't talk about that. We don't believe that." So they wanted to change the words to this: "As Jesus died, the love of God was magnified." Is there anything unbiblical about that? Not at all. It's also true. But when the writers of the hymn, Stuart Townend and Keith Getty who own the copyright, received the request they said, "Absolutely not. You cannot change that line."

The hymn writers wanted to say that the holy love of God is magnified precisely because God in His holy love found a way to rescue us from His holy wrath. You take away the holy wrath of God, and all of a sudden that love of God doesn't seem so big. The committee responded, "We're not going to do it," and they voted nine to six that "In Christ Alone" could not be included in their hymnal.

Paul believes in the wrath of God. He believes that one day God is going to pour out the full measure of His wrath on a sinful, unbelieving world. He believes that Revelation 20:15 is true: "*And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*" He trembles at Revelation 14:10-11 that describes that day like this: they "*will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever.*"

Paul believes that the day is coming as described in Revelation 6:12-17 when God will open the sixth seal:

*I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"*

Paul contemplates the reality of that day and trembles at the thought of what it would be like to be an unreconciled sinner trying to escape. The wrath of God is very real to him. But he believes that on the cross when Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied, so that every sinner

who believes on Jesus can face that day—not with dreadful fear, but with a peaceful, joyful assurance that it will be well with your soul, that you will be safe from God's wrath, faultless and blameless and with great joy.

Only God can rescue us from God's wrath and that's what happened on the cross. As John Stott puts it, "Divine love triumphed over divine wrath by divine self-sacrifice." So Paul says we can have confidence in judgment. Verse ten: "*For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son...*" God did all the reconciling. The Father was at enmity with us, but He reconciled us through the death of His Son. "*Much more*"—now that we are reconciled, now that we are God's friends—"*shall we be saved by his life.*"

This is most likely referring here to the risen life of Christ, Who dwells in us now by His Spirit. We're going to see in the chapters that follow how we experience ongoing salvation and ongoing sanctification from the very presence of sin in our lives. Its power over us is weakened as we look to Jesus and reckon upon what He has done for us. We are being saved by His risen life. He ever lives to make intercession for us.

Charles Spurgeon summarized this so well:

If Christ died for us when we were sinners, will He not save us now that He has made us saints? If, when we were condemned, He redeemed us, will He not preserve us now that we are justified? This is a strong plea for the final perseverance and ultimate salvation of all believers. Were His enemies redeemed? Shall not His friends be kept? Did He love those who were still far off? Will He not love those who are brought near, and love us even to the end?... Does He make us His friends, intending afterwards to destroy us? Perish the thought!

"Does He make us His friends, intending afterwards to destroy us? Perish the thought!" Isn't that great? Never think like that. He's made you His friend. He didn't do that so He could destroy you someday. Let all God's people say, "Perish the thought!" We are secure. We should never feel insecure in our salvation.

Finally, verse 11, now that we are God's friends, we should always rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. What I want to point out here is that Paul has already (verse two) talked about rejoicing in hope of the glory of God and rejoicing in our sufferings because we know what God is producing through the sufferings.

But here he's saying something different. He's saying we rejoice in the Giver, not just the gifts. We joy in God. We want to experience more of Him. We rejoice in Him. We meditate deeply on His character—like Ross's blog article this week on the steadfast love of God. Read it and rejoice in God. We meditate on what He has done for us through the blood of God. We say,

“God, I thank You! To You be the glory, great things You have done.” We rejoice in Him. And we rejoice in the Lord and boast in Him at all times. We magnify the Lord and rejoice in God our Savior through our Lord Jesus Christ. Because it's only through Him that we receive this reconciliation.

Have you noticed how many times in these 11 verses the Apostle Paul speaks that precious name of Jesus? Nine times in 11 verses. It's like Paul is saying to us, “Don't forget Christ.” It starts in verse one, “*Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God...*” —and sometimes we want to just stop there. “Okay, let's talk about peace.” Paul says, “Oh, no. Don't you forget Who got you that peace. Don't you forget Jesus.” “*We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

He does the same thing here at the end. “*More than that, we also rejoice in God...*” Paul is saying, “Don't you forget Jesus. Never lose sight of Him. Don't lose sight of Him by looking at your sin. You need to examine yourself, but let your soul be preoccupied—not with your sin, but with your Savior.” Robert Murray M'cheyne advises, “For every look at yourself, take ten looks at Jesus.”

We rejoice in God when we consider what He's done for us. We've been justified by faith, but don't just stop at the gift. Go to the Giver. Praise Him for the blood He shed. Let your soul be captivated by the loveliness of Jesus, by the graciousness of Jesus. This is the key to holiness. It's not a technique. It's Him. Be amazed at Him. Don't even let the gospel be central if that's somehow displacing Christ with an idea. Let it all flow to Jesus. Let all glory go to Jesus. Let all our joy be in Jesus and in God the Father Who gave us His Son.

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*All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.*

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