

Reconciled to God

Carissa had been a Christian for only a couple of months when she voiced some questions about her newfound faith to the campus minister and his wife, Mike and Sarah—the two people who had been so instrumental in leading her to Christ. She had never gone to church; but when she attended a freshmen get-together at the campus ministry house with her roommate, she found Mike and Sarah easy to talk to and very good listeners. She began attending the ministry's services the next week and put her faith in Christ the following week.

"Even as a Christian, sometimes it feels like I'm a little bit of a walking contradiction," Carissa told them. "Is that okay?"

"Well," Mike responded, "as growing believers, we have to keep in mind the two-sided reality of the Christian life. On the one hand, we realize we're complete in Christ—that our acceptance with Him is secure. But on the other hand, we realize we're growing in Him—that we are becoming more and more like Him."

"On the one hand," Sarah added, "we feel the presence of Christ. But on the other hand, we feel the pressure of sin."

"On the one hand," Mike explained, "we rest in the peace that comes from being made right with God. But on the other hand, we still face daily problems that often help us grow."

"And that's why," Sarah chimed in, "it's important to remember these two sides of the Christian life—so we won't grow discouraged as we face temptations and problems, but also so we'll learn to depend on the power of Christ, who lives in us by the Holy Spirit."

1. *What two sides of the Christian life might we experience?*
2. *Why do we sometimes feel contradictions as believers?*
3. *What does life with Jesus offer to help us reconcile questions about our spiritual life?*

Faith and Peace

Romans 5:1-5, KJV

1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

Romans 5:1-5, NIV

¹Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Paul is focusing on justification—a crucial aspect of the Christian's salvation—in today's passage. He states believers have been "justified through faith" (Rom. 5:1). Saving faith happens when people realize that their sinful words and actions have alienated them from God (and others), and that there is no human or natural cure for this spiritual condition. This state leads the Christian into repentance before God—asking Him to be merciful—which then leads to trust in Jesus to save them from the earthly and eternal consequences of their sin.

In this moment of repentance and belief (saving faith), the new believer experiences justification—they are now declared righteous in the eyes of God, freed from the penalty of sin over his or her soul.

Paul then described all the wonderful things in store for the person who has experienced justification through faith. First and foremost, we have peace with God because of His overwhelming grace in our lives (vs. 1). In addition, our suffering suddenly has a purpose; no longer does the pain we

experience in this life seem gratuitous. According to Paul, our suffering produces perseverance, character, and hope.

Of course, the one who empowers all of this is the Holy Spirit, who indwells and fills every believer to accomplish the will of God and the advancement of His kingdom. Because of the Spirit's presence in our lives, the love of God spills over into our relationships, calling people's attention to the healing compassion of Jesus and the amazing mercy of God.

4. *What is the result of saving faith in the heart of the new believer?*

5. *Why does suffering have meaning for those who are in Christ?*

Perfect Timing

Romans 5:6-8, KJV

6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:6-8, NIV

⁶You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Paul called attention to God's perfect spiritual timing in people's lives—when they realize their powerlessness over the oppressive sins in their hearts, seeing no hope in sight for their own deliverance. It was at this perfect time that Jesus died for those who were ungodly. From a human perspective, however, this timing might have appeared a bit off.

When Jesus arrived, the Jewish people were looking for political deliverance. Many Jews felt that as long as the temple was still standing, they were fine with God. But the salvation they needed was first and foremost spiritual, and Jesus died to give them that salvation.

Paul created an analogy to help us understand the depth of God's grace in offering Jesus as an atonement for the sins of the world. Today, when someone wants to express his or her loyalty to someone, that person might say something like "I'd take a bullet for you." This means if the loved one's life was in danger and preventing that person's death meant stepping in the line of fire, then that person would willingly die for the other, as a deep expression of love. This is what Paul meant when he said that for a righteous person, one might dare to die.

But imagine the person who was in danger was belligerent, insensitive, indifferent to the plights of others, and generally speaking, a deeply selfish human being. Not many people would line up to take a bullet for someone like that. In fact, many people might be wishing for that person's demise.

However, Jesus was willing to die for someone like that because he could see the wonderful things the Spirit of God could do in that person's heart, transforming him or her into someone beautiful in character and spirit—if only that person would experience saving faith and trust in Jesus as his or her Savior.

6. *What does it mean to be spiritually powerless?*

7. *What is amazing about Jesus' willingness to die for those who (at the time) had no interest in salvation?*

How Much More

Romans 5:9-11, KJV

9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

11 And not only so, but we also

Romans 5:9-11, NIV

⁹Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹Not only is this so, but we also boast in God

joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

In the spiritual sense, when people refuse to accept God's grace, the dire consequences of their behavior mean facing the wrath of God and eternal separation from Him. So much is at stake!

From a human standpoint, reconciliation demands that our enemies come to terms with the damage they have caused—and take full responsibility for their actions. Even if all their attempts to make amends fall short, they can still ask for mercy—which should be freely given by the Spirit-filled believer who has forgiven him or her.

This full acknowledgement of sin is what happens when a person expresses genuine repentance over what he or she has done and looks to God to be merciful. Once this happens, these former enemies of God are reconciled with Him and enjoy the earthly and eternal benefits of the Lord's compassion and grace.

This is the result of reconciliation with God through the atoning death of His Son: eternal life, free of the presence of sin in our spirits. The natural result of this is boasting to everyone we know about the amazing grace and mercy of God. Of course, we demonstrate this ourselves in the compassion and grace we show to others—even those who may not be willing to reciprocate with any sort of kindness or decency. For the sake of the Gospel, we endure hardship, insults, and persecution with the hopes that, one day, the Spirit of God will give them a sense of receptivity to the Gospel, so they, too, might experience saving faith and the delivering grace of God.

This is the reason behind our boasting in the grace of God—so that those who are far from Him and are beginning to experience a sense of spiritual distress can be assured that we will be conduits of God's grace to them—no matter how badly they may have treated us in the past.

8. *What does it mean to be reconciled with God?*

9. *What is the only God-honoring thing to boast about in regard to our salvation?*

Peace with God

God's promise of hope and eternal life with Him can be ours when we understand it is possible to be fully reconciled with God. The first step for any kind of reconciliation is to recognize we have done wrong. This includes accepting that we are sinners in need of God's mercy and asking for forgiveness. When we trust Jesus in faith that He will save us from God's wrath, we receive salvation and are justified—made right in God's sight. Reconciliation and peace with God are made possible through Jesus' sacrificial death on the Cross.

Paul wrote that Jesus came "when the set time had fully come" (Gal. 4:4). God orchestrated that time in history for Jesus and the Gospel message of peace with God. Even though people were more focused on political deliverance, rather than spiritual deliverance, Jesus died for the righteous and the unrighteous alike. His gift of forgiveness came at the great price of Jesus' innocent trial and crucifixion. He experienced separation from God for us (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34), that we might have eternal life. Jesus died in our place to bring us back to God: "When you were dead in your sins . . . God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross" (Col. 2:13-14).

We are powerless to save ourselves, and we receive the gift of faith only from God. We step out in faith when we sincerely repent and accept God's mercy. From that place of trust and rest in God's grace, we naturally tell others about the gift of reconciliation and peace with God that is available also for them. The Holy Spirit working in us helps us to offer compassion and grace to others in the hope that they also will experience saving faith and eternal life with God.

10. *Why was Jesus' sacrifice so costly?*

11. *How have you experienced reconciliation with God?*

12. *How and why does saving faith lead us to show compassion and grace to others?*

Resting in Right Relationship

Not only do we receive God's grace and forgiveness that lead to reconciliation, we then rest in our right standing with God. We do not try to climb up to Him, so to speak, with good works, so we will be "more" reconciled. He did the work on the Cross, and we can thank Him for what He did and are humbled by what that reconciliation cost.

► *What is your response to the great things God has done through Jesus' sacrifice? One response would be to write your own hymn or poem of praise for God's gift of reconciliation with Him. Start it here.*

KEY VERSE

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. —Romans 5:1, KJV

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.—Romans 5:1, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Week of May 20 through May 26

(See *The Quiet Hour* for devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Joel 2:28-32—Call on God and Be Saved.

Tues. Romans 9:14-16, 25-33—Striving on the Basis of Faith.

Wed. Romans 11:1-4, 17-27—All Israel Will Be Saved.

Thurs. Deuteronomy 30:11-20—God's Word Is Very Near.

Fri. Mark 5:35-43—Do Not Fear, Only Believe.

Sat. Isaiah 52—A Beautiful Announcement of Salvation.

Sun. Romans 10:1-17—Confession and Belief Lead to Salvation.