

### Romans 4:20 - 5:5

<sup>20</sup> No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,  
<sup>21</sup> fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

<sup>22</sup> That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness."

<sup>23</sup> But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone,

<sup>24</sup> but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,

<sup>25</sup> who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

**5:1** 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.

## "Grace, Faith, and Love"

Just before Dana and I got married, she began a PhD. in Christian Education at Biola University in Los Angeles. She went down in June of 2004 for her first seminars. For one of them she had an assignment which I think was to take a doctrine of the Christian faith and see what the Old Testament had to say about it. Dana chose the Trinity. Her professor told her to change her topic because there are no references to the Trinity in the Old Testament nor in the New Testament because he believed that doctrine of the Trinity is the speculation of a church institutionalized by a Roman emperor. Needless to say, Dana didn't stay there for very long. But back to her project. There isn't Father, Son, Holy Spirit language in the Old Testament but there are a couple of places where we have to start asking some questions like God saying, "Let us make man in our own image." Another place that is interesting is when the three angels come to visit Abraham to tell him that the LORD is going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah where Abraham's nephew Lot resides. Why three angels?

In the 1400's a Russian painter, Andrei Rublev, painted an icon of the visit of the three angels to Abraham but it has since come to be known as The Trinity. The Three are sitting around a table and the only difference between them is the robes they wear. They all have virtually the same face. Thus, the same person is yet three persons. They are sitting around a table appearing to have a very intimate conversation. There is a dish on the table placed close to the edge of the table where no one is sitting as if to invite the one meditating on the icon to come and fellowship.

In my opinion, this icon is about the best anyone has done to portray the relational nature of God, that God within himself is the eternal loving communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who has made it so we can come and share in their own fellowship by the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of the Son in Jesus of Nazareth and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Peter says as much in 2 Peter 1:2-4, "May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. <sup>3</sup> His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire." God has called us to his own glory and excellence and has made it so that we may be partakers of the divine nature which means not that we are becoming God but rather God has made it so that we have a place in the fellowship of his table, his very self.



A question we might want to ask then is, "how do I sit at the table?" How does this apply to me? For the answer, we need to do the obvious; you know, ask Paul. And, I think Paul might say something like it boils down to grace, faith, and the love of God poured into us by the Holy Spirit. He would also undergird that by first saying, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Let me ramble a bit on this.

We have peace with our God through Jesus Christ. If you've been around the New Testament long enough (or at least around me and my weighing in with the Bible scholars I've read), then you know (and I mean it has to be etched into your brain with a wood burner by now), you know you have to pay attention to the prepositions. Those little words – in, with, of – too often are the keys in understanding what a passage means. There is a little preposition in the Greek language, *dia*, which winds up carrying huge meaning. When we read the Bible we usually do not slow down and ask, "What does it mean for us to have peace with God *through* Jesus Christ?" We usually just check out with the word peace and then ignore the preposition *through*. That one little Greek word *dia* actually carries the concept of "with, through, and by means of". We have peace with God *with* our Lord Jesus Christ, *through* our Lord Jesus Christ, and *by means of* our Lord Jesus Christ. Think of it this way, if peace with God is a water source, then Jesus built the pipe to it, he is the pipe to it, and he is with us in the flow of the water from it. Peace with God isn't simply that Jesus has appeased God's anger at humanity's sin. Rather, it is a rich experience of Jesus' own experience of peace, well-being, or Shalom with God the Father shared with us in the gift of the Holy Spirit. In other words, the love of God poured into our hearts.

Another word for peace with God is justified. The word justify comes to English via Latin and the Medieval Roman Catholic Church. It is overly bound up in ideas of Roman/Medieval European courtroom justice and Martin Luther's obsession with his own sinfulness. The traditional definition of justification usually goes God judges us guilty of sin for which the penalty/consequence is death. But God says my Son, the man Jesus, has paid your penalty. You are forgiven and by my help you *will* live accordingly. Yet, justify isn't the best word nor is the court room analogy the best to use. It is just what we have inherited. The Greek word we're translating is the verb form of the noun righteousness. We don't have a word that simply says to make righteous, to "righteousify". Jesus has set us right with God and to be set right with God means to have God as a faithful friend whose promises we can trust just as Abraham did. Paul's idea of justification is simple. God now considers us to be one of his people, members of the family of Abraham through whom God is proving his faithfulness to his whole creation by saving it through Jesus Christ.

Paul pulls this together saying that we are standing in grace with, through, and by means of Jesus Christ. Grace isn't simply courtroom forgiveness. Grace is being in the presence of God, experiencing his favour, and having God's promise to act on our behalf in our best interest. Standing in grace is being at the table as I said earlier. How do we get there? Well, by grace. I have a friend who several years ago met a woman who wrote and performed Christian music and the woman gave her a CD. My friend was Roman Catholic by family but never really participated in church. One evening she was in a very low place and for some reason put that CD on. It spoke to her. God spoke to her and created faith in her. She came to Christ that night and has ever since known God's grace.

I've been mentioning the word faith throughout. The Greek word for faith embodies the notions of belief, trust, and faithfulness. But, I think the best word we have in English is fidelity which is faithfulness within the context of covenantal responsibilities. Marriage is a covenant. Covenants aren't contracts where we say if you do this, then I will do that. A covenant states a reality and therefore, promises are made to uphold the obligations needed to maintain that reality. In Christian marriage, the reality is that God has created the wonderful gift of a unique relational bond between a man and a woman and in response to that gift the man and woman promise to sacrificially love and be faithful to each other according to the way Jesus has loved us. Fidelity is upholding that covenant.

Our relationship with God is covenantal. Faith is not a matter of simply believing or of simply trusting or of simply being faithful. God has made it so that through Jesus we are standing in grace – in his presence, enjoying his favour, and fidelity. Therefore, we will be Jesus' disciples obligated to the one command that he has given us that we love one another as he has loved us and the amazing thing about that is God has made us able to do that. He has poured his love into our hearts with, through, and by means of the gift of the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit with and in us is the reality of God's grace which makes it so that the Christian faith isn't just legal fiction but rather a new reality.

Finally, love; too often we approach the Christian faith from the standpoint of do's and don'ts, rights and wrongs, should's and shouldn'ts. This keeps our fidelity centered on ourselves. Our covenantal responsibility isn't to do's and don'ts, rights and wrongs, should's and shouldn'ts. It is to love our brothers and sisters in Christ, to love our neighbours as we love ourselves, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. This means our call is just as deeply and profoundly relational as the Holy Trinity himself is. Therefore, we are those who share our tables not just with the poor, but with our neighbours. We are those who share our lives with one another that we might pray for one another and together see those prayers answered. Just as it is impossible to love without having someone to love so it is impossible to have Christian fidelity without community. In a day when individualism, consumerism, and materialism are dehumanizing our culture, loving community, true friendship is hard to find. Yet, we stand in grace at the table of our Lord with God as our faithful friend with something real to offer our neighbours. Love as you have been loved. Amen.