

Evergreen Presbyterian Church

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Sermon Title: “The Fruits of Union”

Sermon Text: Romans 5:1-11

Rom. 5:1 ¶ Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Rom. 5:2 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.

Rom. 5:3 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,

Rom. 5:4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,

Rom. 5:5 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.

Rom. 5:6 ¶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

Rom. 5:7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—

Rom. 5:8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Rom. 5:9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

Rom. 5:10 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.

Rom. 5:11 More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Main Point: Being united to Christ, we receive the very life of Christ, which sustains us in suffering, grants us peace with God, and gives us hope to carry on.

Outline:

1. Peace with God (5:1)
2. Access to God (5:2a)
3. Hope in God (5:2b)
4. Growth from God (5:3)
5. The Love of God (5:5)
6. Perseverance from God (5:9)
7. Reconciliation with God (5:10-11)

Introduction

Originally I titled this sermon “The Fruits of Justification.” And that does seem to be how Paul speaks here at first, doesn’t it? He leads off with “since we have been justified by faith, we have...” and then he begins to mention what we have.

But if you read more carefully even the justification he speaks of here grows out of this even more dominant language of union with Christ in this passage. Notice how everything he says here really comes from being united to Jesus. He says things all throughout, like: “through our Lord Jesus Christ,” “through him we have access,” “saved *by* him,” “reconciled by his death,” “saved by his life,” Christ “through whom we have now received reconciliation.”

And so having realized this, I changed my mind on the title, because Paul is definitely extolling the greatness of justification of course. But it’s more appropriate to say that all of these things Paul is going to mention here actually grow out of our union with Christ more than it does from justification. In fact, I argued in an earlier sermon that even justification is really a fruit of our union with Christ by faith.

Part of the reason I’m belaboring this is, justification, strictly speaking, doesn’t have a renovative power on the soul. That is what sanctification is. And sanctification (in which God is working to shape us more and more into the likeness of Christ) is connected to justification but never mingled with or confused with justification. Paul is insistent that sanctification is not how we are justified. We don’t get justified by becoming more and more holy. There are no works of the law that can do that. Instead of thinking of justification as coming from sanctification, or sanctification coming from justification, the biblical way of thinking of this is that that progress of growth in holiness – sanctification – grows out of our union with Christ, as do all of the things that Paul mentions here today.

That was a long way for me to get around to saying, today’s message is more about extolling the glory of being united to Christ than it is about extolling the greatness of justification. And of course, that is not to denigrate justification by any stretch. It is a glorious thing to be justified in God’s sight through faith alone. Amazingly glorious.

But part of what Paul is doing here is saying, “justification isn’t the full story. And it isn’t the end of the story.” All of our life is meant to be a canvas on which the whole glory of Christ is displayed. So yes, we are justified in Christ, and in that justification we have peace with God, and God is glorified for his grace. And it’s something we are helpless to do for ourselves. But it is a mistake to try to make justification the engine from which all of these other beautiful and amazing things Paul says here today grow out of.

So rather than a passage specifically (or exclusively) about justification, I really believe that what Paul is giving us today is a lightning round of glorious beautiful fantastic gifts that God gives us because of our union with his Son.

1. Peace with God (5:1)

First, Paul leads off by telling us that in our union with Christ we have peace with God.

In verse 1 of this chapter, Paul leads with an incredible statement: “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Peace is a word we often use, but may not always think carefully about what it means. The Hebrew word for this is Shalom. You could think of the word as having a positive and a negative sense.

Negatively the word “shalom” or “peace” speaks to an end of conflict, warfare, and violence. And in the deeper sense, Paul is saying, not only do we not have *peace* apart from Christ, but we specifically don’t have peace *with God*. Apart from Christ, we are not reconciled to God (which we’ll get to later in this passage). It is only Jesus who can bring an end to the conflict between sinners and a holy God.

Positively the word is very broad and speaks of security, safety, contentment, wholeness, completeness, health, and just general overall well-being.

This peace that Paul is talking about here is something Israel yearned for, and in some ways thought they would find in the land of Canaan. But even that never really gave them full peace. After all, they were under the forcible occupation by the Romans in Jesus’ day. So a thousand years of Jewish history could not bring real shalom, real peace. Only Jesus and union with him by faith (as Paul speaks of it here) could ever really fulfill that yearning.

In Jesus Christ, you have peace. And it is the sort of peace that the Jews could only hope and pray for, but which is ours in Jesus Christ.

2. Access to God (5:2a)

Second, Paul tells us that access to God is a fruit of our union with Christ.

In the first part of verse 2 Paul tells us, “Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand.” We have access to God and his grace.

The author of Hebrews seems to give some expression to this when he says, “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). In Christ, our God beckons us in. And like Paul here, the author of Hebrews roots our ability to boldly and confidently come to God, not in something about us, but something about Jesus. He says we can enter God’s presence and draw near because Jesus is our faithful high priest who has experienced temptation and yet never sinned. Because he is our high priest, we have access to God. Confident access. Not presumptive access, but confident access. Because he pours out his grace on us, we can come to him.

We are able to enter his throne room because of Christ. God’s grace means we can come to him in prayer, and that we have the ear of the king of the universe.

Imagine if we prayed with faith, knowing that we have the ear of the God of the universe, that whatever we ask for in his name, he will never deny us. Wouldn’t we pray bigger prayers? Wouldn’t we be more bold, like the author of Hebrews say? He listens to our prayers and welcomes us in because we are in Christ.

In Jesus Christ, you have access to God’s grace.

3. Hope in God (5:2b)

Third, Paul tells us that hope in God is another fruit of our union with Christ.

In the second half of verse 2, Paul goes further than just access to God he says, “and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

It’s one thing to have access to God. But how does God intend us to respond to that access? He intends for us to respond with hope. There’s a little bit of a caricature of Reformed folks that we don’t like emotion, but actually being thoughtful and analytic is not in conflict with emotions. It is true propositions that undergird and reinforce the healthy and good emotions and affections that we’re meant to respond to God with.

But notice: it is knowing the truth that in this case reinforces and gives strength to what Paul calls “hope” here. Because we know Christ, and have Christ, and are united to Christ, we “rejoice.” There it is: emotions, right? “We rejoice!” We don’t just nod affirmatively, but we rejoice! And Paul says the reason for the rejoicing is that we have hope. Solid hope.

We have hope that is built on sturdy and healthy and lasting ground. And the ground Paul mentions here is God's glory.

Part of what makes God's glory such a dependable place to hope is that God's glory is something that doesn't depend on you, it doesn't hinge on you, and you don't make God's glory happen. God is glorious, whether anyone sees it or not.

When we talk about his glory, we're talking about his weightiness, his heaviness, his majesty. And he doesn't need you or me in order to be majestic. His glory is objective and outside of us. But it's also something that is a source of blessing for you and me. In 2 Thess. 2:14 Paul says, "To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

So there Paul is saying, in Christ, you obtain God's glory. Which is almost an unimaginable thing to say if it weren't in Scripture. We can "obtain God's glory?" In Isaiah 60:19 God promises that we will have glory, but he says that God is the one who will provide it: "The Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory." So in some ways, the hope we have is a hope of gaining access to God's glory and tasting and enjoying it for our very selves.

Union with Christ ought to result in rejoicing.

If we are a people who *aren't* rejoicing in the Gospel, then we have not only made a mistake, but I would say we have failed to reflect the hope of glory. Paul says, once you get it, you *will* rejoice.

To know the hope of glory is to rejoice, and to be in Christ is to know that hope. It's ours in Christ: we should be a celebrating and rejoicing people.

4. Growth from God (5:3-4)

Fourth, Paul tells us that growth in grace is another fruit of our union with Christ.

We move to verses 3 and 4, and Paul says that yes, we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, but "Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope."

This could be an entire sermon on its own. I actually want to fully focus on this when we get to Romans 8. But I want to briefly mention that when we are united to Christ, we don't just receive pardon and forgiveness, but God intends to keep shaping us and working on us. We are his ongoing project.

It's often been said that the secular approach to life sort of "works" as long as things are going well. As long as your health is good, and the money is there, and things are working out, we

can sort of convince ourselves that things are fine, even apart from God. That isn't everyone's experience, but for some people it is. ("Things are going great. Why do I need God?")

This is why Proverbs 30:8–9 says, "...give me neither poverty nor riches... lest I be full and deny you and say, 'Who is the LORD?'" Prosperity and well-being come with their own dangers of losing touch with reality.

But hardship, suffering, and loss are a part of life for everyone. They come for all of us eventually. And this is one huge problem with the secular "as long as it works" approach to suffering. It stops working because eventually things don't work out. This is a fallen world. And so sufferings and loss *will* come for each of us. When that happens, what will you do? Apart from hoping in God, all we have is what we can see and how we feel. So if we only hope in what we have, and then hardships come, well then there is no hope that can't be taken from us. The secular approach that depends on worldly happiness eventually crumbles. It's incredibly thin and frail.

And yet Paul here says that in Christ, we have a very different response to the rest of the world when suffering and loss come: we rejoice. And he tells us why: he says, when we suffer we can rejoice because we know that God is building endurance in our hearts. He is shaping us, and using our losses to grow our character, and in that he is building our hope.

Most Christians will tell you that it wasn't the times of peace and well-being and prosperity that shaped them most. It was the times of loss and suffering that really shaped and changed them: when you lived on Christ because he was all you had. I think many of you could absolutely testify to that.

So we will suffer. But how can we *rejoice* when we suffer? We rejoice by knowing who our God is. We have access to his grace. We know that he loves us. So when we suffer, we trust him and know he's at work. There is something greater than us happening. We may not know how in the moment, but we know that he is good, that we have hope, and that (as William Cowper once wrote) "behind a frowning providence/He hides a smiling face."

We are enabled to rejoice even when the rain clouds show their face because we have a joy that is not situationally dependent. In Christ, we are not fair-weather-rejoicers. We rejoice even in the rain because we know God is at work, and he loves us.

5. The Love of God (5:5)

This takes us right to our fifth point: Paul tells us that the love of God is another fruit of our union with Christ.

Perhaps it might be better put, the *experience* of the love of God is a fruit of being united to Christ. Obviously, God's love comes before we are united to him. [John tells us that we love God because he first loved us.] But in our union with Christ we experience something special, as Paul puts it in verse 5.

“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.”

It seems like Paul is talking here about an experience the believer has, where God's love is “poured out” in an experiential way. It's like he's saying that being united to Christ means having God's love in a more direct way than just knowledge. We know that he loves us, and the Scriptures tell us this, but here it's like he's saying, “If you're in Christ, he doesn't just love you, but he's pouring that love out generously and you can feel it. You know it.”

Notice that the love is poured out into something. He says, “into our hearts.” I think he's giving a nod to our conversion here. No one can come to Christ unless the Spirit works in his heart to make this happen. And he does bring the Spirit into it here.

This brings a new dimension to our union with Christ. It's not just that we are in Christ, but Christ is *in us* through his Spirit.

- We see this in other places like John 14:20: “In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.”
- Or John 15:4: “Abide in me, and I in you.”
- Or 1 Corinthians 3:16: “Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you?”

So it's not just that when you place your faith in Christ *you are in God* through Christ and his Spirit. But now *God is in you*. The love of God is poured into your heart when you are united to Christ by faith. This is a subject by the way that will yield even more benefit and blessing as you reflect on it. And this is just the tip of this iceberg; a taste of what Paul is getting at here. But in Christ we do experience the love of God in a way that we didn't apart from Christ.

6. Perseverance from God (5:9)

In the meantime, we come to our sixth point this morning, in which Paul tells us that perseverance from God is another fruit of our union with Christ.

In verse 9 Paul tells us, “Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.”

So Paul is acknowledging in passing that Jesus was punished in the place of sinners in order to remove God's wrath from us. We have been justified by his blood.

In other words, without the death of Jesus in our place, there is no removal of God's wrath. It is in his death on the cross that sinners go free. And Paul is about to make a point that builds on that.

Because Jesus died for us as his people, then what? Well Paul's point is, God has provided for the removal of his wrath through Christ. But Paul is saying, God does not *stop* at our justification. Sure we've been justified, we have peace with God now. Is that it? And Paul's answer is, no! He's not done with you. Justification is not the finish line, it's the starting line. Now that you have been justified, God is going to keep doing a work in you.

- Philippians 1:6: "I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."
- 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24: "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely... He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it."

The scriptures aren't promising that you will never stumble, or that you'll never have ups and downs in the Christian life. But he is saying that you are a work in progress, and that he will never, ever give up on you.

Here is my encouragement to you if you are a believer: rejoice in being justified. Capture it. Apprehend it. Study it. Delight in it. But ask the larger question: what is God's bigger plan for me? The answer is, he's going to carry that work to completion. You've left the starting line, but now he's going to keep carrying you, and keep you believing. He's going to use the means of grace like preaching, prayer, and the sacraments in your life, along with suffering and struggle in order to grow you and shape you and make you more holy. Your life in Christ is now a holiness project that God has begun and will keep doing.

He promises that in Christ you will persevere.

7. Reconciliation with God (5:10-11)

Seventh and finally, Paul tells us that reconciliation with God is another fruit of our union with Christ. Verses 10 and 11 say this:

"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. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."

Paul has already told us that we have forgiveness from God. So isn't it redundant for him to mention that we have reconciliation with him? Well no it's not, and here is why: Forgiveness is not the same thing as reconciliation.

- Forgiveness is when a debt or injustice between us and another person is removed or rectified.
- Reconciliation is the restoration of a broken relationship to a state of peace and fellowship again.

Forgiveness is a *prerequisite* for reconciliation, but someone can be forgiven without being *reconciled* to the person. One doesn't necessarily include the other.

Imagine someone that has hurt you and shown themselves to be dangerous or destructive. You might forgive that person, but it also doesn't mean that they suddenly become a part of your life again. You can be forgiven without being reconciled.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are distinct things.

Almost certainly, Joseph had forgiven his brothers for selling him into slavery, but it wasn't until they embraced and wept over each other and lived together again that they were actually reconciled.

My point here is to say, even above forgiveness, it is a precious thing that in Christ we now have been reconciled with God so that we aren't just forgiven, but we're embraced and enfolded and brought into the family of God, and we live and dwell together. Paul may have highlighted the forgiveness we have in Jesus, but even the forgiveness is really a stop on the way to the thing our heart really cries out for and needs most of all: we need reconciliation with our God. So that we can not just have a status with him, but so that we can dwell with him. So that we can live our life before his face.

Augustine tells us that this is what our heart was made for: to return to the God who created us, and whom we yearn to live with once again.

What an incredible blessing it is, not just to be forgiven, but that in our union with Christ we are also reconciled to God.

Conclusion

This is a passage that is chock full of reasons to hope and rejoice. As John Stott says, "We [as Christians] should be the most positive people in the world."

We rejoice. And we're surrounded by commands to rejoice. And commands like that don't conflict with rejoicing. God does command us to repent, for instance. But coming to him in repentance isn't an awful chore. It's like being told to do something wonderful. It would be like if your parents commanded you to eat ice cream. Right? [Unless you're lactose intolerant], who complains about that kind of command?

The Gospel is like that! It's a command to do something wonderful—which you were made for!

So here is my question to you today: if you don't have this hope, what is stopping you? Is it pride? Skepticism? Might it be sin? Are you holding onto living life your way? Let me tell you: life your way can't even compare to the blessings of the kind of life Paul has been laying out here.

Whether you are a believer or if you're not yet a believer in Christ, I want you to know, God commands all people everywhere to repent and trust in the name of Jesus. All of us. And when we do that, God says, "I have so many blessings for you, and this list here today is only scratching the surface."

Let's pray.