

Believer's Blessings (part 1)

Romans 5:1—2

Being justified by God has given the believer many blessings. As Paul points out in chapter 4, the believer was declared righteous (justified) by faith without works. Chapter 5 begins to enumerate the many blessings that come to us because of Christ's work in us. Our first benefit is that instead of being an enemy, we now have peace with God the Father, (Romans 5:10). Instead of having an adversarial relationship, we are now in perfect harmony. We now have both Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit continually interceding on our behalf to the Father (Romans 8:26, 34). Since we are sealed with the Holy Spirit unto the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30) we can be assured that there is nothing we can do to cause God to revoke His saving grace from us. How absolutely amazing is that!

Access (verse 2)

One thing we don't often think about is the freedom of access that we now have into God's presence. We are so use to being able to talk to Him any time we would like to that we don't fully appreciate the freedom we have to communicate with Him. To fully appreciate this benefit, it helps to take a look at what Israel needed to go through to access God.

God instituted some strict guidelines prescribing the system that was to be used when coming to Him. The tabernacle was built as the place that God would dwell, and it was the place where man would be able to communicate with Him. He made His presence known in the Holy of Holies, an inner sanctum separated from the Holy place in the temple by a thin woven curtain. The Holy of Holies contained only the Ark of the Covenant, covered by the Mercy Seat and containing Aaron's budded rod, a jar of manna and the stone tablets with the 10 commandments. It is important to note that the strict and unyielding stone tablets, the 10 Commandments, were covered by God's mercy. The sins of Israel were forgiven and covered by God's mercy, even when the Law had no remediation for certain sins. When Israel need to talk with God, it was usually done through God's representative, such as Moses. Moses would meet face to face with God at the Tabernacle of the Congregation (Exodus 33:11). When the Tabernacle was completed, the glory of God filled it so that Moses could not enter (Exodus 40:34—35).

(Side note: The Ark represented God's presence. The condemning nature of the law was tempered by the covering of the Mercy Seat. In spite of the harshness of the Mosaic Law, God still had mercy when dealing with Israel. Ezekiel (chapters 8—10) had a vision of God's presence leaving the temple, following the account of His glory entering Solomon's temple in 2 Chronicles 6—7. When Israel refused to turn from the idols they set up in the temple, God left Israel. It is often assumed that the ark was taken by Babylon when they took Israel captive just after 600 B.C., but no one really knows. The Ark of the Covenant was not a part of Herod's Temple.)

As noted above, Israel's access to God revolved around the tabernacle. This continued with the building of the temple. This is why we see Peter and John going to the temple at the hour of prayer in Acts 3:1. Their connection to God was generally through the temple.

As can be seen, their access to God was on a completely different level than how we access Him today. God dwelt in their midst, within the tabernacle, but now God dwells within us. We are now the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16). This change of access was not made known until God set Israel aside and the Church, the Body of Christ was formed (the one Body of

1 Corinthians 12:13 and Ephesians 4:4). This Dispensation of Grace (Ephesians 3:2) is the Mystery revealed through the Apostle Paul (Romans 16:25; Ephesians 3:3) which is the Gospel of Grace (Acts 20:24) preached by Paul. Once we are saved, we have special access because of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:18). The Holy Spirit did not indwell believers until Paul was saved, but he became our pattern as the first person put into the Body of Christ (1 Timothy 1:16). We now have free access because we were reconciled to the Father through Jesus Christ, and we accepted the offer of reconciliation by faith. Dispensationally we, as Gentiles, now have access to God on the same footing as any Israelite (Ephesians 2:19). God is no longer favoring the nation of Israel (Ephesians 2:13). When God was dealing with Israel as a covenant nation, Gentiles could only come to God through Israel. The pathway to appease God came through obeying the Law including prescribed sacrifices.

Now, because of Christ's death on the cross and with the temporary setting aside of Israel, all individuals are able to accept God's free gift of salvation (Ephesians 2:13; Colossians 1:20) and enjoy unlimited access to Him. Instead of appeasing God with the shedding of animal blood, Jesus Christ became the perfect sacrifice, making it possible for all to have perfect peace with God (Ephesians 2:14). Through Jesus Christ both Jews and Gentiles have access by one Spirit to the Father (Ephesians 2:18). Instead of access to God through the covenants, we now have access to Him by faith.

Hope (verse 2)

Since believers have been justified by faith, we can rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Since Paul is speaking of our hope, it should be obvious that we have not realized the fulfillment of this glory yet. We are looking forward, with hope, to experiencing eternal life in heaven.

Today's English language does not serve well in our understanding of the biblical word *hope*. Today, to hope means something may or may not happen. If a person hopes something will happen, they are wishing that it will. If wrongly applied to the Bible, the word *hope* means we would wish for, and greatly desire eternal life, without fully expecting it to happen.

Instead, the Bible's definition of *hope* is "confident expectation" or "firm assurance." Our hope of glory is a sure thing if we have come to God in faith through His Son. We can confidently expect God to fulfill what He has promised He would do. We absolutely know it will come to pass because God said it would happen. When we take a firm hold on God's word, we can be fully assured that He will cause it to come to pass.

Our hope, as members of the Body of Christ, is that we will enjoy life eternal with Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus Christ was resurrected and ascended into heaven, being joint heirs with Him, we have that same hope (Titus 3:7). It is because we have Christ in us that we have the hope (confident expectation) of glory (Colossians 1:27). Those who are saved can only become spiritually mature if they understand what this hope means. It is a hope that is looking ahead to a sure fulfillment sometime in the future, but yet in God's eyes has already happened. We are already seated in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6). We are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ and therefore we are already seen as being glorified (Romans 8:17). How great a salvation we have been given that extends far beyond human reasoning.

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