

# Wading River Congregational Church

## SERMONS IN PRINT

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### Romans 5:1-11 "Free, Godly and Glorious"

In our brief tour of Christian theology we have so far looked at *reconciliation* to God and how Jesus' *atoning death* makes that possible - part of what the theology books call "the Person and Work of Christ." Today we move into the consequences of being reconciled to God, the area usually called "the ministry of the Holy Spirit," and look at three more big New Testament words: what it means to be *justified*, to be *sanctified*, and to be *glorified*. If these words sound abstract, they are not; they deal with *where Christians live out their lives*. In other words, once you are reconciled to God through faith in his Son, *what's next?* What's this all for?

#### 1) Justified and Free

To be *justified* is to be right with God and especially with his *law*; it's a legal term. We have broken God's Law and continue to break it - ignorantly, incidentally, deliberately, consciously, by habit, by nature. Being justified is the result of Jesus having "stood in our place, born our guilt, paid our debt, taken our punishment." *Jesus substituted himself* for us, the righteous for the unrighteous, so that people who trust Jesus are *even now* acquitted in God's court, declared not guilty, pardoned, free.

You could liken it to a plea bargain (not that we are in *any* position to bargain with God!): by pleading "guilty" - which is what the Bible calls *confession* (literally, saying the

same thing God says about us) - we avoid going to trial and being found guilty anyway. But what we discover, to our amazement, is that in God's court we are then acquitted, pardoned, our slate wiped clean, freed!

We enter this undeserved state, Paul argues, *by faith* and *through the grace* of God. When we stop arguing with God, and claiming we are "not guilty," and put our trust in Jesus - and that is the basic New Testament meaning of *faith* - we are reconciled to God and *united with Jesus*. From this point on, the Father treats us as his children; we begin *to share in the life of God*; new life, eternal life, abundant life, begins entering our life. One consequence of being united with Jesus, says the New Testament, is that *his righteousness becomes ours*. We are now "right with God," just as Jesus is. So just as one Old Testament picture of atonement was that our sins are "covered over" by the blood of the sacrifice so that God no longer sees them; now in the New Testament he sees his children as "re-clothed" in the righteousness of Jesus. Please understand this is all picture-language, metaphor, to describe profound spiritual realities!

So by now you are supposed to be asking (and probably are), "so?" What does all this strange legal talk do for me? Let me ask you: do you fear God? Do you go around feeling guilty? Do you feel you are free, or in chains?

Are you a child of God, a brother or sister of Jesus? Do you believe, with the Apostle Paul, that there will be “no condemnation” for you? This was the great spiritual breakthrough that changed Martin Luther’s life, when his guilty sense that he could never please God was replaced by joy that through faith in Jesus, he was now justified – free! The consequences for the history of the Western world, including all of us, have been incalculable.

In your life and mine, the consequences of knowing we are *now* justified and righteous in God’s eyes can be just as liberating. We belong to God, and we don’t have to live in fear. His life begins to filter into ours in ways we cannot explain, did not expect, can never deserve. Our eyes are opened to truth about ourselves, about God, about our world. We learn, as we begin to understand faith that this is *the work of the Holy Spirit in us* – which is another way of saying that we are now sharing in *the life of God*. And we are free to live with our heads up; no more hiding from God! He is our Father, we are reconciled to him after a long estrangement; we have come home!

Martin Luther had what we might call a “Joe-Biden-like” ability to say more than was sometimes wise, even if it was true! One of Luther’s conclusions, from his gratitude that he was justified by faith, was that believers could now “*sin boldly*”! Of course he did not mean “you are free to do whatever you want,” but “when you sin, and you will, retain the deep and freeing confidence that God loves you anyway!” Luther grasped that people with faith are *at one and the same time justified while still being sinners*. We all know that we continue to sin; what we need to know is that despite this, we can be free of guilt in God’s sight through faith in Jesus!

## 2) Sanctified and Holy

So of course a second consequence of being reconciled to God and starting to share his life is that our sense of who we are begins to change. We are still sinners, but the Spirit who brought us the gift of faith begins to change us – change our view of ourselves and the world, change our priorities, change what Jonathan Edwards famously insisted was needed: change *our Affections*. The Spirit begins the process that in theology is called becoming *sanctified*.

What is that? “Sacred, sanctified, holy,” are all adjectives to describe *what belongs to God*. And believers in Jesus, who have been “bought with a price,” now belong to God. And because they now share his life, they start becoming “*more Godly*.” As God is holy, free from fault or evil, his people have to be holy. As Jesus is holy, people united with him become more holy. As the *Holy Spirit* works within people, they become more holy!

What does that mean in our lives, in the life of believers in Jesus? Coming to terms with God’s commands, with Jesus’ teachings, with all the ethical instruction in the Bible. Paul says “now we are justified, shall we go on sinning? No!” Now we are faced with *becoming in practice what we already are by faith and by grace*. Seen as righteous, we have to become more and more righteous in fact. How are we going to do that? What does it take? And what happens if we don’t get far along this path, or fall backwards?

God’s plan for this sanctifying process is a surprising one to most of us: it’s called *the Church*! The church is first and foremost *the people of God*; that is, a *community* bound together by faith in Jesus and by the love and grace of God. In the church, believers are united at another level with Jesus as they become part of “*his Body*.” When the Holy

Spirit calls us to faith, he calls us into his community, and starts to teach us, to remodel us; gives us a home, shows us his love, prepares us to serve him as his hands and feet in the world he "so loves." In the church he teaches us, often by hard experience with one another, what it means for people who are reconciled to God to now develop a *ministry of reconciliation* to one another and to the world.

Church is where the Spirit teaches us the truth of the Word, where "the love that God has poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit" begins to overflow into the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Church is where the desperate needs of a broken and hurting world are faced squarely and boldly and lovingly in the power of the Holy Spirit, in the name of Jesus, and for the glory of God. Church is home for Christians; Church is Christ's body on earth; Church is where people who belong to God become just that: "holy" - "Godly," if you can believe that!

Christians in different churches over the years have of course argued about how you become sanctified, how quickly it occurs, how far it ever goes in this life, whether you can do it perfectly, how much is the Holy Spirit's effort and how much is the believer's. I think nobody says it better than Paul to the Philippians: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus... who made himself nothing... a servant... even unto death... therefore work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for *it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*" Work with God as he works in you. Become all you can be, which is to be increasingly "Godly."

### 3) *Glorified and Glorious*

Where does all this lead? The New Testament says "to glory" - that is, to the shining, heavy, majestic, awe-inspiring,

glorious life-changing presence of God himself. God's goal in reconciling the world to himself in Jesus is for him to dwell in it and see it restored to its former glory - for all creation to become what it was meant to be. That includes the material world, the nations of the earth, people "from every tribe and language and people and nation." All will share in his glory. This is the Christian *hope*.

In the light of that future, Paul says that "our momentary troubles" here are light-weight things by comparison. Of course they are in a sense all we know; part of this messed-up world we live in, but it will not always be so. We will be changed; the world will be changed, and God will do it! The time will come, says John in his New Testament letter, when "*we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is;*" holy and glorified, when we meet Jesus our Lord face to face. C.S. Lewis said "*It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses; to remember that the most uninteresting person you talk to today may one day be a creature which - if you saw it now - you would be tempted to worship. There are no ordinary people... it is immortals we joke with, work with, marry, exploit... your Christian neighbor is holy and will be glorified.*" (The Weight Of Glory).

The great Augustine in the 5<sup>th</sup> century summed up God's great acts in history in a very few words (even fewer in Latin!). He said that from Creation to Fall, from Fall to Redemption in Christ, from Christ to the Coming of the Kingdom, from the Kingdom unto forever; the condition of the people of God changes from:

*Being Able to Sin*

*Being Unable Not to Sin*

*Being Able Not to Sin*

*Being Unable to Sin*

Think it through! Before the Fall, Adam and Eve *were able to sin*, and did! Since then we have all been *unable to avoid sinning*. But once you have faith in Jesus and the Spirit of God

is within you and you are reconciled to God, it becomes *possible* not to sin. When we get to glory, it will *impossible* for us to sin.

Where are we now? *If* we are reconciled to God through Jesus, we are "able not to sin." True for you? For me? Free from the *penalty* of sin we may be; are we growing more free of its *power*?

One day we will be glorious: or - better said - *Jesus will receive glory* for what he has done in redeeming such people as you and me!

Let us pray...