

ACCESS TO GOD

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Romans 5:1-2.

These two verses understood and believed will certainly cause the fire of heavenly assurance to blaze within the soul. Our generation needs to get back to some of these old truths which mightily revolutionized the lives of our forebears. Justification by faith was the battering ram of the Reformation. It will be just as powerful to the folks of our generation who grasp the significance and glory of this truth.

Think of what is ours in Christ at this moment, according to these verses. The verb tenses in the original language are soul-raising.

"Being justified"--not hoping to be, but reckoned righteous NOW in Christ. "We have peace with God"--not we hope to have; it is ours NOW. "We have had our access"--not we desire or expect to; we enjoy it NOW. "Grace wherein we stand"--it is our present standing ground; grace is the home of the soul.

This chapter opens with the declaration of divine justification through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Works have no part in this judicial reckoning. Justification is one of the grandest, most glorious truths in God's Word. We might read the verse, "Being therefore declared righteous by faith, we enjoy serenity in the presence of God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Justification is the act of God declaring righteous those who trust in His Son for salvation. Think of a holy God officially declaring sinners righteous in His sight! If that means anything, it means everything. Because God has done that upon your trusting in the merits and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, you may enjoy calmness and repose in the presence of the holy and righteous One.

It is our purpose to take a step beyond the fact of justification and give our thought and consideration to the truth of ACCESS TO GOD, as stated in the second verse. It is a truth which every believer needs to lay hold of with a firm confidence. Failure to understand God's provision of access may lead to wandering in the wilderness of doubt and confusion, and the loss of the joy that is ours in Christ.

I. The Meaning Of Access.

What are we to understand by this word which is used three times in the New Testament, and only by the Apostle Paul? "By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:2). "For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Ephesians 2:18). "In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him" (Ephesians 3:12).

The word in the Greek is "prosagoge," and is made up of the verb "ago," which means "to go," and "pros," meaning "toward" or "facing." In other words, it means to go forward or into the presence of God. In Greek literature it was used of a landing stage, also of a ship approaching the harbor where it could land--the arrival of a vessel

at the port of destination. Thus the word is used here as setting forth our approach to or entrance into God's presence. The word is used in classical Greek for access into the presence of a king or some great personage. This word prepares us for the statement of Peter: "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" (I Peter 3:18).

The purpose of Christ's suffering was to bring us to God. For this He endured the vicarious agony of the cross. Only thus is it possible for sinners to be brought to God. Christ is the only way of access into the presence of God. "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

In Hebrews 12:18 and 22 we have a striking contrast between life under the law and life under grace. The mount that burned with fire and was enveloped in blackness and trembled at the presence of the Holy One could not be approached or even touched. The people were held at a distance; they could not come near. "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect" (Hebrews 12:22-23).

How glorious is the provision of grace! It brings men to the God from whom they were separated by sin. Because of this we are exhorted, "Let us draw near with a true heart in fulness (full assurance) of faith" (Hebrews 10:22). And we may do this with boldness and confidence because Christ has "dedicated for us a new and living way." Access into the presence of God has been realized through the meritorious work of our Redeemer on the cross. The French word "entree" perhaps expresses the idea as nearly as any other word. We have "entree" into God's presence at any time and under all circumstances. This is the heavenly privilege of all who are "in Christ Jesus."

II. The Medium Of Access.

Not only the verses under consideration but other Scriptures make clear that this access is through the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Way into the Holiest. Not only are we declared righteous through faith in Him but we also have access to God on the same ground. There is no other means of access into God's presence.

Sin drove man from the presence of God. Man was driven out of the garden of Eden and could not get back into it; the flaming sword barred the way. Cain, the murderer, went out from the presence of the Lord. In the wilderness the Israelites were barred from the Holy of Holies, the partitioning veil preventing them from entering into the presence of the divine glory. Only one man--the divinely appointed high priest--could enter into this august presence, and he but once a year, and even then not without blood which was shed for his sins and the sins of the people whom he represented. The people remained on the outside and could not enter the throne-room. But, when our Lord died, the hand of God reached down and took hold of the separating veil in the temple, rending it in two from top to bottom, thus removing the obstacle that kept the people out and opening the way for God's own

to enter into His most holy presence. The cross having settled the sin question made possible the right of approach and of entree into the presence of the Heavenly Father.

But, how many of God's people fail to enjoy and use the right of access! They are frequently talking of their unworthiness, as if human merit were the basis of our approach. This is to misapprehend entirely the character and provision of our Christian faith. If we were to live to be as old as Methuselah and spend our lives in prayers, tears of penitence and the giving of alms, all this could not give us the right of access to God.

"Could my tears forever flow,
Could my zeal no languor know;
These for sin could not atone,
Thou must save, and Thou alone."

Let us forever put away all thought that access to God is through human merit or worthiness. Access belongs to the saints even when they are most fully conscious of their unworthiness. Christ is and ever will be the one unchanging means of access to the Father. He is our merit, our righteousness and our means of approach. Let us lay firm hold on God's declaration in this matter and keep it continually in mind.

III. The Maintenance Of Access.

The Greek tenses in this verse are most glorious. The perfect tense indicates continuity and permanence. Not only did we have access when we were converted but it has been ours ever since. It is the permanent, unchanging privilege of every blood-bought child of God. In Hebrews 10 we are told that our boldness to enter into the holy place of God's presence has been "once for all," permanently, opened up for our use. Christ has dedicated and opened up a new and living way once for all, and, ever since, it has been open for heavenly traffic night and day under all conditions and circumstances. It is accessible to every saint at any time.

Whether or not we use this new and living way is quite another matter. It is at our disposal, because we are Christ's; but it only avails for our advantage as we make use of it. Let us not confuse the right of access to God with the fact of fellowship with God. According to I John 1:6, which reads, "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth," we learn that believers may lose their fellowship with the Father by walking in darkness, but, even when fellowship is lost, access remains unaltered. That is why we read in I John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Even the backslidden Christian walking in darkness has the right of access to God and may in humble confession come to God and have Him put away the sin that interrupted his communion. If access were lost when fellowship is interrupted, it would be impossible for us to have recourse to God. Fellowship may be lost through sin; access is a permanent provision. Keep in mind, fellow-Christian, that access to God is your divine prerogative at any time and under any circumstances. Because of this John wrote: "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (I John 2:1). Not only do we have access, but One pleads our case in the presence of the Father. "Wherefore he is able also to save

them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

You will observe also that our access is "into this grace wherein we stand." Our standing ground is not sinking sand but the Solid Rock, Christ Jesus. This standing place is permanent and enduring.

Are you enjoying access to God? Is it a real and conscience experience with you? Many have the right of access but are not enjoying or using it. What would you say if one who had the right of access into the presence of a king never made use of it? What would you say about a son or a daughter living in the same city and never crossing the threshold of the father's home? That sort of thing reminds us of Absalom. "Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem; and he saw not the king's face" (II Samuel 14:28). How many of God's sons and daughters are in the same unhappy predicament today! They are children of the heavenly King but have wandered from His fellowship and lost the vision of His face. Let us arise, use our right of access and confess our sins to the Father. If we will do so, He will forgive and cleanse us and restore us to His fellowship. How wonderful is God's provision of access to His throne! "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace."