

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expositor-series-1.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php)

*DIFFICULT PASSAGES IN ROMANS.*

V. FAITH, AND PEACE WITH GOD.

HAVING stated fully and formally, in Romans iii. 21–26, his two great fundamental doctrines of (1) righteousness or justification through faith and (2) through the death of Christ, St. Paul at once draws from them in verse 27, by a question, a logical inference. “Where then is the exultation? It has been shut out.” That the first-mentioned consequence of justification is exclusion of boasting, may seem strange. But probably Jewish boasting of a special favour and indulgence of God was one of the most serious hindrances to the early spread of the Gospel. That St. Paul refers here to distinctly Jewish boasting, is made evident by the words *apart from works of law* in verse 28, by the question in verse 29, *is it of Jews only that He is God?* and by the reference in verse 30 to *circumcision* and *uncircumcision*. This reference to Jewish boasting gives the writer an opportunity of twice restating his first fundamental doctrine, viz. in verse 28, “we reckon that a man is justified by faith, apart from works of law”; and in verse 30, “God is One, who will justify circumcision by faith and uncircumcision through faith.”

Notice the phrase *a law of faith*. Evidently the Apostle means that, by announcing salvation for all who believe, God proclaimed a new law requiring men, under penalty of His disfavour, to believe the Gospel of Christ. Similarly in Acts xvii. 30: “He now commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent.” The phrase *law of faith* is another example, in addition to those mentioned in my former papers, of the Gospel cast by this great student of law into legal phraseology.

A common objection to the Gospel which overturns Jewish boasting is at once stated and met; or rather a

common objection is made a stepping stone to important positive teaching in support of the main doctrine. It might be objected that, by overturning Jewish boasting, the Gospel overturned also the ancient Law in which the Jews boasted as a mark of the special favour of God towards their nation. St. Paul therefore asks, "do we then make the Law of no effect through the faith" which we preach? The absence of the article before the word *νόμον*, thrust conspicuously to the beginning of the question and repeated in the answer, leaves to it the fullest latitude, and suggests that to overturn the Law of Moses is to overturn the whole principle of law. But the long reference to Abraham in the verse and chapter following and the quotations from Genesis prove that the writer had specially in view the sacred books in which, in ancient Israel, the abstract principle of law had assumed historic and literary form. A close parallel is found, in an epistle closely allied to that to the Romans, in Galatians iv. 21, "tell me, ye who wish to be under law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons," etc., followed by an exposition of the story of Ishmael and Isaac.

In support of his assertion that by preaching justification through faith he is maintaining the Law, St. Paul quotes what is perhaps the most important passage in the Old Testament, viz. Genesis xv. 6. Abraham is in darkness and doubt and fear. God brings him out from the tent in which the lonely man nurses his loneliness and directs him away from the darkness around to the stars shining overhead, and speaks to him the memorable promise, "So shall be thy seed." And now for the first time the sacred narrative records the effect, in man's heart, of the word of God: *Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness.* "In that day," as we read in Genesis xv. 18, "God made a covenant with Abraham." Of this covenant, all the peculiar privileges of Israel were a result.

In other words, the Book of the Law asserts that the superior privileges in which the Jews boasted were obtained for them by their father Abraham, some years before the rite of circumcision was ordained and centuries before the Law was given, on the simple condition of faith. A more complete reply to the objection that faith as a condition of salvation overturns the Law could not be given. For, as St. Paul argues in Romans iv. 9-12, Abraham's faith was earlier even than circumcision.

After stating this analogy between God's treatment of Abraham and the Gospel announced by Christ, St. Paul further expounds, in verses 18-21, the faith of Abraham. This exposition is the best account of faith to be found in the Bible.

We have in verse 18 a definite promise: *so shall be thy seed*. We have, in verse 19, a natural obstacle which seemed to make fulfilment of the promise impossible; and this duly taken into account by Abraham: *he considered his own body, already dead, being about a hundred years old, and the deadness of the womb of Sarah*. We have, in verse 20, Abraham's regard to the promise of God, and his reliance on the infinite power of God: *giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what He hath promised He is able also to do*. The Bible and the history of the kingdom of God contain no nobler example of the faith which, even in view of natural impossibilities, leans upon the word and power of God and expects fulfilment. And certainly no faith of man has ever been more fruitful of blessing.

Notice here a third phrase, peculiar to St. Paul, describing the Gospel of Pardon. In Romans i. 17, iii. 21, 22, we have *righteousness of God through faith*; in chap. iii. 26, 28, 30, *justification through faith*; in chap. iv. 3, 5, 9, 11, 22, *faith reckoned for righteousness*. These phrases are evidently equivalent. In the third of them the *righteousness* is conspicuously forensic. This third phrase

thus confirms the exposition given in my third paper of the first and second phrases.

The abiding importance of the statement in Genesis xv. 6 that Abraham's faith was reckoned to him for righteousness, and its close bearing on the salvation announced by Christ, reveal to St. Paul a purpose in the record far above the writer's thought. He adds, in chapter iv. 23-25, *it was not written because of Him only, that it was reckoned to him, but because of us also*. In other words, the close bearing of the story in Genesis upon the faith of the servants of Christ reveals in the ancient narrative a hand divine. The supreme proof of the special inspiration of the Old Testament is the light which it sheds upon the Gospel of Christ.

The total difference between the promise believed by Abraham and the Gospel believed by us makes conspicuous the essential identity of his faith and ours. He believed the promise of *God, who makes alive the dead*; we believe on *Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead*.

Notice the future form, so difficult to translate, *to whom it is afterwards to be reckoned*: οἷς μέλλει λογίζεσθαι. These words cannot refer to justification on the judgment day. For this is justification through faith, which is always, in the New Testament, a present blessing. The final justification, of which we read in Romans ii. 16, Matthew xii. 37, is a judgment according to works. The word *us* in Romans iv. 24 forbids us to refer this reckoning for righteousness to those who in time to come will believe and be justified. The simplest explanation, and one quite satisfactory, is that the future is rhetorical, that St. Paul throws himself back into the past, to the time when the Book of Genesis was written, and standing by him looks forward to the Gospel of Christ. The Apostle asserts that the story of Abraham and the covenant which God made with him had reference to days far in the future and to a better covenant.

So far St. Paul has dealt only with the first of the two great doctrines stated in Romans iii. 21–26, viz. justification through faith. He now approaches the second, viz. justification through the death of Christ: *who was given up because of our trespasses*. These words are little more than a repetition of those in chapter iii. 25: “whom God set forth as a propitiation . . . in His blood.” For if, as we saw, God gave Christ to die in order to harmonize with His own justice the justification of believers, then was He given up because of our trespasses. For, had not man sinned, there had been no need for this costly means of justification. These words thus mark the transition from the fuller exposition of the first of these doctrines to the fuller exposition of the second.

He who was given up to death because of our trespasses was also *raised because of our justification*. To this last word, it is needless to give any meaning other than that of its cognate verb in chapter iii. 24, 26, 28, 30. The preposition *διά* with the accusative represents the justification which God purposes to bestow on the condition of faith as a motive prompting Him to raise Christ from the dead, in order thus to give a sure foundation for justifying faith. It would have been equally correct to write *εἰς τὴν δικαιοσύνην ἡμῶν*, representing justification merely as the aim of the resurrection of Christ. But the preposition here used is equally appropriate. For a cherished purpose becomes a motive for action. The selection of the preposition was probably suggested by the use of the same particle in the earlier part of the same verse: *because of our trespasses*. A good example of a similar use of the same preposition is to be found in the Nicene Creed: *δι’ ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν*. Men and their salvation were the motive which prompted the incarnation of the Son. Another may be found in Thucydides, bk. ii. 89: “The Lacedemonians, when leading the allies, *because of*

their own glory bring them up, the more part unwilling, into danger."

The simplicity and correctness of the above exposition renders needless all attempts to give to the word *justification* any unusual sense. Godet understands it to denote some universal justification of the race, of which the justification of each one through his faith is a personal appropriation. But, of such use of the word, we have no trace in the Bible: and its adoption here, without further explanation, would be meaningless.

No verse in the New Testament has given rise to more divergent and strongly held opinions among the best scholars than has Romans v. 1. The difficult reading *ἔχωμεν*, *let us have peace*, is accepted with confidence by Tischendorf, Tregelles, and Westcott. It is found in all uncials earlier than the 9th century, and in some of the best cursives. Tertullian's exposition (*Against Marcion*, bk. v. 13) makes probable that the same reading was current in North Africa at the end of the 2nd century. Origen expounds this verse at great length; and his exposition makes quite certain that he had before him the subjunctive reading, and knew of no other. The same is true of Chrysostom. The versions confirm the testimony of the Greek manuscripts and the Fathers. The earliest trace of the reading *we have peace* is found in a correction in the Sinai MS. attributed to the 4th century. A similar correction, attributed to the 6th century, is found in the Vatican MS. There are uncertain testimonies for the same reading in some of the Fathers: and in later days it became common. In other words, we have a practically unanimous testimony, coming to us from the West and the East and the South, and reaching back to the 2nd century, that St. Paul wrote *let us have peace with God*. The same reading is accepted by the English revisers, qualified only by the mildest note on their margin, "some authorities read *we have*."

In spite of this overwhelming external evidence, the reading so strongly supported is rejected by the able commentators Meyer, Godet, and Oltramane, on the ground that it gives no meaning consistent with the grammar and usage of the Greek language and with the phraseology and thought of St. Paul. Gifford admits "the great preponderance of external testimony" in favour of the other reading; but, strange to say, in his exposition retains the reading he is compelled to reject. This refusal to expound the reading found in all the best documents is the strongest protest these writers can make against the expositions hitherto proposed. This failure to expound a reading we are compelled to accept emboldened me, in my commentary, to propose another exposition.

It has hitherto been assumed that the words *δικαιωθέντες οὖν ἐκ πίστεως εἰρήνην ἔχωμεν* imply that justification has already taken place, and make this a reason why we should *have peace with God*. This assumption is embodied in the rendering given in the Revised Version: "Being therefore justified by faith, let us have peace with God." But this interpretation is by no means the only one which the words admit or indeed suggest. The aorist participle implies only that the abiding state of peace with God which the writer desires in his readers must be preceded by justification through faith; and leaves the context to determine whether justification is looked upon as actual and as a reason for having peace with God or as a means by which it must be obtained. This last is the use of the aorist participle, so far as I have observed, in all the many passages in the New Testament in which it precedes a subjunctive or imperative. As examples, I may quote 1 Corinthians vi. 15, *ἄρα οὖν τὰ μέλη τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ποιήσω πόρνης μέλη;* Acts xv. 36, *ἐπιστρέψαντες δὲ ἐπισκεψώμεθα τοὺς ἀδελφούς;* Ephesians iv. 25, *διὸ ἀποθέμενοι τὸ ψεῦδος, λαλεῖτε ἀλήθειαν*. Similarly, Aristotle, *Nicom. Ethics*, bk. iii. 5. 23, *ἀναλαμβάνοντες δὲ περὶ*

ἐκάστης εἶπωμεν; bk. vi. 3. 1, ἀρξάμενοι οὖν ἄνωθεν περὶ αὐτῶν πάλιν λέγωμεν.

Even with a future indicative, the aorist participle denotes almost always an event still future; as in Romans xv. 28, τοῦτο οὖν ἐπιτελέσας καὶ σφραγισάμενος αὐτοῖς τὸν καρπὸν τοῦτον, ἀπελεύσομαι, κ.τ.λ. So Acts xxiv. 25, καιρὸν δὲ μεταλαβὼν, μετακαλέσομαι σε. In Romans v. 9, 10, we have the other use twice, *i.e.* the participle recalls an actual fact and uses this as a ground of hope for the future. That in these two passages the participle refers to an event already past, is indicated by the word νῦν in verse 9. In all other places in the New Testament, so far as I have observed, and very frequently in classical Greek, the aorist participle preceding a subjunctive or imperative or even an indicative future denotes the means by which the future event is to be brought about.

This use of the aorist participle is common in the LXX. as a rendering of two Hebrew imperatives, jussives, or cohortatives. So Genesis xi. 7: καταβάντες, συνχέωμεν; chapter xviii. 21, καταβὰς οὖν ὄψομαι. That the translators chose this rendering for a Hebrew construction which they might have reproduced literally by two Greek imperatives, etc., proves how thoroughly inwoven into the Greek mind is the construction used.

The above interpretation of the aorist participle gives good sense here. The present subjunctive denotes, not an entrance into, but an abiding state of, peace with God, which St. Paul sets before his readers as their privilege. The aorist participle preceding it implies that this abiding state of peace with God must be preceded by the event of justification. In other words, the verse before us asserts that the doctrine of justification through faith, already stated and defended, puts within our reach an abiding state of peace with God. This exposition may be rendered, LET US THEN, JUSTIFIED THROUGH FAITH, HAVE PEACE WITH GOD.

The above exposition is required by the meaning of the phrases *justified through faith* and *peace with God*. For, as we have seen, justification of the guilty involves pardon: and every ruler is at peace with those whom he pardons. One who is justified is, by the very meaning of the word used, already at peace with God, and necessarily continues so as long as he continues in a state of justification. To exhort such a one to have peace with God, as is done in the Revised Version, is mere tautology. This tautology is avoided by the exposition just suggested. For, although justification involves peace with God, the two phrases represent the same blessing in different aspects. Justification is a judge's declaration in a man's favour: the phrase *peace with God* reminds us that formerly there was ruinous war between us and God, and asserts that this war has ended. The Apostle teaches that it is our privilege, by means of the justification implied in the Gospel of pardon, to be henceforth at peace with God. The same idea is kept before us in verses 10, 11, in the phrases "reconciled to God" and "we have received the reconciliation."

The only objection to the above exposition is that elsewhere St. Paul speaks of his readers as already justified. This is implied in verse 2, "we have had access into this grace in which we stand"; in verse 9, "justified now in His blood"; in verses 10 and 11, just quoted, and in chapter viii. 1, "there is therefore now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus."

A complete answer to this objection is found in St. Paul's habit of writing from an ideal and rapidly changing point of view. In chapter iii. 7, he puts himself among liars and asks "if the truth of God, by my lie, hath abounded for His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner?" In chapter iv. 24, he puts himself beside the writer of Genesis, and says that the story of Abraham's faith was written not merely to pay honour to him but because of us to whom

faith will be reckoned for righteousness, viz. those who believe on Him that raised Christ. In chapter v. 1, he goes a step further and bids us at once enter, through the gate of justification, into a state of peace with God. In verse 2, he advances still further as already standing in the grace of God: and this standpoint is maintained in verses 9-11. On the other hand, in chapter vii. 14-25 the Apostle throws himself back, as in another paper we shall see, into the time when he was a conquered captive and slave of sin. And in chapter viii. 30 he throws himself forward to the time when God's purpose will be fully accomplished and those already justified will have entered the glory of the children of God. This changing standpoint is a marked feature of his vivid thought.

If the above exposition be correct, the subjunctive present is rhetorical. St. Paul might have written, as so many later MSS. have given us his words, "justified through faith, *we have* peace with God." But he prefers to urge his readers to appropriate the blessing about which he writes; and immediately afterwards assumes that they are doing what he bids them. In other words, the exposition now proposed is much nearer to the familiar rendering of the Authorised Version than is the rendering given by the Revisers.

This exposition permits us to take the word *καυχώμεθα* in verses 2 and 3 as an indicative: *we exult in hope of the glory of God . . . we exult also in the afflictions.* The Revisers' preferred rendering, *let us rejoice*, is much feebler. For it is of little use to exhort men to rejoice in afflictions. Such joy must be spontaneous; or it is worthless. To assert that we do exult not only in hope of glory but also in our afflictions is much more in harmony with the heroic confidence of St. Paul. And an assertion, rather than an exhortation, agrees with the indicatives immediately foregoing.

As already stated, Meyer and Godet and Oltramane reject a reading to which they can attach a suitable sense: and Gifford, while compelled to accept the reading, does not attempt to expound it. Fritsche and Alford understand the participle to imply that the readers were already justified, and this is given as a reason for so living as to be at peace with God. But they are evidently dissatisfied with their own exposition.

Dr. Sanday and Mr. Headlam in the *International Commentary*, if I rightly understand them, accept my exposition. Unfortunately they give no translation, and thus leave their readers in uncertainty as to the exact meaning they derive from the Apostle's words. But their paraphrase of Romans v. 1 is, "we Christians ought to enter upon our privileges. By that strong and eager impulse with which we enroll ourselves as Christ's we may be accepted as righteous in the sight of God, and it becomes our duty to enjoy to the full the new state of peace with Him which we owe to our Lord Jesus Messiah." In other words, they represent St. Paul as setting before his readers justification, which he has already expounded, as a gateway to peace with God. In their exposition they correctly say: "The aor. part. *δικαιωθέντες* marks the initial moment of the state *εἰρήνην ἔχωμεν*. The declaration of 'not guilty,' which the sinner comes under by a heartfelt embracing of Christianity, at once does away with the state of hostility in which he had stood to God, and substitutes for it a state of peace which he has only to realise." The writers acknowledge that the exposition given in my commentary "is perfectly tenable on the score of grammar; and it is also true that 'justification necessarily involves peace with God.'" Their only criticism is that "the argument goes too much upon the assumption that *εἰρ. ἔχ.* = 'obtain peace,' which we have seen to be erroneous." But this I have never said or suggested. These words denote only an abiding state of peace with God.

Apparently these scholars agree with me to interpret *καυχώμεθα* in verse 2 as an indicative, *we exult*, thus differing from the Revisers, who put in their text *let us rejoice*, with *we rejoice* in their margin. But the two commentators give no exposition of the word. Their rendering *exult*, already adopted in my commentary, seems to me to convey the sense of the Greek word better than does the Revisers' rendering *rejoice*, which should be reserved for another Greek word.

The uncertainty attaching to Dr. Sanday and Mr. Headlam's exposition of Romans v. 1, 2, illustrates the necessity, in every critical commentary, of a literal translation. Without such, it is sometimes difficult to know how the expositor interprets the words of the original.

St. Paul has now completed his exposition of his first great doctrine. He has asserted that in the Gospel is manifested and revealed a righteousness of God through faith for all who believe. This he afterwards describes as justification through faith; and later on as faith reckoned for righteousness. Still later on, he speaks of this justification as a gateway into a state of peace with God; and treats as equivalents the phrases *justified* and *reconciled to God*. This various phraseology teaches that God receives into His favour as righteous all who believe the good news of salvation announced by Christ, accepting their faith as the one condition of pardon.

In my last paper we saw that this pardon comes to us through the violent death of Christ on the cross. Some further consequences of this doctrine of justification through the death of Christ, I hope to expound in another article.

JOSEPH AGAR BEET.