

4 Priorities for the New Year

“Assurance”

Romans 5:6-10

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on January 10, 2016

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Please open your Bibles to Romans 5.
- We are a feelings centred culture. By this time in the morning, without even realizing it, you will have asked yourself dozens of times, *“how do I feel today?”* So often we start with our internal subjective feelings and we then allow them to determine what we think, what we believe, and how we act.
 - We see this everywhere in culture. For instance, the average person decides what is right and wrong on the basis of how they feel about certain issues. As Sheryl Crow sings, *“If it makes you happy it can’t be that bad.”* In response to this feelings driven culture author C.J. Mahaney writes,
 - *“It would be fine to follow our feelings if we could always be sure they’re faithful to reality. But they aren’t; their perspective on reality typically has huge blind spots. As a result, our emotions are flighty, fickle, and far too easily dominated by any number of influences – spilled coffee at breakfast, a traffic stall when you’re running late, a cutting comment from a coworker. Our feelings simply cannot be trusted.”*¹
- One of the greatest, and most common, mistakes a Christian makes is to base his or her sense of God’s favour on feelings. So many of us operate with a feelings based relationship with God.
 - So when we do not *feel* God’s presence we start to *believe* that something must be wrong in our relationship with God. When God *feels* far away we start *believing* he must be far away. When we consider our sins we *feel* ashamed and so *believe* that God must be ashamed of us as well.
 - As a result we lack assurance of God’s favour.
- But we need assurance. I am making this one of our four priorities for the new year because when you are assured of God’s love and favour you are filled with confidence, energized in service, and able to persevere under trial. Without this assurance you will lack these things.
 - So let me ask you: how do you gauge what God thinks about you? Are your feelings the primary gauge? If so, you will find that your relationship with God is an emotional roller coaster? One day you feel great assurance of his love and the next you lack assurance.
- By God’s grace, I want to get you off that emotional roller coaster this morning. The key is to understand the place of feelings in the Christian life. In Romans 5 we see that Paul is all for feelings and inner experiences of God’s love. Look at verse 5. **READ 5** - *God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the*

¹ C.J. Mahaney, *Living the Cross-Centered Life*, 33.

Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's job is to give us internal experiences of God's love.

- Paul goes on though in verses 6-10 to ground these experiences in truth. You see, truth must direct feelings. Feelings must not direct truth. The truth that Paul wants every Christian to have is a rock solid assurance of God's favour toward his people. Paul knows that the only way you will get this is to understand the death of Jesus.
 - Because Jesus died for us, Paul outlines three things that are true for the Christian. These three truths will completely liberate you from the tyranny of a feelings based relationship with God. These three truths will give you rock solid assurance.

TRUTH #1 – WE ARE LOVED BY GOD

- **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** Truth #1: Since Jesus died for us we can have rock solid assurance that we are loved by God.
 - Because of the fact of Jesus' death, because of the truth of what he did, you can have rock solid assurance that you are loved by God. We see this in verses 6-8.
 - **READ 6-8** - *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*
 - What I want you to see here is that you only get a rock solid assurance of God's love when you understand the death of Jesus. Isn't that what verse 8 is saying? **READ 8** - *but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*
- **(SHOW SLIDE 3)** God's love for us is proved first of all in the kind of people we were when God loved us. Notice all the descriptions. In the first half of verse 6 we were 'weak' and unable to help ourselves. In the second half of verse 6 we were 'ungodly.' In verse 8 we were 'sinners'. We have disobeyed God. In verse 10 we were God's 'enemies.'
 - So it is not like God loved a world that was seeking after him. As Mark Dever writes, "*Christ did not come...after a long series of humble entreaties from us and centuries of obedience on our part in an effort to make up for the sins of our first parents...He didn't wait until we had cleaned ourselves up or until we worked to deserve his gift. He came when we were all sinners, all his enemies.*"²
 - God's love for us then is proved in the kind of people we were when God loved us.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** In the second place, God's love for us is proved in what Jesus did for his sinful enemies. God did not just say, "*I love you so now believe me when I say it.*" No. God's love is proved in the facts of how he acted toward us. Christ died for us. Oh dear Christian, what else can God do to give you rock solid assurance that you are loved by Him?

² Mark Dever and Michael Lawrence, *It is Well*, 156.

- For as Paul says in verse 7 on rare occasions in history someone will give up their life for someone else who is good and worthy. But you don't hear stories about people giving up their lives for wicked people or their enemies.
 - Yet, it was while we were sinners and enemies that Christ died for us. This is love.
- Let's apply this: what do you do then when your feelings question God's love for you? Listen to these words from Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes,
 - *"I say that we must talk to ourselves instead of allowing 'ourselves' to talk to us! I suggest that the main trouble in this whole matter of spiritual depression in a sense is this, that we allow our self to talk to us instead of talking to our self...have you ever realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself? Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them, but they start talking to you, they bring back the problems of yesterday, etc. Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? Your self is talking to you...the essence of this matter is to understand that this self of ours, this other man within us, has got to be handled. Do not listen to him; turn on him; speak to him; condemn him; upbraid him; exhort him; encourage him; remind him of what you know, instead of listening placidly to him and allowing him to drag you down and depress you."*³
- The voices come to you saying, *"Look at your life and all is happening to you. You cannot feel the nearness of God and all this pain is clear evidence that he has left you."* At that point you must interrupt your soul and say, *"Soul, your voice speaks from the pit of hell itself for God does love me."*
 - But then your inner voice interrupts you and says, *"That sounds really great but do you really feel that way right now? Your dry feelings are surely an indicator that it simply is not true. If he loved you, why would he let you feel this way?"*
 - Oh this is where you need the power of the gospel. Rebuke your soul and say, *"Soul, God has proven his love. If God does not love me then why did He give His Son to die? If God does not love me why would Jesus be punished in my place? God has demonstrated his love to me in this: while I was a sinner, Christ died for me. Be gone wicked thoughts!"*
 - So that is truth #1: Since Jesus died for us we can have rock solid assurance that we are loved by God.

TRUTH #2 – JUSTIFIED BEFORE GOD

- **(SHOW SLIDE 5)** Truth #2 - Since Jesus died for us we can have rock solid assurance that we are justified before God.
 - We see this in verse 9. **READ 9** - *Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.*

³ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression*, pg 20-21.

- Justification is one of the most critical concepts in the Bible. Every Christian must understand this. The language comes from the courtroom. It is the furthest things from feelings. It refers to our legal standing before God the Judge.
 - To be justified means that God the Judge legally declares you to be righteous – to be right with Him. You are no longer condemned as a criminal. When a person believes in Jesus they are justified by God.
 - This is a once and for all declaration. You don't need to be justified again and again. Furthermore, you cannot become more justified or less justified. The newest Christian is as justified as the Christian of 70 years.
- But there is a big question you must be able to answer. The answer to this question is what will liberate you from the tyranny of your feelings. On what basis are you justified before God? What is it that causes God to declare you to be righteous in his sight? When we relate to God on the basis of our feelings we are saying that God's justifying favour depends on how well we are doing. But is your justification based on how well you obey God? No. What does Paul say? Look at verse 9. We are justified 'by his blood.'
 - This phrase 'by his blood' is Paul's shorthand to recall what he was talking about in chapters 1-3. There Paul established the fact that because of our sins we all stand under God's wrath. There is no one righteous and there is nothing we can do to justify ourselves before God.
 - But God found a way to make us righteous. He gave his Son. Jesus lived the life that we should have lived and died the death that we should have died. He bore the wrath that we deserved. So Jesus removed our sins and gives us his perfect life. God says, *"Since Jesus died in your place for your crimes, since he paid it all, this court finds no grounds of accusation against you. You are free to go."*
 - Therefore, if you are in Jesus, God views you as perfectly righteous and justifies you. **(SHOW SLIDE 6)** So we are justified not on the basis of anything we have done but on the basis of what Jesus did.
- This has huge implications. In verse 9 Paul says that **(SHOW SLIDE 7)** since we are justified on the basis of what Jesus did we can have complete assurance that we will be saved from God's wrath. ***READ 9 - Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.***
 - Be sobered by this fact. There is a future day of wrath coming. None will escape. All will appear before the judgment seat of God.
- Many Christians I meet have an underlying fear of that day. They are pretty sure God will save them but there is uneasiness about it. But Paul wants every Christian to have rock solid assurance that they will be saved from that wrath. How can you be sure that you will be saved on that day?
 - The key is in those little words, 'how much more.' This is an argument from the greater to the lesser. If God has already done the most difficult thing – namely to justify unworthy sinners through the death of His Son –

how much more can he be depended on to accomplish the easier thing – save us from the wrath of the day of judgment. That is why Paul writes to the Thessalonians of ***“Jesus who rescues us from the coming wrath.”***

- When the Christian stands before God on the day of wrath God will say, ***“I did the hardest thing in pouring out all the wrath that was due to you upon my Son. There is no more wrath for you. Enter into my glory.”*** ***“That’s it? Just enter into your glory?”*** ***“Yes. Jesus already did all the hard work. Go ahead.”***
 - ***“Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!”***

THE GOOD DAY AND THE BAD DAY

- Do you see then how your justification is the key to breaking a feeling based relationship with God?
 - Let me show you how this works by paraphrasing an illustration from Jerry Bridges. Think about two different days and how they make you think about God’s favour toward you.
- Day #1 is Monday. You wake up on a Monday morning to the awful sound of your alarm. You go to put on your clothes and realize that you have no clean socks. To make it worse, it’s raining in Victoria...again. On the drive to work a guy cuts you off. You yell at him and then feel kind of guilty about doing it. At work things don’t go well. You don’t meet your boss’ expectations on a project. At lunch your non-Christian colleague brings up a topic about God but you avoid it because of your mood. You get home and the kids are going crazy. Your spouse has a hundred jobs lined up for you.
 - Just before you crawl into bed you decide to pray and your prayer goes something like this: ***“Dear God, I really don’t feel like I can talk to you right now because I have made such a mess of this day. Please forgive my sins for Christ’s sake. Amen.”***
- The next day you wake up before your alarm and you are raring to go. The sun is actually shining in Victoria and your socks are clean. On your way to work a man cuts you off yelling some sort of profanity and you turn the other cheek. At work you get a raise and when your friend brings up the topic of God again you seize the opportunity and end up spending an hour talking about Jesus. Your spouse welcomes you home with a smile and a kiss and the kids are angelic.
 - The day has gone so well. You get on your knees before God at night and your prayer goes something like this: ***“Eternal and Almighty God, the one who was and is and is to come.”*** All the King James language comes out. ***“In the infinities of Thy grace we do bow before thee. We thank Thee oh God for the blessings of this fantastic day and for your obvious favour upon us.”*** You even pray for your pastors and all the missionaries you can think of.
- Now let me ask you a question: on which day did you get the prayer wrong? Both. Why? Because you think God’s favour in listening to your prayer is based on how you feel you did that day. But God’s favour for you is never based on

how well your day went and how you feel about it. To relate to God on the basis of how well your day went is to base your justification on yourself. If you do well then you feel worthy to be justified. If you fail then you feel condemned and not worthy to be justified before God. Both are wrong.

- Listen, if you kneel in the presence of God tonight or 50 billion years into eternity you will stand there because of what Jesus did on that blood stained cross outside Jerusalem and for no other reason.
 - On your good day come before God and say, ***“Father, I approach you this day confident of your favour, not because I feel that I have done well, but because that you have justified me by the blood of Jesus.”*** On your bad day come before God and say, ***“Father, I approach you this day confident of your favour, not because I feel that I have done poorly but on the basis that you have justified me by the blood of Jesus.”***
- This is rock solid assurance because your justification does not depend on you. It depends on Jesus and what he has already done.
 - So that is truth #2 - Since Jesus died for us we can have rock solid assurance that we are justified before God.

TRUTH #3 – RECONCILED TO GOD

- **(SHOW SLIDE 8)** Finally we come to truth #3: Since Jesus died for us we can have rock solid assurance that we are reconciled to God. **READ 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.*** You will notice that this verse is almost parallel to verse 9. It is another ‘how much more than’ argument.
 - In this verse the major difference is reconciliation is substituted for justification. Justification language is legal, law court language, picturing the believer being declared innocent by the judge. Reconciliation language comes from the world of personal relationships. It means to bring together or make peace between two estranged or hostile parties.
 - We were hostile to God. We were his enemies. But God was also hostile to us. God’s holiness is hostile to all sin and evil. In chapter 1 Paul said God’s wrath was coming against us. Our sins have justly incurred his wrath. **(SHOW SLIDE 9)** So it is not just that we needed to be reconciled to God. God needed to be reconciled to us.
- But once again let me ask you: on what basis are we reconciled to God? Is it just good feelings? Did God just have a change of heart toward us? No. According to verse 10 we are reconciled by the death of his Son.
 - What was the offense that needed to be removed? Our sin. At the cross Jesus was punished in our place. All the hostility that God had toward us was inflicted on him. With that done, all God’s hostility is removed. He is reconciled to us.
- And because God has done this most difficult thing it is easy for him as our friends to give us good things. **(SHOW SLIDE 10)** Since we are reconciled to

- God we can be assured that God will complete our salvation. **READ 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.*
- Notice that it is Jesus who will cause the true Christian to persevere to the end. We will be saved. This whole chapter is meant to assure us that a true Christian cannot lose their salvation. How do we know that? Here it is because of Jesus' life.
 - Follow the logic: if Jesus has done the hardest things, which is reconciling us back to God when we were his enemies, then surely now that he is our friend he can do the easier thing of bringing our salvation to completion. The resurrected Lord ever lives to intercede for us and He will bring all his sheep to share in his eternal resurrected life. Because Jesus died and because he lives the Christian looks forward to the completion of their salvation.
 - A pastor went to see a woman who had three months to live. She wanted to discuss her funeral with him. She chose the songs, the scripture to be read, and the outfit she wanted to be buried in. With everything in order the pastor turned to leave only to have the woman say with great excitement, ***“There is one more thing and this is the most important. I want to be buried with a fork in my hand.”***
 - Seeing that the pastor was puzzled by this request she explained her reason. ***“In all my years of attending church socials and potluck dinners, I always remember that when the dishes of the main course were being cleared, someone would inevitably lean over and say, ‘Keep your fork.’ It was my favorite part because I knew that something better was coming...like velvety chocolate cake or deep-dish apple pie. So, I just want people to see me there in that casket with a fork in my hand and I want them to wonder ‘What’s with the fork?’ Then I want you to tell them: ‘Keep your fork... the best is yet to come.’”***
 - Indeed! The best is yet to come. Christian, do not let your feelings direct your relationship with God. Let truth direct your feelings. Because Jesus died for you, you are loved by God and cannot lose that love. Because Jesus gave his life, you are justified and need never fear the day of wrath. Because Jesus voluntarily went to the cross, you are reconciled to God and the living Christ will see to it that your salvation is completed.
 - Let truth direct you this week. Preach truth to your feelings. Encourage your feelings with truth. Rebuke your feelings with truth. Remind your feelings of what Jesus did. Because Jesus died you can have rock solid assurance that you are loved, you are justified, and you are reconciled.