

The Confirming Spirit of God

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[0 : 01] Well, this evening our senior minister will be continuing our studies in Romans chapter 5, that passage dwelling on the fruits of a great Saviour's grace.

So turn with me to page 942 in the Visitor's Bibles, and we'll read again chapter 5, verses 1 to 11. But once again I'll begin with just a few verses from chapter 3, chapter 3, verse 20.

Verse 20.

For all who believe. Therefore, chapter 5, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

[1 : 24] More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.

And hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

For while we are 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 are still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since, therefore, we have been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 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.

[2 : 34] More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

This is the word of the Lord, and may you bless it to us this evening. Amen. Well, if you'd open your Bibles at Romans chapter 5, the passage that we read together, and let's pray briefly.

Spirit of faith, come down. Reveal the things of God, and make to us the Godhead known, and point to Jesus' blood.

Amen. Open this word, O God, tonight, to all of our hearts we pray. We might not leave this building without finding ourselves rejoicing in the life that your Holy Spirit brings all who come to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

For we ask it in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, this is the fourth study that we've made together in this first half of Romans chapter 5.

[3 : 59] We're not going through the bigger picture of Paul's letter to the Romans. We did that a few years ago, completely. Went right through the letter from beginning to end. And if you want to find that, I'm sure you can find it online and listen.

But what we're trying to do in these studies is to home in on some of the great fruits of the death and resurrection of our Savior, the Lord Jesus.

The fruits of a great Savior's grace, as we're calling it. And these verses, Romans 5, 1 to 11, are a densely packed little summary of Christian doctrine.

A summary of what Paul teaches us about the fruits of justification. He goes on to expand that, obviously, a lot more in the chapters that follow.

But sometimes it is just useful for us to focus down on some of the key themes, the key doctrines, if you like, right at the very heart of our gospel faith.

[5 : 04] And that's what we've been doing in this little series. And we've thought about what it means to be righteous before God by grace alone, received as a gift by faith alone.

That is what it means to be justified by faith alone, as the contraction has it. And therefore, because of that, reconciled to God by grace and assured that we are regenerate, reborn, born anew by God's grace alone through the Holy Spirit's power.

And therefore, being renewed by the Holy Spirit's energies as he leads us to that final salvation, that full salvation that is still to come.

That is our glorification when we receive our resurrection bodies. Justification, reconciliation, regeneration, renewal, glorification.

These are all big theological words. Sometimes people refer to these things as the doctrines of grace. And they certainly are all facets of our salvation that is by grace alone.

[6 : 19] And that comes to us simply by faith alone. But, of course, faith, as the New Testament understands it and explains it, faith is never just about things.

Very important where you get a grasp of that. Faith, in the New Testament, is always, always about a person. It's the person of our great Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom we have faith.

So, faith, for the Bible, is never just some kind of impersonal force through which we get some benefits, the benefits of salvation. No, faith, in the Bible, is always personal.

It's our personal trust. And it's a personal trust in our personal Savior, the Lord Jesus himself. And everything that we have of our salvation comes from our personal Savior himself.

Faith means simply that we trust him. That we've come to him. That we've received from his hand all the fruits of his great grace and mercy.

[7 : 32] To everything that we have, we have in him. And we have through him. And that's the great chorus of the letter to the Romans, if you bother to read all the way through.

It's through Jesus Christ, our Lord, that we have this great and marvelous salvation. So, look at verse 1 again of our passage. We have peace with God.

That is, we have acceptance in God's sight through our Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 2, through him also. We have access to grace now.

And through him, we rejoice in the hope of glory. Same in verse 9. We're justified by his blood, the Lord Jesus.

Verse 10, we're reconciled by his death. And much more, he says, we'll be saved by his life. Or in his life. That is, his risen life.

[8 : 31] In verse 11, it's all summed up, as it were, to say that we have now received reconciliation through our Lord Jesus Christ. All that we have comes to us as the fruits of our great Savior's grace.

But it comes to us as we come to him. As we come to him personally. As we receive him. We're united to him.

We are united forever, says Paul, to Jesus Christ. Christ, in his death. A death that liberates us from the guilt and from the power of sin. And then also, so also, we shall be united with him in his risen life.

So when you come to chapter 7, Paul says, we belong to another. To him who has been raised from the dead. In order that we may bear fruit for God. In the newness of the Spirit.

So he's using the language, isn't he, of marriage. Being united to another. And he says that through the gospel, by faith, as we have come to the Lord Jesus Christ.

[9 : 38] As he has drawn us to himself. We have been united to a new husband. So that all that is his by rights. Has become ours by virtue of our union with him.

And that means that we can now bear fruit for God, says Paul. Because we now receive and we now share the fruits of our wonderful Savior's grace. That's why the 16th century reformers used to say that we receive Christ clothed with all his benefits.

We can't have the benefits of salvation without receiving the one in whom the benefits come. The Lord Jesus himself. It's a personal thing.

Christian faith. The fruits of the tree of life can only be had by those who come to the tree of life itself. And that means, you see, that faith can never just be a distant thing.

It can never be an impersonal thing. Faith is never just an intellectual assent to certain ideas or certain doctrines. However correct those doctrines might be.

[10 : 53] Obviously, it can't be less than that. But of course, it's always much more. Far, far more. It's personal trust. It's a personal commitment.

It's a personal union, is the language that Paul uses. A union with the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Now, just as it's in the moment that you say, I do, that you are united in marriage, in union with another person, for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse, and all these other things.

To that moment that in law, you become endowed with joint ownership, all the worldly goods of your new spouse. Well, just so it is in that moment of union with the Lord Jesus Christ that we also are endowed forever with all the fruits of his marvelous grace.

All the riches that are his by rights become ours by union with him. Righteousness, reconciliation, regeneration, renewal, the promise of resurrection, all that the gospel promises.

And that union, that joining of us with the Lord Jesus Christ is effected by the Holy Spirit and is sealed by the Holy Spirit himself through whom, Paul says here in verse 5, chapter 5, God has poured his own love into our hearts.

[12 : 32] Look at verse 5. God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. The Spirit of life who has set us free from sin and death in Christ Jesus, as Paul says later on in chapter 8, verse 2.

So I want to focus tonight on this confirming work of the Holy Spirit as he assures us of our union with the Savior and confirms to us that the love of God to us is real in Christ and that it's effective for us and that it will be everlasting for us because it is guaranteed not by our doing, not by our works, but by our great Savior's grace and that alone.

I've said many times that it's the guarantees of grace that mark out real Christian faith from all other religion, all other human ideas about God and about salvation, whether it's a corruption of Christian ideas, a Christian veneer and a Christian language on what is just pagan folk religion, or whether it's something quite different, another religion altogether or some philosophy or creed or way of life.

But the Christian gospel, in contrast to all of these, is all about grace. Grace from above. Grace come down, reaching down to planet Earth by a sovereign God, to claim for God all of those that God has purposed to have mercy upon by sheer grace and love in his heart.

I will have mercy upon those whom I will have mercy, says God in Romans chapter 9 verse 15.

- [14 : 34] Free, unmerited, undeserved favor. And if you look at verse 10 of our chapter here, you'll see that it makes that absolutely plain, that it is unmerited, undeserved favor.

While we were enemies, says Paul, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son. We were not deserving. We were not even just undeserving.

We were enemies. Nor were we active. Nor were we cooperative in this salvation at all. Verse 6, we were weak when he saved us.

Verse 8, he says we were still sinners. Verse 10, we were still enemies. And verse 11 says we were utterly passive. We simply received this reconciliation.

But you see, that very fact is why our salvation can be guaranteed forever. Verse 1, since we've been justified by faith.

- [15 : 37] That is merely by receiving God's gift of grace in our empty hands. That is why we know we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. It's a given because it has been given.

We have a certain secure status before God. We are justified. We are righteous. We are right with him. And, says verse 2, we have therefore a continuous standing with God.

We've seen that already. We have access to God. We stand in his grace, says Paul, and we rejoice in the hope of more that is yet to come. So secure is our position, as we saw last time.

We even rejoice in our sufferings, verse 3. We rejoice even in sufferings. Why? Because we know that in all our experience, we have the guarantee of the conforming Spirit of God, who is shaping us in love, shaping us for glory, as he conforms us, every one of us who are his, into the image of his own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, shaping us and fitting us for glory.

So that, as Paul says in chapter 8, having suffered with him, we may also be glorified with him. And that is a truly wonderful and encouraging ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of every Christian believer.

- [17 : 10] The mark of the Spirit filling a believer is not ecstasy, but great struggle and suffering. And that ought to be a great encouragement to everyone here who's struggling in one way or another in their Christian life tonight because they're following the Lord Jesus.

But I want to think tonight more specifically about a different ministry of the Holy Spirit within us. He's not only the conforming Spirit who is shaping us and conforming us in love for glory.

He is also, according to Paul here, and very wonderfully and deeply personally, he is at work in us to show us and to assure us of God's love for us.

To show each one of us that God's love to us personally is a love that will not let us go, that will bring us safe to glory because we are deeply assured that it is real, that it has already touched us personally, and therefore it will continue to touch us personally forever.

Because again, it's based not on our faithfulness, but on God's faithfulness to us. Because we are justified by faith, we can have the guarantee of the confirming Spirit who shows us that God's love to us in Christ is real, to me, in my heart, in my life, and in yours, if you trust Christ.

- [18 : 49] You see, you might ask, how can I know that this is real for me? How can I know that God can do this and will do this for me? I can understand, yes, that those he justifies by grace will be brought safe home to glory.

I can understand that. But how do I know that I'm one of those? That's the big question, isn't it? How do I know that I am really justified? How do I know that I can really be right with God, that I can have peace with Him, that I can be reconciled to Him?

How can I be sure of that? How can I be sure that, as verse 5 says, that my hope will not be put to shame like these others?

Now that's a question that's a very real question for many people. For some people, I think it's a question that is very real and very deep and troubles them greatly all the time.

But I suspect that for many of us, that is a question that comes to us at some time or other in our lives, especially under times of stress, times of suffering, perhaps, times when we really are struggling.

[20 : 06] How can I know that my faith hasn't just been an illusion, that it hasn't just been a deception, that I really am the genuine article?

The answer, says Paul, is that the Holy Ghost confirms God's love to us personally now. And he does that as he leads us to the cross of Christ, and he keeps on doing it as he keeps on leading us to the cross of Christ and keeps us near that cross.

That's what these verses 5 to 8 in the heart of our passage are really all about. I want to look at them in a little detail. First of all, the Spirit confirms God's love to us is real as he leads us to the cross.

He's the confirming Spirit because, verse 5, through his work in us, he has poured, he has extravagantly poured, really that word could say, he has extravagantly poured his love into my heart.

A love that assures me and you that we really are justified, that God can love me and that God does love me and that God will always love even me, even though I am the chief of sinners.

[21 : 36] And he does that the moment that we believe. Because the New Testament is very clear. The Spirit opens your heart to God's love in that way and unless he does that, you can't be justified at all.

You can't be right with God. We looked at that last time in Romans 8, verse 9. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. So, if you don't have the Holy Spirit filling your heart, it's not that you're a defective Christian.

It's not that you're a half Christian, only halfway there to full experience. If you don't have the Holy Spirit in your life, you are not a Christian at all, not any kind of Christian, not at all.

None. But when you believe, and when you abandon your own way of righteousness, when you abandon everything else and throw yourself wholly on the Lord Jesus Christ, even though you don't understand everything, even though you don't grasp all the theology, there is one thing that you do know and it's this.

Christ died for me. Yes, even for me. When you understand that, you know, don't you? You know that God loves you, that he loves me.

[22 : 57] That's what happened to John Wesley, the great Methodist preacher in the 18th century. He knew the Bible. He'd been preaching the Bible for many years, but he had never really grasped this truth in a personal way until one night in an evening service in the city of London.

It all came home to him with real force. Listen to what he wrote in his journal. That evening. In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street where one was reading Luther's preface to the epistle to the Romans.

About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation.

and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

The next morning, he wrote in his journal, the moment I awaked, Jesus' master was in my heart and in my mouth. See what John Wesley is saying there.

- [24 : 14] It's just what Paul is saying here that the Spirit fills us with the love of God when he leads us to the cross of Christ to understand and really grasp the significance of what happened on the cross of Christ.

We know and even feel that God loves us when we grasp, when we understand deeply in the heart of our being that he loved us, that he loved me when he died for us, for me, on that cross at Calvary, when we grasp the cross and when we love the cross.

That's the realization that the Holy Spirit pours into our heart to bring us from death to life and from wrath to glory. He lights up the cross of Jesus to us and it becomes real to us.

It becomes everything to us. John Wesley's brother, Charles, wrote that hymn that we sang a few moments ago. No one can truly say that Jesus is the Lord unless you take the veil away and break the living word.

Then, only then, we feel our interest in the blood and cry with joy unspeakable, you are my Lord, my God. See, if you look at verses six to eight, you'll see that four times Paul speaks about Christ's death to explain what it means to become conscious of God's love poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

- [25 : 50] His love, verse five, is poured into our hearts by the Spirit, verse six, four, because, what he says here is, because at last we understand the death of Christ.

Let me read verses six to eight again with a slightly different emphasis that we lose a little bit in our English translation. Let me read it a little more literally.

we know that God's love is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, for, because, while we were still weak at the right time for the ungodly, Christ died.

For scarcely for a righteous person will one die. 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, for us, Christ died.

You see the emphasis? He shows his love to us now, in the present, in our experience, in the death of Jesus then, in the past, once and for all.

- [27 : 10] for sins. See, that's why when you read the New Testament, the usual language for speaking of Christ's love, of God's love for his people, is in the past tense.

I wonder if you've noticed that. So, Romans 8, verse 37, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Ephesians 5, verse 2, Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.

Not loves us. 1 John 4, verse 10, in this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be a propitiation for our sins.

Galatians 2, verse 20, where Paul speaks of the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. That's how we know that God loves us now in the present.

That's how we know that God will love us forever, to the very last and for all eternity. and a love that can never, ever be separated from us. A love that will bring us guaranteed safe to glory through every danger and toil and snare because he loved us there at the cross at Calvary because he shed his own blood for me.

- [28 : 27] And it's when the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to the cross of Christ and what it means for us that he opens our hearts to a wonderful consciousness of the love of God for us in Christ.

When he fills us with that assurance of faith, the knowledge that we really do have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

He shows us the love of God and he leads us to the cross of Christ. Sometimes that comes very, very suddenly in realization into somebody's experience as it did for John Wesley, as it did for Saul of Tarsus, do you remember, on the road to Damascus.

All of a sudden he understood the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. That may well have been true for some of you whose lives were suddenly turned around when God took the scales away and you saw and understood the message of the gospel of the cross.

Sometimes, though, it happens quite differently. It happens slowly and gently and quietly as God just gradually unravels somebody's heart and opens their eyes to see the beauty of the cross of the Lord Jesus.

[29 : 49] There's a rather lovely story of that in the book of Acts, of Lydia, in Acts chapter 16, and the words that are used there by Luke says that the Lord opened her heart, unraveled it, like a tangled ball of string, and at last everything was made straight and plain, and she believed and understood.

Maybe it was like that for some of you, perhaps especially if you're young and brought up in a Christian family in a Christian church, but eventually it all came together and you understood the meaning of the cross of Christ, that your sins were taken away by the precious blood of our great Savior.

But you see, however it happens, God's love is poured into our hearts and we become conscious subjectively of his love for us.

as we become clear objectively of his death for us on the cross. Verse 8, God shows his love for us, that is now, in the present tense, makes it real in our hearts when we understand deeply and truly that while we were sinners, Christ died for us, for me.

That's what the Holy Spirit does. He points us to Jesus' blood and he takes away the veil so that we grasp the meaning. And as Wesley says, we feel our interest in the blood.

[31 : 28] We see that he died for us, for me. That's why somebody who uses the name Christian but has no love for the cross of Christ, no joy in the language of blood shed for their sins.

Well, it's very likely that person has no real understanding at all of what it means to be a Christian in the sense that the Bible uses that word. Let me read you another testimony to this from one of Scotland's greatest missionaries, Robert Moffat.

Happens to be my great, great, great grandfather. He was born in 1795 in Ormiston and East Lothie and he grew up in Caron Shore in the center of Scotland.

At about the age of 18, he was sent down to Cheshire to go and work as a gardener and as he was sent off to go and work there, he promised his mother faithfully that he would read his Bible every day and he kept his promise, more out of duty, I think, than out of desire.

But after about two years, things began to change and he wrote this, at length, I became uneasy and then unhappy. The question would sometimes, even when my hands were at work, dart across my mind, what think ye of Christ?

[32 : 50] Which I dared not to answer. A hard struggle followed. I tried hard to stifle conviction, but I could not help reading much in the epistles and especially in the epistle to the Romans.

This I did with an earnestness. I tried in vain to subdue. For many weeks, I was miserable. I turned anon to my Bible and grasped it, feeling something like a hope that I should not sink with it in my hands.

And you have no one to whom I could unburden the agony that burned within. I tried to pray fervently, but thought that there was a black cloud between me and the throne of God. I tried to hear Jesus saying to my soul, only believe, but the passages from which I sought comfort only seemed to deepen my wounds.

One evening, while pouring over the epistle to the Romans, I couldn't help wondering over a number of passages which I'd read many times before. They appeared altogether different.

I exclaimed with a heart nearly broken, can it be possible that I have never understood what I've been reading? Turning from one passage to another, each sending a renovation of light into my darkened soul, the book of God, the precious undying Bible seemed to be laid open and I saw at once what God had done for the sinner and what was required of the sinner to obtain divine favor and the assurance of eternal life.

[34 : 20] I felt that being justified by faith, I had peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ and that he was made unto me wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

Oh to grace, how great a debtor daily I am constrained to be. You see, he saw but in all that reading he had never seen before that what God had done in Christ he had done for him, for me.

and God's love was poured into his heart by the Holy Spirit as he was led to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ and his life was turned around.

At the age of 21 he sailed to the Cape Colony in South Africa and spent 60 years laboring as a missionary in Southern Africa. Translated the entire Bible himself into the local language having created the local language and reduced it to writing.

Not bad for somebody who left school at 13. I wonder how many of us could do something like that. But all because he came to grips with the love of God in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ for him.

[35 : 39] Do you see the wonderful assurance that is in these words that if we can say that we can know in our heart that it's true that while I was a sinner weak and helpless and indeed an enemy that Christ died for me then I know that God loves me and that he'll always love me because on the cross at Calvary that day he loved me and he gave himself for me for me.

you see the spirit not only confirms God's love for us now he goes on confirming that God's love is real as he keeps on leading us back to the cross of Jesus again and again and again that is the place and the only place where assurance can be found.

turn over to Romans chapter 8 and to the last section there that Rupert suggested you read during the offering and this last paragraph verses 37 to 39 are so wonderful you see the question there in verse 35 who shall separate us from the love of Christ and the answer is nothing nothing now and nothing ever even says Paul amid tribulation distress persecution famine nakedness danger or sword no verse 37 in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us not loves us but loved us loved us once and for all when he died on that cross for our sins and because we know that he did that nothing shall ever be able to separate us from that love not ever we can be sure look at verse 38

I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord do you see all we need to assure us of his ongoing love for us of his forever love for us of his never ending faithful love for us is to be led back once again to the cross because it's only living near the cross that we need never be insecure that we need never ever be fearful wondering if we can ever really please God our Father wondering if we can come up scratch in his eyes it's only near the cross that we never need to worry about whether he'll approve us or want us or whether someday he might perhaps abandon us we need never fear any of these things ever no our heavenly Father loves us and can never stop loving us can never cast us out because in Christ he loved us at the cross because I can sing in dying you loved me your own life laid down to save me forever from sin

I can be sure of his love the spirit keeps us near the cross he leads us back again and again and again to the place where God loved us and we know he loved us so we can be assured that nothing will ever separate us from that love see it's as he goes on leading us to that place of mercy that we can sing these wonderfully assuring verses of the hymns I remember God's great mercy by his help I've safely come and I know he will not fail me but will surely bring me home Jesus sought me when a stranger wandering far away from God and to rescue me from danger shed for me his precious blood in the cross in the cross be my glory ever till my ransomed soul shall be and find rest beyond the river see that's why Paul keeps saying all through these verses that we can rejoice that we can boast that we can celebrate confidently even in persecution even in struggle even in turmoil and danger and distress because in the cross we know he loved us and he will always love us and that's why we can proclaim boldly this sovereign salvation this sure and certain hope for all who believe in Christ and that's why there's no presumption there's no arrogance in it not at all because it's not at all about our loveliness to God it's not even about our love for God it's all about his great love for us for me at Calvary where he loved me verse 5 of Romans 5

[41 : 32] God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit for verse 8 God showed his love for us in that while we were sinners Christ died for us let me ask you this evening all of you do you have this sure and certain hope for the glory of God the certainty of salvation from God's judgment in the wrath to come at the last great day from salvation salvation from your sins do you have certainty that instead you will share not in what you deserve but in the glory of God's eternal life in Christ do you have what Paul speaks of here that hope that will never be put to shame do you know and are you sure that your heavenly father accepts you and approves you and loves you and will love you forever and ever and ever do you have that do you have it for certain you see the apostle

Paul says you can you can you can have that today right now you can know it and you can be assured if only you will believe trust in the Lord Jesus Christ throw yourself holy unto him a little later on in this letter he says this the scripture says everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame everyone everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved because when you turn to the Lord Jesus Christ like that God will pour out his love into your heart through the Holy Spirit as he lights up the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ to you personally and what it means to you is he gives you eyes to see that he who died for sinners surely died for me that's his promise why would you hold back on a promise like that let the Holy

Spirit lead you to the cross of Jesus of Jesus tonight believe and trust throw yourself on the promise of God in Jesus and God will pour out his Holy Spirit into your heart and you will feel your interest in the blood and with joy unspeakable you will cry out you are my Lord and my God that's the promise that's the unshakable promise of God Almighty himself to you in this wonderful gospel of grace let's pray near the cross a trembling soul love and mercy find me there the bright and morning star shed its beams around me near the cross oh Lamb of God bring its scenes before me help me walk from day to day with its shadows o'er me in the cross in the cross be my glory ever for my ransomed soul shall find rest beyond the river oh God our Father who has sent your spirit to lead us to the cross of the

Lord Jesus Christ so may he lead us everyone there tonight for the first time or for the thousandth time that we might know that you love us because there he loved us as he shed his blood for us in the cross amen