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Page : 1 - 18

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## JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ENABLES US TO REJOICE IN TIMES OF SUFFERING

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### ABSTRAK

Surat Rasul Paulus kepada orang-orang Roma memiliki tempat yang signifikan dalam teologi Kristen, karena memperkenalkan konsep-konsep penting seperti pembenaran, imputasi, adopsi, dan pengudusan. Sementara surat ini mengeksplorasi teori kebenaran yang dianugerahkan oleh Allah melalui iman kepada Yesus Kristus, surat ini juga menekankan penerapan praktis dari doktrin ini dalam kehidupan orang percaya. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk melakukan studi eksegetis singkat, dengan fokus pada implikasi praktis dari pembenaran oleh iman dan relevansinya dengan penderitaan orang beriman saat ini. Konteks sastra dan sejarah dari surat ini mendukung kepenulisan rasul Paulus, sebagaimana dibuktikan dengan penekanan pada pembenaran, pemahaman perspektif Yahudi, dan peran Paulus sebagai rasul bagi bangsa-bangsa lain. Dengan menggali lebih dalam dalam doktrin ini dan implikasinya, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan kekuatan transformatif iman dan signifikansinya dalam menghadapi kesulitan bagi orang beriman saat ini.

### ABSTRACT

St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans holds a significant place in Christian theology, as it introduces essential concepts such as justification, imputation, adoption, and sanctification. While the epistle explores the theory of righteousness bestowed by God through faith in Jesus Christ, it also emphasizes the practical application of this doctrine in the lives of believers. This article aims to conduct a brief exegetical study, focusing on the practical implications of justification by faith and its relevance to the present suffering of believers. The literary and historical context of the epistle supports the authorship of the apostle Paul, as evidenced by the emphasis on justification, the understanding of Jewish

### *Kata kunci:*

Hermeneutik, Surat Paulus kepada Jemaat di Roma, Pembenaran oleh Iman, Yesus Kristus

perspectives, and Paul's role as the apostle to the Gentiles. By delving into the depths of this doctrine and its implications, this study aims to shed light on the transformative power of faith and its significance in the face of adversity for believers today.

*Keywords:*  
Hermeneutics, St Paul's  
Letter to Romans,  
Justification by Faith,  
Jesus Christ

## Introduction

Paul's Epistle to the Romans is the most theological letter in the New Testament. It has contributed significantly to Christian theology. Most of its technical terms, such as justification, imputation, adoption, and sanctification, provide the backbone of Christian thought.<sup>1</sup> This epistle does not only talk about a theory of the righteousness of God to man, but also it talks about the life that should be led by one who is righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ. In this paper, my purpose is to do a brief exegetical study of the practical application of the doctrine of justification by faith, and its implication to the present suffering of believers.

## Methodology

This research uses a qualitative method that emphasizes the value-laden nature of research and seeks answers to various questions that emphasize how social experience is created and given meaning.<sup>2</sup> Research will be carried out using a literature review with reference to appropriate sources.

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<sup>1</sup> Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 305-6.

<sup>2</sup> Andreas B. Subagyo, *Pengantar Riset Kuantitatif & Kualitatif: Termasuk Riset Teologi dan Keagamaan* (Bandung: Yayasan Kalam Hidup, 2004), 62

## Results and Discussion

### 1. LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

#### a. Authorship

Many scholars agree that the apostle Paul was the author of this epistle that bears his name (1:1).<sup>3</sup> According to C.K. Barrett, the Pauline authorship of the epistle to the Romans is "a proposition which it is unnecessary to discuss because it is not in dispute. That this epistle is the apostle's greatest piece of sustained theological writing is self-evident."<sup>4</sup> In addition, John Murray gives three reasons from the contents of the epistle that prove the Pauline authorship. Firstly, the Epistle emphasized justification by grace through faith. That was the gospel that Paul promoted. Secondly, chapters 9-11 must be written by someone who was a Jew. Paul was a Jew, and he knew the mind of the Jew as did no other. Finally, the epistle identifies that Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles (1:13; 11:13). This fact is true according to Acts 13:47, 48; 15:12; 18:6,7; 22:21; 26:17; Gal. 2:2,8; Eph. 3:8; and I Tim. 2:7.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Romans, Epistle to the," by Charles D. Myers, Jr.

<sup>4</sup> C.K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1957), 1.

<sup>5</sup> John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), xiii-xv.

b. Date and Place of Origin

On the basis of a widely agreed interpretation of Rom. 16:23 and I Cor. 1:14, Paul was writing the epistle of Romans from Corinth. At the time, he was the guest of his former convert Gaius, in whose house the church in Corinth was accustomed to meeting. Furthermore, Rom. 16:1 reports that Phoebe, a deaconess of Cenchreae, the port of Corinth, is commended to the Roman church. Probably, this epistle was sent through her.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the date of writing was the time when Paul was staying in Corinth. According to Harold S. Songer, "the fixed point for dating Paul's stay in Corinth is his appearance (on an earlier visit to Corinth) before Gallio, the pro-consul of Achaia (Acts 18:12-17), who was in office between A.D. 50-54 and most likely in A.D. 51."<sup>7</sup> Based on this fact, most scholars would date Romans between A.D. 54 to 59, with a date of 55-56 being preferred.<sup>8</sup>

c. Composition

Several scholars in recent years have argued that the Epistle to the Romans is actually composed of two or more writings. The reason is, there is textual evidence that the book of Romans circulated at one time without chapter 16. One of the ancient Greek papyri called P46 (the Chester Beatty

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew Black, *The New Century Bible Commentary: Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 18-9.

<sup>7</sup> *Holman Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Romans, Book of," by Harold S. Songer.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

papyrus) consists of the closing benediction of Romans at 15:23 and 16:25-27. Since this benediction evidently formed the conclusion of the epistle, it is argued that Romans did at one time end at chapter 15. In addition, several Vulgate texts do not have chapter 16, but end with the doxology at 14:23.<sup>9</sup>

According to Matthew Black, the reason for the removal of chapter 16 in certain circles in the early church is "Obviously the general character of the Epistle, its suitability for all to read, and the obvious place to make a cut of unnecessary material."<sup>10</sup> Even though several scholars in past centuries have argued the composition of the Romans, all scholars agree that the apostle Paul was the actual author of this epistle.

#### d. Social Setting

Rome in Paul's day was the capital of an empire that stretched from Britain to Arabia. Wealthy and cosmopolitan, it was the diplomatic and trade center of the known world.<sup>11</sup> Emperor Nero had just begun to rule (A.D. 54-68), and anti-Christian persecutions had not yet begun. There was a large number of Jews living in Rome at the time. About a dozen synagogues were located throughout the city.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew Black, 27.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>11</sup> David Alexander and Pat Alexander, eds. *Eerdmans' Handbook of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), 581.

<sup>12</sup> Irving L. Jensen, *Jensen's Survey of the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 248-9.

The Christian community in Rome is a mixed congregation of Jews and Gentiles. In this epistle, Paul directly addresses both Gentiles (1:13, 11:13) and those of Jewish background (2:17, 3:9). At the time Paul wrote the epistle he had not been at Rome (1:13; 15:22). Therefore it is impossible that Paul had any direct role in founding the church there. Most likely, Jewish Christians founded the church in Rome. In Acts 2:10, it was reported that there were present at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost "sojourners from Rome" who may have returned with the message of Christ.<sup>13</sup>

e. Purpose

Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans for several purposes. Firstly, Paul wanted to counsel the church on Jewish-Gentile relations in the hopes of establishing one church of Jews and Gentiles (14:3, 5-6, 14). Secondly, Paul wanted to introduce himself and explain his gospel more fully to the Roman Christians (1:5). Thirdly, Paul wanted to apologize for his delay in visiting Rome (1:13). Finally, Paul wanted to appeal for prayer support that he may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and his ministry to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there (15:30-31).<sup>14</sup>

f. Characteristics

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<sup>13</sup> *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

Romans is the longest and most systematic letter of Pauline epistles. It has an emphasis on Christian doctrine. "The number and importance of theological themes touched upon are impressive: sin, salvation, grace, faith, righteousness, justification, sanctification, redemption, death, and resurrection."<sup>15</sup> In this paper, I am concerned about the practical application of the doctrine of justification by faith.

## 2. STRUCTURE AND OUTLINE

### a. Form Structure and Setting of Romans 5:1-5

The immediate context of this passage begins at 3:21 and continues to 5:21. The theme of this entire section is "God's glorious provision of righteousness." This theme tells about how God provides the way to righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, the beginning section (3:21-4:25) has set out God's way of righteousness, and that is "no person can be justified before God apart from the gift of righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ."<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, 5:1-11 tells about "the fruits of justification by faith". In this paper, my exegetical study is limited to verses 1-5. Finally, the following verses (5:12-21) tell about "a contrast between Adam and Christ," which sums up the message of the book up to

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<sup>15</sup> Walter W. Wessel, "Romans" in *The NIV Study Bible*, ed. Kenneth Barker (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 1704.

<sup>16</sup> Donald C. Stamps, ed., *The Full Life Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 1706.

this point. Adam stands for man's condemnation (1:18-3:20); Christ stands for the believer's justification (3:21-5:11).<sup>17</sup>

b. Outline of the Epistle of Romans

Introduction (1:1-17)

- I. Man's Desperate Need of Righteousness (1:18-3:20)
- II. God's Glorious Provision of Righteousness (3:21-5:21)
  - a. Main Emphasis-The Blessings and Assurance Accompanying Justification (5:1-11)
- III. The Outworking of Righteousness Through Faith (6:1-8:39)
- IV. Righteousness Through Faith As It Relates to Israel (9:1-11:36)
- V. Practical Applications of Righteousness Through Faith (12:1-15:13)

Conclusion (15:14-16:27)<sup>18</sup>

c. Outline of Romans 5:1-5

After setting out God's way of justifying sinners is a justification by faith (3:21-4:25), Paul now enlists the blessings which accrue to those whose faith has been counted to them for righteousness (5:1-11).<sup>19</sup> Therefore, my outline of Romans 5:1-5 is talking about the four fruits of justification by faith. Those fruits are:

- I. We Have Peace with God (5:1)

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<sup>17</sup> Walter W. Wessel, 1712.

<sup>18</sup> Donald C. Stamps, ed., 1705.

<sup>19</sup> F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985), 113.



- II. We rejoice in the hope of the Glory of God (5:2)
- III. We rejoice in Our Sufferings (5:3-4)
- IV. The Holy Spirit has been given to us (5:5)

### 3. THE ROLE OF THE TEXT GENRE

Some scholars have argued that Paul's letter to the Romans is a "letter essay."<sup>20</sup> The reason is, Paul, was explaining his gospel without relating to the specific needs of the Roman church. On the other hand, Charles D. Myers states, "Although Romans is Paul's longest and most systematic work, it is still an epistle, not a manifesto, or a treatise, or a position paper."<sup>21</sup> I agree with Myers that Romans is an epistle (an actual letter). The reasons are Romans characterizes an epistolary form and has an epistolary occasion. According to the purposes of this epistle, it was written by Paul for a specific occasion in the Roman church. That is to counsel the church on Jewish-Gentile relations in the hopes of establishing one church of Jews and Gentiles (14:3, 5-6, 14).

### 4. PARALLEL PASSAGES

Parallel passages of Rom. 5:1 are Php. 3:9; Gal. 2:16; 3:11; Tit. 3:6,7 and Rev. 5:9. These verses talk about being justified by faith in Jesus Christ. Rom. 5:2 is parallel with Eph. 2:18; 3:12 and Heb. 6:19-20; 10:19. In

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<sup>20</sup> Craig S. Kreemer, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary New Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 412.

<sup>21</sup> *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, *ibid.*

these passages, Christ is viewed as ushering believers into their new state of grace and acceptance before God. Rom. 5:3-4 is parallel with Matt. 5:11,12; Ac. 5:41; Jas 1:2-4; and I Pt. 4:13. These passages tell about the believers rejoicing in the suffering because it is not meaningless. Finally, Rom. 5:5 is parallel with Isa. 28:16; and I Pt. 2:6. These passages tell about hope, which is based on the promise of God, does not disappoint us or put us to shame.

## 5. KEYWORDS AND SPECIAL FEATURES

### a. Justified (v. 1)

This word is translated in Greek as "to justify someone, therefore, means to bring out the fact that he is just or to make him just without necessarily referring to how it is accomplished."<sup>22</sup> This word points to the legal standing of men before God. Barrow quoted in Wm. S. Plumer states,

God's justifying us doth solely or chiefly, import his acquitting us from guilt, condemnation, and punishment, by free pardon and remission of our sins, accounting us and dealing with us as just persons, as upright and innocent in his sight and esteem.<sup>23</sup>

### b. Access (v. 2)

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<sup>22</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, ed. *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1990), 1825.

<sup>23</sup> Wm. S. Plumer, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1971), 128.

This word denotes "the privilege of approaching or being introduced into the presence of someone in high station, especially a royal or divine personage."<sup>24</sup> Here Christ is viewed as ushering believers into their new state of grace and acceptance before God.

c. Rejoice (v. 2,3)

This word denotes "a shout of triumph."<sup>25</sup> Justification through faith in Jesus Christ brings joy to the believer's life. He rejoices because he has triumphed for eternity in assurance, in peace, in fellowship, in access to the throne of grace, in the immovable establishment in grace, triumph in hope, and in the glory of God.<sup>26</sup>

d. Character (v. 4)

This word means literally "the fact that one has proved oneself true or the act of proving oneself true."<sup>27</sup> Suffering is allowed by God to test the faith of the believers (Jas. 1:2-3). Suffering will produce an "approved" character.

## 6. THEOLOGICAL ISSUES

The main theological issue in Rom. 5:1-5 is the debate whether justification that means God's action in making persons righteous refers primarily to one's new status in Christ or to one's new moral character in

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<sup>24</sup> F.F. Bruce, 116.

<sup>25</sup> J.P. McBeth, *Exegetical and Practical Commentary on Romans* (New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell company, n.d.), 149.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, 1826.

Christ. Protestant and particularly Lutheran scholars argued that justification should be understood in the first sense. That is God's acquitting or pronouncing the sinner righteous without any reference to moral change. On the other hand, Roman Catholic scholars argued that justification means God's making a person righteous or moral regeneration. Both of these extremes are not right. The biblical understanding of justification is one, which includes both the new status of a person before God and the new life that this status demands.<sup>28</sup>

#### 7. EXEGESIS OF ROMANS 5:1-5

Rom. 5:1 marks the transition verse from the doctrine of justification by faith (3:21-4:25) to the practical application of justification by faith – "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith," (5:1a). Then, Paul describes fruits or results of justification in the believer's life (5:1-5).

v. 1b – "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," (NIV).

The KJV and NASB also state the same. The word "peace" means "more than tranquillity of conscience."<sup>29</sup> Peace may mean as contra with strife. Such a state of peace is "the object of divine and saving promise and is brought about God's mercy, granting deliverance and freedom from all the distresses that are experienced as a result of sin."<sup>30</sup> Therefore, peace with God is an objective status or condition, a relationship that

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<sup>28</sup> *Holman Bible Dictionary*, *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> J.P. McBeth, 146.

<sup>30</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, 1829.

exists between God and those whom he justifies. However, the objective state is reflected in the feeling of peace which someone enjoys when he knows that he is reconciled to God.<sup>31</sup> Peace with God is "through our Lord Jesus Christ." By faith in Jesus Christ, someone receives reconciliation with God.

v.2 – "through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand." (NIV).

The KJV states a similar phrase to the NIV. The NASB says, "through whom also we have obtained our introduction." The word "access" in Greek can be translated as "introduction or approach."<sup>32</sup> It carries the idea of "one being introduced into the private chamber of a monarch."<sup>33</sup> Jesus is the introducer; the believer is the introduced; God is the king; and grace is the realm of the introduction. "Grace" is therefore the permanent realm in which the believer lives. The security of the believer is founded in the eternal grace of God, in which the believer has access or approach to God through Jesus Christ.<sup>34</sup> The verse further goes on to say "And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." (NIV). The KJV and NASB also state a similar phrase to the NIV. "The glory of God" means "the manifestation of God's own glory."<sup>35</sup> It is connected with "being forever with the Lord, and enjoying the ineffable bliss of a never-ending residence in the glorious

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<sup>31</sup> C.K. Barrett, 111.

<sup>32</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, 1886.

<sup>33</sup> J.P. McBeth, 147.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 148.

<sup>35</sup> John Murray, 162.

presence of God and the Lamb.”<sup>36</sup> This is the future hope of the believer that he has not yet entered.

v.3 – “we also rejoice in our sufferings,” (NIV).

The KJV states, “We glory in tribulations also.” The NASB states, “We also exult in our tribulations.” The word “tribulation” is translated the same as “suffering.” The believer does not only rejoice in his future hope; he even rejoices in the present, whatever great tribulations or sufferings may be. The reason for this rejoicing in suffering is that it is a “part of God’s purpose to produce character in his children.”<sup>37</sup> The next phrase states, “because we know that suffering produces perseverance;” (NIV). The NASB gave a similar translation to the NIV. The KJV says, “knowing that tribulation worketh patience.” The word “perseverance” means “the act of persevering, continued, patient effort.”<sup>38</sup> Therefore, perseverance is similar to patience. Suffering produces perseverance or patience. Patience is “an element of all truly great soul.”<sup>39</sup> It is the attitude that looks through sufferings to find their meaning in God.”<sup>40</sup>

v. 4 – “perseverance, character; and character, hope.” (NIV).

The KJV states, “and patience, experience; experience, hope.” The NASB translates it, “and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope.” The word “character” in Greek means “the fact that one

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<sup>36</sup> Wm. S. Plumer, 196.

<sup>37</sup> Walter W. Wessel, 1712.

<sup>38</sup> *Webster’s New World Dictionary & Thesaurus*, s.v. “Perseverance.”

<sup>39</sup> Wm. S. Plumer, 197.

<sup>40</sup> C.K. Barrett, 104.

has proved oneself true or the act of proving oneself true."<sup>41</sup> In other words, the character here means "proven character." Through the experience of suffering, the believer has proved the genuineness of the tried person and also of the faithfulness and support of God, which will enable him to overcome every difficulty."<sup>42</sup> This is a religious experience. Through this experience, the believer's hope in God grows stronger.

v. 5 – "And hope does not disappoint us," (NIV).

The NASB and NIV gave a similar rendition of this phrase. The KJV states, "And hope maketh not ashamed." "Hope does not disappoint us" means literally "does not put us to shame by proving illusory."<sup>43</sup> The KJV translation is more literary. A hope, which fails of realization, does put one to shame. The next phrase states, "because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us," NIV. The KJV and NASB have a similar phrase to the NIV. "God's love" is the assurance of the believer's hope. This love is revealed to him by the Holy Spirit and objectively demonstrated to him in the death of Christ (5:6-8).<sup>44</sup> The verb "has poured out" indicates "a present status resulting from a past action."<sup>45</sup> The past action was that God gave the Holy Spirit to the believer when he first believed in Christ (as a justified person). The Holy Spirit poured out God's love in his heart. The present status is that God's love continues to

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<sup>41</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, 1826.

<sup>42</sup> Haldane quoted in Wm. S. Plumer, 197.

<sup>43</sup> Matthew Black, 83.

<sup>44</sup> Walter W. Wessel, 1712.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

dwell in him through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comforts him in his sufferings and assures him that his hope for future glory is not illusory.<sup>46</sup>

## 8. APPLICATION AND DEVOTIONAL INSIGHTS

I think that this passage is an encouraging passage to Indonesian Christians who are in presently trouble. Sometimes, Christians have to face persecution. For instance, during the period of 1965-November 30, 1998, there were 514 churches that were closed, vandalized, destroyed, or burnt down. Out of that number, 275 cases took place between 1996 and November 30, 1998.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, this passage is relevant to the situation of Indonesian Christians.

Through this passage, we learn that our justification does not only bring the new status that we are justified persons but also, it brings joy and hope in our lives. God can use our suffering for our good. It is a part of God's purpose to produce character in His children. Through this experience, our hope in God will grow stronger. The Holy Spirit has been given to comfort us in times of trouble. All sufferings will pass away when we see the glory of God revealed which is our future hope.

## CONCLUSION

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<sup>46</sup> Donald C. Stamps, 1717-8.

<sup>47</sup> Paul Tahalele, *The Church and Human Rights in Indonesia* (Surabaya, Indonesia: Indonesia Christian Communication Forum, 1998), 7 quoted in Gani Wiyono, "Pentecostalism in Indonesia: an Overview" (Presentation Paper, Satyabhakti, n.d.), 15.



The message of Rom. 5:1-5 explains that justification by faith in Jesus Christ does not only produce the new status of a person before God, but also it produces the new life that this status demands. The believers, who are justified by God, have peace with God. They have fellowship with Him. They have hope for the future glory and the present. They can rejoice in their sufferings because they know that God uses them to produce character in His children. They have the Holy Spirit who dwells in them. The Holy Spirit will comfort them and enable them to go through their difficulties. The Holy Spirit assures them that their hope in God is not illusory. All of these blessings are the fruits of justification by faith in Christ.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Editorial note:* If I may add a few notes... that *Justification by faith* does not mean we can live as we please without rules. So antinomianism/hypergrace teachings are not true. This remark's only meant as an alert. Because lately there have been quite a lot of splinter streams. -- Editor.

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