

## Reading

5 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, **we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.** 2 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.

(Romans 5:1–2)

## Intro

Between the ages of about 13 and 20, I was troubled by the sneaking suspicion that I was not really a Christian. I told people I was a Christian, I hoped I was a Christian, but I had no assurance that I really was a Christian.

As a result, I was a serial go-to-the-fronter during my teenage years. I went to the front at a Luis Palau evangelistic meeting in London at the age of 13. I went to the front at a Billy Graham meeting a year or so later. At numerous times and places over the years, I went forward, or prayed the prayer. I said it ever more fervently, ever more anxiously, and often with tears. And I kept praying and going to the front because I was never entirely sure that I'd prayed enough or gone to the front enough or meant it enough.

I didn't feel any different in the days after I'd prayed the prayer. I found myself failing in the same departments as before. So how could I know whether or not I really WAS a Christian?

What advice would YOU have given to a spiritually agitated fourteen-year-old Barry Cooper? Hopefully, the first thing you'd say to the fourteen year old me would be: please please, would you go and shave off that ridiculous downy fluff you have on your upper lip. That's the first thing you should say.

But then after that, what would you say to the teenage me? Was I a Christian? Is it possible for someone to know? Does God even want us to have a deep assurance that we're truly saved?

I remember one of my friends at university saying to me, actually, God doesn't want us to know for sure whether or not we're truly Christian. If we had certainty about *that*, then that would make us spiritually complacent, and less likely to do good works. Was she right?

On the other hand, I had friends saying to me, "No, she's wrong. You CAN know for sure if you're a Christian. As long as you were sincere when you called on the name of Jesus, then you are saved." Were THEY right?

I've got two headings for us.

Firstly, can you have peace with God?

Secondly, can you KNOW you have peace with God?

## Firstly, then: can you have peace with God?

Look at what Paul says in Romans chapter 5 verse 1:

5 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, **we have peace with God** through our Lord Jesus Christ.  
(Romans 5:1)

Anyone can have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ, *if they have been "justified by faith"*. What does that mean, "justified by faith"?

As you know, the internet remembers everything you do. There's no sense in which you can truly "delete" anything you've ever put online. Emails, photos, blogs, search history, things you've bought, social media posts. Even if you go into Facebook and ask for all your data to be deleted, there are websites that have automatically saved and archived everything that has been published on the internet. Even if you delete emails from your computer, and the recipient does the same on their computer, the email is stored forever on the server that processed your email. Even your individual keystrokes can be captured.

And the Bible says there's a moral equivalent of that which is even more detailed and comprehensive. Everything you've ever done or ever will do is remembered, including your internal thoughts and intentions. The Bible speaks of this as the "record of our debts". What it means is, nothing is forgotten. Everything matters. Even a single moment in which we've broken any of God's laws, even in our minds, is enough to render us guilty in the eyes of God.

Jesus says in Luke chapter 12:

Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.  
(Luke 12:2-3)

And the Bible says that God's judgement of us in future will be declared on the basis of that record of our debts.

You may remember in the movie *The Dark Knight Rises*, I'm sure you do, Catwoman is desperate to find a piece of software called "The Clean Slate". It's described as "the ultimate tool for a master thief with a record". And what it does is basically erase your past. You type in a person's name and date of birth and in a few minutes, they're gone from every database on earth. She desperately wants to get hold of this so she can start a new life that is free from her past mistakes.

What Catwoman needs, to use biblical language, is to be *justified*. To have the record of her debts erased, gone, forgotten. That's what that word "justified" means in Romans chapter 5 verse 1.

Now in the movie at one point, the "Clean Slate" is referred to as a myth. Someone says, "It's too good to be true."

But that's the gospel. It's called "good news" for a reason. Every single failure to keep God's law, whether by thought or deed, all wiped clean. No catches or conditions or strings attached. It doesn't depend on you being morally perfect from hereon out. You are justified because of God's goodness, not your own.

Unlike "the Clean Slate", you don't activate this "justification" with the push of a button. But it's just as simple, and just as instantaneous. You activate it "by faith", which simply means by "trusting" Christ.

Therefore, verse 1,

...since we have been **justified by faith**, we have **peace with God** through our Lord Jesus Christ.  
(Romans 5:1)

So you CAN have peace with God. No matter how miserable or shameful or criminal your back story is, God offers you a clean slate.

How is he able to do that?

Because he's just, He doesn't magic the record of our debts away. He doesn't pretend that wrongdoing doesn't matter or that it never existed. What he does is he comes and he pays off

your debts himself, on your behalf. That's the significance of Jesus Christ dying on the cross. God takes on human flesh to come and pay the mountain of moral debt that we owe.

And the result of Him doing that is that you no longer have any debt to pay. So God declares you to be "not guilty". In fact, you are declared to be righteous. All because you have put your faith in the one who IS perfectly righteous.

That's how you have peace with God. By putting your faith in Christ, and Christ alone. You are justified *by faith*.

But that takes us to our second heading. Can you KNOW you are have peace with God? Is there some way of being sure?

## **Secondly, can you KNOW you have this peace with God?**

What was it that Jesus singled out as the last thing he would leave with his disconsolate friends, just when he knew he was about to be arrested and killed?

He said:

**Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.** Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

(John 14:27)

Yes, he will soon leave with them the intellectual knowledge that they are reconciled to God because of Him. But it's more than that. "The peace of God" is more than a mere fact stored up here in the brain.

It is, as the eighteenth century pastor Andrew Fuller describes it, "a sweet tranquility of soul"; it is something to be savoured and enjoyed; it is a sweet consolation that sinks deep into the very marrow of our bones. You FEEL it in your conscience and in your consciousness: that you are pleasing to God, and you have his peace.

When my friend said to me, "Actually, you're not supposed to know you have peace with God, you're not supposed to have assurance." - was she right?

Well, listen to First John chapter 5:

Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, **that you may know that you have** eternal life.

(1 John 5:12-13)

So you CAN know that you have eternal life. In fact, the Apostle John writes his whole book specifically to that end.

Clearly, he doesn't think that KNOWING you have eternal life is a recipe for spiritual disaster. In fact, the biblical logic is that when we KNOW we are saved, when we have deep assurance of our salvation, it will motivate us to live godly lives.

Not only CAN you know whether you are in the faith, you ought to pursue that knowing. Second Corinthians tells us:

5 Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves...  
(2 Corinthians 13:5a)

And Peter says, "...be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election..." (2 Peter 1:10a)

So let me ask you: Do you know the peace of God yourself? Do you have the sweet tranquility of soul that assures you that you are in the faith?

I'm going to briefly suggest nine hallmarks of someone who is saved. Now let me stress that a true believer does all of these imperfectly. If we did all of these things perfectly, then we would not feel our need for a Saviour. We're all of us a work in progress.

So keep that in mind as we consider these nine hallmarks of a believer, which help us to know that we really ARE a believer.

**Firstly, you're looking to CHRIST, and Christ alone, for salvation, not to a prayer you once prayed, or to the sincerity of the prayer you prayed, or to anything else that is NOT Christ.**

Salvation is not looking to your heart to see if it is looking to Christ. Salvation is looking to Christ.

What does it say in Romans chapter 10?

...if you confess with your mouth that **Jesus is Lord** and believe in your heart that **God raised him from the dead**, you will be saved.  
(Romans 10:9)

Do you freely confess that Jesus is Lord, and believe that God raised him from the dead? Yes? Then that's one of the hallmarks of someone who is saved.

**Secondly, there should be some kind of spiritual hunger in you, if you're saved.**

You may have heard it said: "Babies that are born alive are born hungry." First Peter chapter 2 says:

2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.  
(1 Peter 2:2-3)

If you have tasted that the Lord is good, if you HAVE truly been saved, then you will long for spiritual food, spiritual nourishment. Do you enjoy hearing the Bible taught? Do you want to know more about Christ? That's another hallmark of someone who has been saved.

**Thirdly, you love other Christians.**

First John 3 says:

14 We know that we have passed out of death into life, **because we love the brothers...**  
(1 John 3:14)

How do you view other people here at CCC? Do you gravitate toward them, or would you rather keep your distance? Look I get it, some of us are a bit weird. It's ok to think that because it's true. But does your heart instinctively go out to the people here? Do you feel a deep kinship with those who love Jesus?

John Piper puts it like this: "Is the current pattern of your life to live for the eternal good of other people, or are your thoughts and dreams and daily choices generally aimed at merely making yourself comfortable and your name esteemed?"

**Fourthly, you know you're saved if you have the Holy Spirit.**

First John chapter 4 says:



13 By this we **know** that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

(1 John 4:13)

Ephesians 1 says:

13 In [Christ] you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, **were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,**

14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

(Ephesians 1:13–14)

So all believers have the Holy Spirit. Which begs the question, how do I know if I have the Holy Spirit?

Perhaps this is stating the obvious, but the Holy Spirit gives you the desire to be HOLY. You will have the desire to be different from the world around you.

You should expect to see the fruit of the Spirit: not perfectly, and not all at once to the same degree, but over time, you'd expect these qualities to be growing in you:

22 the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control....

(Galatians 5:22–23)

That said, one of the striking things about particularly godly believers is that they are the ones who are most troubled by their LACK of progress in these things. That doesn't mean they're not saved; it's actually means the opposite: their growing holiness makes them increasingly sensitive to their own room for growth. But others can clearly see the fruit of the Spirit in them.

**Fifthly, related to number four, you'll have an increasing awareness of your own sin, and an increasing desire to fight it.**

Galatians 5 says:

17 ...the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh....  
(Galatians 5:17a)

Increasingly, we ought to find ourselves uncomfortable with our own sin, rather than making peace with it or cozying up to it.

And when you do sin, does it grieve you? Do you come to the cross for forgiveness and renewed strength to fight the battle?

**Sixthly, there's a desire to keep God's commands.**

The Apostle John says:

3 And **by this we know that we have come to know him**, if we keep his commandments. 4 Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, 5 but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. **By this we may know that we are in him: 6 whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.**  
(1 John 2:3-6)

Jesus himself says

15 If you love me, you will keep my commandments.  
(John 14:15)

This doesn't mean we perfectly keep God's commands. But a Christian has a God-given desire to please the Father by obeying the Son through the Spirit.

You know, looking back, I don't want to be too hard on fourteen year old me, but I don't think I was a Christian at that point. It wasn't until I was twenty, and in my second semester at university, that I felt a deep assurance that I was truly a believer. Where did that assurance come from? What was the difference between fourteen year old me, and twenty-one year old me?

One of the differences was that I found I had a desire to keep God's commands, rather than what I had before which was kind of a begrudging and fitful obedience because I was somehow trying to placate him. NOW when I read his Word, I wanted to obey. Because I knew it was for my good. And I knew that HE was good. And that in itself became another inward confirmation that I was truly a Christian.

**Seventhly, you know you're saved if you understand spiritual things you couldn't previously understand.**

First Corinthians chapter 1:

18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

(1 Corinthians 1:18)

I remember a good friend of mine who was not a believer, I'd been trying to get her to go on a Christianity Explored course at my church, and it took about three years before she agreed. I won't say she was hostile, but there were a lot of intellectual roadblocks in our conversations. Why does God allow suffering? I just can't accept the Bible's teaching on sexuality, and so on.

But one night, I was walking home in central London, and I saw her coming from the direction of the church. I think she was about midway through Christianity Explored. And I said to her, "How's it going? Do you feel like you've had helpful answers to your questions?" And she just smiled at me and said to me, "The bigger Jesus gets, the fewer questions there are." And that was the moment I was pretty sure she'd become a believer.

Again, you can be a believer and ask questions about God. The Psalms are full of questions about God.

But there will be things which seemed like nonsense to you as an UNbeliever which make perfect sense to you as a believer. The cross once seemed like foolishness to you. It doesn't any more.

**Eighthly, and perhaps surprisingly, we know we're saved when we're chastised for our disobedience.**

6 For **the Lord disciplines the one he loves,**  
and **chastises every son whom he receives.**"  
(Hebrews 12:6)

I've heard it put like this: God doesn't spank the neighbor's children.

In fact, the writer of Hebrews says if you don't experience discipline from God, then "you are illegitimate children and not sons."

So if you feel you are under the discipline of God, don't be discouraged. He doesn't spank the neighbor's children. The Lord disciplines those he loves.

**Ninthly, you know you're saved when you experience the inward testimony of the Spirit.**

In Romans 8 it says this:

15 ...you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "**Abba! Father!**" **16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,**  
(Romans 8:15-16)

And look too at Galatians chapter 6:

6 ...**because you are sons,** God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"  
(Galatians 4:6)

Abba of course is the is the Aramaic word meaning "Father".

You may have prayed "Our Father who art in heaven" as an unbeliever, but it hits very differently when you're a Christian. Our FATHER. MY Father. He puts the Spirit of his Son into your heart, and that Spirit cries out "*Father!*"

There is a sweet, experiential dimension here. When I get home in the evening, my children - because they KNOW they're my children, react to seeing me in a certain way. They don't just stay on the couch and say, "Ah, there is the man I am given to understand is my father..." Not

even half-British kids are that cold. No, they leap up, they run across the room, they put their arms around my legs and they cry out "daddy!". Even more so if they think I have chocolate.

It's experiential for them. They FEEL it! When you think of God, when you speak of Him, do you generally experience affection, joy, delight? This is an inward testimony that you are truly saved.

So those are nine hallmarks of a Christian, biblically speaking.

Having heard those, let's return to the fourteen year old me. What would you say to someone like the younger me who had the nagging suspicion that he's not saved, who has NO assurance of salvation?

As well-meaning as it was, I think it was a mistake for that person to say to me: "As long as you believed sincerely when you prayed the prayer, then you are saved." Because in doing that, they were unwittingly saying that I was justified by my feeling of SINCERITY, rather than being justified by my Saviour.

My friend the evangelist Glen Scrivener had a very similar experience to me as a teenager, and it ended up with him resenting God and even hating him. Listen to this:

I gave my life to Jesus about a thousand times. It began aged 13 at a Christian camp. The youth leader made the challenge and I was equal to it. I surrendered all. Later that evening I looked hard in the mirror to see if there was any change. Was there a light behind my eyes? A halo above my head? A funny feeling in my stomach? Was there anything to tell me my prayer worked! Nothing.

So I prayed again the next day. I found myself adding phrases like "really, I mean it" just to assure Jesus I was earnest. How earnest? I prayed again the next day and the next. I prayed a "prayer of commitment" most days between the ages of 13 and 17.

But as I closed in on the thousand prayer mark, how do you think I was feeling about God? I hated Him. There was I, super-committed. There was He, silent, presumably unimpressed by my devotion, always wanting more.

By the time I left home I concluded God didn't want me. Therefore I didn't want Him. So I went to university, determined to be free of His constant demands but it didn't work. Switching from "elder brother" to "prodigal" didn't liberate me. It only got me lost.

What brought me home? The gospel. The actual gospel. You know the one about Christ giving His life. That's what the Bible is about: Not my self-offering – His!

We think salvation happens because we are the ones who "gave our lives to Jesus". It's the other way round. Our salvation happens because Jesus gave his life to US. We're saved by looking to HIM, not by looking to things we've done or emotions we've felt.

And on that point, as I close, I want to say a word about feelings. I've just been making the case that true faith will typically lead us to experience certain feelings, unless there are particular physiological reasons which make feeling impossible.

But that is not the same thing as saying that you should found your faith on your feelings. Remember the passage we started with: "we have been justified by faith [not by our feelings], we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ [not through our feelings]."

Counter-intuitively, the best way to enjoy a more experiential faith is not to focus your attention on your feelings, but to focus your attention more and more on Jesus Christ.

Think of two Israelites standing on the verge of the Red Sea. The Egyptian chariots are coming up behind them, they think they're going to die. But then the Red Sea rises up and is parted, so that they can walk through it and be delivered from their enemies. So imagine they're standing safely on the other side looking back across the sea. One of them says, "WOAH!! That was INCREDIBLE! I've never experienced anything like this! God saved me! He saved me!" The other Israelite looks at him and says, "You know, I know I OUGHT to feel something here, but I'm just not a big FEELS guy. I'm just not really feeling anything much right now."

Question: which one of those two Israelites was saved? Answer: both of them. Why? Because their feelings didn't save them. God did. We have been justified not by faith in our feelings, but by faith in Christ.

But what of those who still feel doubtful, or fearful about our salvation? What would God have us do? He would have us come to him. Never let fear or doubt or uncertainty keep you from him. He longs that you would ask him for what you lack. Ask him to give you love for him - it won't offend him. Ask him for love for others, ask for a desire for holiness, whatever it is you feel you lack.

Let's pray.