

4

Reconciled with God

Romans 5

a Peace with God through Jesus (5:1-11)

Since we have been justified
through faith, we have peace with
God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

—Romans 5:1

Paul defined justification in Romans 3:21—4:25. In Romans 5, however, he focused on the benefits of justification. For Paul, justification was not only an event that put believers in a right position with God. Justification had practical, life-long implications for Christians.

First among these benefits is the peace we have with God through Jesus Christ (vs. 1). Because of sin, we were estranged from God and were objects of His wrath (see 1:18—3:20). Because of Christ, however, not only do we avoid receiving the wrath we deserve, but also we enjoy a state of peace with God. We expect fury and yet receive grace.

Paul was not talking about peace as simply a sense of rest. He was talking about an objective state of harmony between the believer and

God. All this is possible because of what Jesus did on the cross (see Eph. 2:14). Formerly we were God's enemies; now we are His friends (see Col. 1:21, 22).

Ask Yourself . . . *Do I have peace with God, and do I sense that peace?*

A second benefit that results from justification is direct access to God (Rom. 5:2). Formerly, we were prevented from coming into the presence of God because of sin. Now we have full and unrestricted access. The Greek word for "access" means "privilege of approach," which is now available through faith in Jesus Christ.

A key blessing we enjoy is "this grace in which we now stand." Because believers have been justified—that is, declared righteous—we live in the sphere of God's grace. And in this sphere, believers enjoy every spiritual blessing in Christ. The gift of grace gives us the hope of experiencing God's glory—the glory from which we previously fell short (see 3:23). Grace may be viewed as a foot in the door of God's glory, which will one day swing wide open and grant us unhindered access to the glorious immediate presence of God.



have job-related distresses; others struggle with broken relationships. Whatever the difficult situation, Paul said, we can have joy in the midst of it. In Christ, we have the power to choose how we will respond to our circumstances, no matter how burdensome they are.

The Colosseum in Rome was a place of intense persecution of Christians, especially during the reigns of Vespasian and Titus after the time of Paul. Paul's words about rejoicing in suffering no doubt prepared the Christians in Rome for the suffering to come.

Of course, peace with God does not necessarily bring peaceful circumstances in the course of daily living. All of us go through times of suffering when our circumstances may seem anything but peaceful. Therefore, in Romans 5:3-5 Paul turned his attention to the believer's attitude toward suffering.

Notice that Paul said we rejoice "in" our sufferings, not "because of" them (vs. 3). This is an important distinction. Paul was not telling us we should be joyful when things go wrong in our lives; he was telling us that we can be joyful in the midst of troubling situations.

The word "sufferings" could also be translated "afflictions," "distresses," or "pressures." These are broad words that encompass all kinds of things that can go wrong. Some people have financial pressures; some have health afflictions; some

Notice the chain in verses 3 and 4: suffering produces perseverance (that is, "steadfast endurance"); perseverance produces character; and character, hope. One leads to the next. (Progressions such as this, called concatenation, were a common literary device in ancient times.) Hence, a believer can have a joyful attitude in the midst of suffering because he or she can be certain it is not meaningless. Such pain can bear Christlike fruit, namely perseverance, character, and hope.

Ask Yourself . . . *How has my character changed as a result of difficult circumstances? How would I be different today if those difficulties had never occurred?*

Paul affirmed that hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured His love into our hearts (vs. 5). Such love enhances our hope because it does not hinge on circumstances. Even when life throws us a punch, God's love continues to flow through our hearts to heal the bruises.

The verb translated "poured out" speaks of the inexhaustible supply of God's love given to believers through the Holy Spirit. The Holy

Spirit is the agent who expresses God's love in and through believers' hearts.

To illustrate the love of God he had just described, Paul stated that "at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly" (vs. 6). For centuries the Mosaic law had been in operation—provoking and exposing sin, showing people their need to be reconciled with God. But now the time had come for the Messiah to be born, at just the right time in God's sovereign plan of redemption (compare Gal. 4:4).

Christ came when we were "powerless" (Rom. 5:6). The original word means "weak," "without strength," "feeble," and "sickly." In the present context, it points to those who are weak in terms of their ability to create any righteousness for themselves.

When Paul said Christ died for

the ungodly, he referred to something theologians call "substitutionary atonement." (The word "for" in the phrase "Christ died for the ungodly" means "on behalf of.") Christ was our substitute on the cross. We deserved to die for our sins, but Christ took our place and died on our behalf.

What an amazing thing Christ did! People rarely give up their lives for others. Occasionally we might find someone who is willing to die for a good person (vs. 7), but we were neither upright nor good—not in the sense that God reflects these qualities. Christ died for ungodly sinners, while we were still alienated from Him (vs. 8).

The contrast between the one who laid down His life and those for whom He died is stark. Such an act of self-sacrifice can only be motivated by unfathomable love. And indeed, this love was demonstrated

Why Christians Suffer

Paul instructed the Christians in Rome to rejoice in their sufferings. When we see believers who are in extraordinary physical or emotional pain, or when we find ourselves in the middle of such turmoil, it is normal for us to question why these trials had to happen. Though we might not know all the reasons why Christians suffer, the Bible offers some general explanations.

- Human suffering ultimately traces back to the fall of humankind (Gen. 2—3).
- Sometimes Christians suffer as a result of personal sin (II Sam. 11—12).
- Sometimes Christians suffer for the sake of righteousness (Matt. 5:10-12; Acts 4:1-31).
- Sometimes Christians suffer because of satanic attack (Job 1:1—2:10).
- Sometimes Christians suffer because God disciplines them (Ps. 51; Heb. 12:4-13).

When we suffer for our sins, we can rejoice that God loves us enough to discipline us as sons and daughters. When we suffer for reasons beyond our control, we can rejoice that we are becoming more like Christ, especially in the area of humility.

when Christ laid down His life on our behalf. Christ's death on the cross illustrates the relentless and amazing pursuit of the wounded by the wounded.

Verses 9 through 11 continue to build on the doctrine of justification. Since believers have been justified, how much more shall we be saved from the coming wrath through Jesus (vs. 9)! "Wrath" in this verse refers to God's final judgment of humankind (compare I Thess. 1:10). Since believers have been justified (that is, made positionally right with God), we will certainly not be abandoned to await a judgment of condemnation, nor will we suffer God's coming wrath (see John 5:24).

Arguing from the lesser to the greater, Paul said that if we, as God's enemies, were reconciled to Him through Jesus' death, "how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" (Rom. 5:10). At one time, we were God's enemies because our disobedience estranged us from Him. But because of Jesus' death, we have been reconciled to Him. "Reconciliation" refers to removal of the enmity that stood between us and God. It put an end to all forms of hostility. It is the basis of a restored fellowship between God and us (see II Cor. 5:20, 21).

Paul's point, then, is that since God no longer looks on us as His enemies, the basis of our salvation is complete. Furthermore, Christ provides for us "through his life" (Rom. 5:10). This refers not only to Jesus' earthly life but to His present post-resurrection life as well. An example

of Jesus' present ministry to us is the way He lives to make intercession for us from heaven (see Heb. 7:25). He prays for us continuously. In this and other ways, Jesus saves us "through his life" (Rom. 5:10). To simplify, our justification was brought about through Jesus' death; our sanctification is brought about through His life.

Not only do we have future provision in Jesus Christ, Paul said, but we also rejoice in the present moment in God through Jesus Christ, through whom we have received reconciliation (vs. 11). As believers we can rest in and enjoy our state of reconciliation with God this very moment.

b Death through Adam, Life through Jesus (5:12-17)

If, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

—Romans 5:17

To illustrate how Christians receive the benefits of justification, Paul drew a parallel between Adam and Christ. While Adam's single act of disobedience brought sin and death into the world, the single work of obedience by Christ on the

cross resulted in justification.

The word for “entered” in the phrase “just as sin entered the world through one man” (vs. 12) can be translated “introduced into.” Sin came right in the front door of humankind through Adam’s sin. The word “came” in the phrase “in this way death came to all people” means “spread through.” The idea is that death spread through the entire human race as a result of Adam’s sin. Reconciling this concept with individual responsibility for sin has puzzled theologians for centuries.

The penalty for sin includes both spiritual and physical death (see 6:23; 7:13). Death is separation: spiritual death is separation from God; physical death is the unnatural separation of the soul from the body.

Greek grammarians tell us that the tense of all the verbs in verse 12 indicates that Paul viewed the entire human race as having sinned in the person of Adam (“all sinned”). Theologians have suggested several ways to understand this challenging concept.

One view is the “federal headship view.” In this view, Adam is understood as the federal head of humankind. Since Adam was the head, his sin was considered by God to be representative for all human beings. The penalty of death that was pronounced against him was therefore applied to the entire human race.

Another view is called the “seminal headship view.” This view sees the entire human race as being physically affected by Adam’s sin. In a real sense, all people were present

in Adam, and naturally therefore we all were cursed as a result of Adam’s sin. The idea that descendants can be seminally present in a person is reflected in Hebrews 7:9, 10: “One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.”

Still another view understands the effects of Christ’s death as having neutralized Adam’s sin. Though we start on a footing with no righteousness, God’s grace to all enables anyone to choose salvation (see Titus 2:11).

Regardless of which view is correct, it is clear that sin entered human experience through Adam’s act of disobedience, and every human being confirms his or her solidarity with Adam by committing personal sin. The effect of Adam’s sin was that death reigned even before the time of the law (Rom. 5:13, 14).

From the time of Adam, people were continually inclined toward sin (see Gen. 6:5-13). But the written law had not yet been given. Paul earlier told us that “where there is no law there is no transgression” (Rom. 4:15). Hence, even though people sinned, it was not accounted to them as transgression, for one cannot transgress a law that did not exist (5:13).

Nevertheless, Paul was careful to emphasize that even though such acts may not have been counted as violations of the written law, sin nevertheless prevailed in the hearts of people. The proof that people

sinned is that death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses (vs. 14). Since death was present (death being rooted in sin), it is clear that the people of this time—prior to the written law—rebelled against God.

Death reigned over those who had not broken a command as Adam had. Adam violated God’s command in the Garden of Eden (see Gen. 2:17; 3:6). In so doing, he transgressed God’s clearly communicated boundaries. His prelaw descendants, however, did not commit the same type of transgressions when they sinned, since no commands had been given to them. Paul made it clear, however, that even those without the law were still responsible for their sinful actions because “the requirements of the

law are written on their hearts” (Rom. 2:15).

Ask Yourself . . . *Is my life characterized by obedience to God’s Word?*

Paul called Adam a “pattern of the one to come,” that is, Jesus Christ (5:14). Keep in mind that the apostle was setting up a contrast in his parallel between the two men. The principal similarity between Adam and Christ was that a great many people were affected by a single act of each man.

Paul stressed that the abundance of God’s grace through Christ far surpassed the devastating effects of Adam’s sin. This is evident in the repeated use of his phrase “how much more” in regard to God’s free grace-gift of righteousness (vss. 15, 17).

THE FIRST AND SECOND ADAMS

VERSE	ADAM	CHRIST
Romans 5:15	As a result of Adam’s sin, many died a spiritual death.	As a result of Christ’s obedience, many became spiritually alive.
Romans 5:16	Judgment and condemnation resulted from Adam’s sin.	Justification resulted from Christ’s obedience.
Romans 5:17	Because of one man’s trespass, death reigned.	Because of one man’s obedience, believers reign with Christ.
Romans 5:18	Because of one man’s trespass, all human beings were condemned.	Because of one man’s obedience, justification was offered to all human beings.
Romans 5:19	The disobedience of one led to many being made sinners.	The obedience of one led to many being made righteous.
Romans 5:21	Sin reigned in death.	Grace reigns through righteousness to bring eternal life.

Grace is often hard to understand. In our society we are expected to earn everything we get. But God's gift of salvation is a grace-gift and is not based on works of righteousness, talents, looks, skills, or anything else we might be tempted to claim as our own. "He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy" (Titus 3:5).

Ask Yourself . . . *What impact has God's grace had on my life?*

To highlight the contrast, Paul stated that "the gift is not like the trespass" (Rom. 5:15a). Indeed, if death came to humanity as a result of Adam's sin, how much more did God's grace overflow to humanity (vs. 15b). The effect of Adam's "work" on "the many" was entirely different than that of Christ. (Note that "the many" who died are the same as the "all people" of verse 12.)

Paul also pointed out that in Adam's case a single sin was involved, and that one sin was sufficient to bring condemnation upon all humankind. But in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, a provision was found for the many acts of sin that resulted in the lives of Adam's descendants (vs. 16). Whereas death reigned over sinners like a tyrant, those who receive God's grace reign in life (vs. 17). In the former case, sinners were dying victims to a ruthless dictator who showed no mercy. In the latter, redeemed sinners—those justified by faith—become the rulers. This rulership refers to the present and future reign believers

enjoy with Christ (see II Tim. 2:12; Rev. 22:5).

C **Condemnation and Justification (5:18-21)**

Just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

—Romans 5:18

Paul said that just as the result of one trespass (Adam's sin) was condemnation for all people, so also the result of one act of righteousness (Christ's death on the cross) meant justification for all people (vs. 18). Notice that Adam's act was called a "trespass." This emphasizes that he deliberately broke a command of God.

Some scholars have debated what Paul meant when he said Christ's act of obedience "brings life for all people." Was Paul teaching that all human beings in the end will be saved—a view known as universalism?

Such a view is impossible in view of the context of Paul's Letter to the Romans. Paul had been arguing all along that all human beings are lost because of sin (see Rom. 2:12). Only those who exercise faith in Christ are justified. Those who do not receive Christ in faith remain lost in their sins. Romans 5:17 explicitly says that it is those who "receive"

God's provision who are justified. Nevertheless, this provision is available for all people.

Paul continued his contrast in verse 19 by pointing out that as through Adam's disobedience many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of Christ many will be made righteous. The use of the word "disobedience" indicates that Adam voluntarily entered into sin.

All of us have demonstrated our solidarity with Adam by willfully sinning. Regardless of our circumstance, we are all without excuse.

Ask Yourself . . . How have I followed Adam's pattern of disobedience?

The Greek word for "made" in the phrase "many will be made righteous" (vs. 19) can be translated "established as." Through what Christ has accomplished, those who place faith in Christ can have a righteous standing before God (see II Cor. 5:21).

Paul's Jewish readers might have wondered where the Mosaic law fit into all of this. Up to this point, the apostle described those who sinned prior to the establishment of the written code. Paul answered that the law was added so that awareness and acts of trespass might increase (Rom. 5:20). Where sin increased, grace increased all the more.

God's goal is that His grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life to people through Jesus Christ (vs. 21). Just as sin resulted in death, God's grace would result in righteousness and eternal life for all who believe on the Lord Jesus.

THE ERROR OF UNIVERSALISM

Universalism is the belief that ultimately all people will be saved. This view is unbiblical for at least four reasons.

- First, while God desires that all people be saved, Scripture clearly recognizes that some will accept the offer of salvation and others will not (Rev. 20:11-15).

- Second, Scripture indicates that hell is the eternal abode of those who refuse to accept Christ as Savior (Matt. 25:41-46; II Thess. 1:9).

- Third, universalism minimizes or does away with moral responsibility. Obviously, if all people go to heaven, then sin has no eternal consequence (Rom. 6:23).

- Fourth, if universalism were true, then witnessing becomes a waste of time. Why would Jesus command us to evangelize if everyone were already destined for heaven (Matt. 28:19, 20)?