

“Peace With God”

Sermons on Romans # 11

Texts: Romans 5:1-11; Jeremiah 8:4-13

We’ve all seen the pictures of VE-Day—some reading this might even remember VE Day—that glorious day in May of 1945 when Hitler’s Germany unconditionally surrendered to the victorious allied armies. The horrors of war were coming to an end. Peace was at hand. And did people celebrate! In Romans 5:1-11, Paul speaks of the coming of peace, but not in the sense of the end of bloody war between combatant nations. Paul speaks of the peace which is the result of Jesus Christ’s death upon the cross for sinners. By turning aside the wrath of God, Jesus Christ has reconciled God to sinners and sinners to God. Because of the cross the war between God and rebellious sinners is now blessedly over. And this beloved is cause for joy and celebration!

Beginning in Romans 5:1, Paul changes focus a bit and begins to set out some of the blessings which come to all of those who receive the promised inheritance through faith and not through works. This section in Romans is not only loaded with important theological information, but the entire chapter serves as a hinge of sorts, connecting Paul’s discussion of justification in Romans 3:21-4:25, with his subsequent discussion of sanctification in Romans 6:1-8:39. As we will see, for Paul, all those who believe God’s promise to justify the ungodly are not only justified and given life, but they are also called to reckon themselves dead to sin but alive to God (Romans 6:11). Paul cannot conceive of someone who is justified but who is not also being sanctified. To be justified by grace through faith is to be sanctified by grace through that same faith. These two things are inextricably linked together.

It is noteworthy that commentators disagree so widely about the main theme of this section as well as how it is connected to the preceding discussion of Abraham and justification by faith (4:25) and the following discussion of sanctification and the Christian life (6:1 ff). The divergence of opinion about the theme of this section suggests the obvious—this section is packed with information, all of which is related to Paul’s comments about the nature of the inheritance of those justified *sola fide*.

Several commentators view Romans 5 as a new section in Romans. Anders Nygren who focuses upon the eschatology of Romans, picks up on Paul’s declaration in Romans 5:9 regarding the wrath to come, and calls this section “free from the wrath of God.”¹ As Nygren sees it, if Romans 1:18-3:20 spoke of God’s wrath upon all things associated with this present evil age, then in Romans 5:1-11, Paul focuses upon on the blessings of the age to come, especially freedom from God’s wrath. Charles Cranfield contends that the idea of “peace with God” (Romans 5:1) is the central motif of this section which he believes runs through to the end of Romans 8, because, as Cranfield points out, justification (a right-standing before God) and reconciliation (the removal of the basis for humanities’ estrangement from God, namely our sin) are necessarily connected. A sinner cannot be justified without at the same time being reconciled to God from whom he was formerly estranged.²

¹ Nygren, Commentary on Romans, pp. 191 ff.

² Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.256-257. Moo concurs (cf. The Epistle to the Romans, pp. 290-295).

But others see this section of Romans as the natural conclusion of Paul's prior discussion of justification. James D. G. Dunn contends that hope is the central theme of the passage which he says is filled with links to what has gone before.³ Calvin sees this section as an amplification of Paul's discussion of the righteousness of faith set out in Romans 4.⁴ Leon Morris believes that this section is describing the "effects of justification," and exhorts his reader not to overlook something far too many readers of Romans are apt to do, namely Paul's emphasis on God's love for sinners, as spelled out in verse 5.⁵ John Murray basically concurs, calling this section "the fruits of justification."⁶ And then there is the summation from Charles Hodge, who spells out what he calls the four "consequences of justification" found here in Romans 5:1-11:

The **first** consequence of justification by faith is, that we have peace with God, ver 1. The **second**, that we not only have a sense of his present favor, but assurance of future glory, ver. 2. The **third**, that our afflictions, instead of being inconsistent with the divine favor, are made directly conducive to the confirmation of our hope; the Holy Spirit bearing witness to the fact that we are the objects of the love of God, verses 3-5. The **fourth**, the certainty of the final salvation of all believers. This is argued from the freeness and greatness of the divine love; its freeness being manifested in its exercise toward the unworthy: and its greatness, in the gift of the Son, verses 6-10. Salvation is not merely a future though certain good, it is a present and abundant joy, verse 11.⁷

The reason why commentators differ about these themes is because all of these themes are present in Romans 5:1-11, since all of these blessings result from our justification through faith in the promise. This is a densely packed section of this letter because all of the points made here by Paul fit neatly within the apostle's overall argument, especially *if* they are all seen as benefits, fruits or consequences of justification, which Paul set forth beginning in Romans 3:21.⁸ I concur with Calvin, Morris, Hodge and Murray that Romans 5:1-11 is a description of the benefits that a justified sinner receives in Christ. These verses set out the glorious fruits of justification by faith *alone*. Once again, Martin Luther seems to know the very mind of the apostle like no one else: "the Apostle speaks as one who is extremely happy and full of joy."⁹ How can we not be joyful when we consider the blessings accomplished for us

³ Dunn, Romans 1-8, pp. 242-244.

⁴ Calvin, The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians, p. 104.

⁵ Morris, Epistle to the Romans, pp. 217, 221.

⁶ Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, pp. 158 ff.

⁷ Hodge, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, p. 131.

⁸ Moo's argument that the repetition of key words from this section in Romans 8:18-39 (The Epistle to the Romans, pp. 292-293) connects Romans 5:1-11 with what follows, rather than what precedes, is mitigated by Morris' wise caution that "it is not all that obvious that the apostle is following a rigid scheme" (cf. The Epistle to the Romans, p. 217). I prefer to speak of chapter 5 as a hinge which connects what goes before and what follows.

⁹ Cited in Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 297.

by Jesus Christ, and which are now ours by virtue of faith in the Son of God.

As we begin to work through our text, we need to keep in mind that every sentence is packed with material and we could devote an entire sermon to virtually every verse. But I will try and summarize each main point and then frame them in the context of Paul's over-arching purpose, which is to explain the gospel to the Roman church as well as the place of both Jew and Gentile in the messianic age which dawned in the person of Jesus Christ.

In the first two verses of chapter 5, Paul writes: *“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.”* The NIV places “therefore” at the beginning of the sentence to emphasize the point we just made, namely that the blessings which follow, all flow from the justification of the ungodly through faith, not through circumcision or works of law. Having been justified by faith *alone*—note that Paul uses an aorist tense here to emphasize the fact that this is a blessing Paul's readers presently possess—Paul goes on to spell out that the first blessing justified sinners enjoy is *“peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

As we read in our Old Testament lesson (Jeremiah 8:4-13), the prophet Jeremiah pronounced God's word of woe (curse) upon any and all who were proclaiming peace when there really was no peace. Indeed when Jeremiah recorded these words, God's wrath was about to be poured out upon disobedient Israel despite the noise and apparent fervor of the people's worship. Despite their raucous and noisy assemblies, their hearts were far from YHWH, and judgment was at hand.

But in Romans 5:1 we find the exact opposite set of circumstances. In these verses, Paul announces the most glorious word of blessing imaginable to a guilty sinner who has become aware of the gravity and consequences of their sins. Having been justified by faith alone, apart from works of the law, the sinner now has peace with God through the person and work of Jesus Christ. The hostilities between God and rebellious sinners have to come an end at the cross. Unlike the false shepherds of Jeremiah's age, this is no false word of assurance from Paul, no false promise of peace to a disobedient people whose hearts were far from God. No, this is the announcement of God's word of blessing to ungodly sinners, now crushed by the demands of the law, who know that their only hope of heaven is the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel, in which God graciously gives to sinners what he demands of them under the law. Thus Paul's word of peace is no mere boast or false assurance. Because of the cross of Jesus Christ, the war between God and sinners is over.

Not only do we have peace with God, through the work of Jesus Christ, we have also *gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand*. While it is clear that justification is through the means of faith¹⁰ and has as its basis the grace of God, it is important that we do not think of grace as an impersonal “stuff” which is given to us by God to transform us into saints. Rather, this wonderful access into grace is simply access to the God who gives himself to us, graciously, through faith in the person of his son.¹¹

¹⁰ “It is doubtful whether the words ἐκ πίστεως belong to the text or not, for the weight of external evidence is almost evenly balanced for their inclusion.” Cf. Bruce Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (New York: United Bible Societies, 1975), pp. 511-512.

¹¹ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 239. Moo points out that this access to grace should not be limited to justification, which, while a central element of this free access to grace, is not entirely

Access to grace is access to a gracious God. Indeed, the perfect tense of the verb “to stand” means that this condition of free access to God’s grace continues on into the present. In other words, Because of the doing and dying of Jesus Christ, all Christian believers continue to stand in this access to our gracious God by virtue of our union with Christ through faith.

For Paul, the very thought of access to the grace of God now manifest in the work of Christ moves him to rejoice (literally “to boast”) in what lies ahead. Paul now joyfully exclaims, “*and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.*” Paul knows full well that with the coming of Christ and his death for sins, as well as his being raised for our justification, this guarantees the final victory over sin and its wages, which is death. This hope in the glory of God, which, as Paul will tell us in Romans 8:17-30, is directly connected to the restoration in Jesus Christ of all those things we lost in the fall, in this case a full restoration of the image of God. Thinking about this glorious future, Paul displays his a kind of joyful confidence in the future, because of what Jesus Christ has done in the past.¹² Christ’s horrible suffering was followed by a glorious resurrection. Considering these things should bring us joy as well!

But such glory is yet future. Even as Paul contrasts future glory with our present sufferings in Romans 8, where he addresses this matter of the restoration of all things in some detail, here in Romans 5, Paul likewise reminds us that while we boast of our hope in the glory of God, this boasting serves to give us an eternal perspective on those things we must endure in the present, namely suffering and affliction. In verses 3-4, he puts it this way: “*Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.*” Because of our future hope, which is grounded in Christ’s resurrection, so too we rejoice (boast) in our present sufferings. We now are able to see the present from the perspective of the end.

Paul is not some sadomasochist who thinks suffering is good, or that suffering is the sign that God has cast off the sufferer because the sufferer has supposedly done something to provoke God to wrath. No, suffering is not a good thing. We suffer because of sin, as the human race rebelled against God when Adam violated God’s commands under the terms of the original covenant of works. But Paul’s point is that we do not suffer in vain. Indeed, we boast (rejoice) in our sufferings because not only does God have a purpose for them—which Paul will now spell out—but God has also promised to turn our suffering and affliction to our good, if not in this life, certainly in the next (Romans 8:28). This is a promise which is grounded upon the pattern of Jesus, who suffered and was raised.

Looking at present suffering in light of future glory and the restoration of our fallen nature associated with our eventual glorification, Paul sees a purpose in these present afflictions. Because Christ’s suffering upon the cross was followed by his triumphant resurrection, a Christian who is called to suffer, can see that according to God’s purposes, suffering produces perseverance. In this light, the sufferer can see with the eyes of faith that the suffering of this present evil age, will one day give way to the glories of the age to come. And although the sufferer must wait for this glory to become a reality, the sight of the goal enables us to persevere in the meantime.¹³ We not only see the goal, but because of Christ’s

exhaustive of this grace. See Moo, [The Epistle to the Romans](#), p.301. Cranfield, on the other hand, limits the frame of Paul’s reference to justification ([Commentary on Romans](#), I.259).

¹² Moo, [The Epistle to the Romans](#), pp. 301-302; Cranfield, [Commentary on Romans](#), I.260.

¹³ Moo, [The Epistle to the Romans](#), pp. 302-303.

resurrection—remember, he was raised for our justification—it is certain that we will reach the goal God has appointed, despite our weakness and doubt in the meantime.

Furthermore, as we keep both Christ’s death and resurrection in the past and the goal of future glory in their proper tension (the already and the not yet), our own perseverance produces character. The Greek word rendered “character” in the NIV (δοκιμῆν) is a difficult word to translate and means something like “to temper,” “to test,” or the contrast between someone in boot camp and a hardened combat veteran.¹⁴ And having suffered, persevered, and become battle tested, instead of despairing (which we all do momentarily), the Christian’s confidence in God’s faithfulness grows over time, and so does our hope to participate in the glory of God.

This hope, as Paul says in verse 5, “*does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.*” Looking at our present sufferings in light of future glory is something which will never disappoint us, a term which means something like being put to shame. Paul is saying that “the genuinely Christian hope, never puts those who have it to shame.”¹⁵ The reason such hope will never put us to shame is because God pours out his love through the work of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of all of people, especially those whom he has called to suffer. Indeed, Paul connects the two things together. Our present suffering and future hope must be seen in light of God’s love for his people.

Although most commentators overlook this, Paul uses the word love (ἀγάπη) some 75 times out of the total 116 times the word is used elsewhere in the New Testament, far more than any other writer. Here, Paul’s point is that God pours out his love in our hearts so as to kindle our own love for God, our love for his word and our love for his saints. Neither is God miserly in this. The word “poured out” speaks of great abundance,¹⁶ and since God does this through the power of the Holy Spirit given to us (a single definitive act by God), I take Paul to mean that this begins at the moment of regeneration and is continually kindled within us by the ordinary means the Holy Spirit uses to do such things, namely word and sacrament.¹⁷ God has poured out his love for us when he give us his Holy Spirit. And it is the blessed Holy Spirit who continually reminds us of God’s love for us and kindles in us a love for God.

What is more, the giving of the Holy Spirit to God’s people at the time of regeneration, is what several of Israel’s prophets, Joel (2:28) and Ezekiel (36:25-27) foretold as the characteristic of the dawn of the messianic age. In Jeremiah 31:31-34, the prophet speaks of the New Covenant as entailing, in part, the internalizing of the law of God, when it is now written upon the human heart rather than upon tablets of stone. All of these things are fulfilled, in part, when the Holy Spirit is poured out into our hearts, which Paul speaks of in Romans 5:5 as the manifestation of God’s love so that hope does not disappoint us.¹⁸

¹⁴ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 221.

¹⁵ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 221.

¹⁶ Cranfield describes this as an “unstinting lavishness.” Cf. Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.263.

¹⁷ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 221.

¹⁸ Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 305.

But while the pouring out of God's love into our hearts clearly has a subjective emphasis in verse 5, in verses 6-8, Paul now sets out the objective proof that God loves his people, namely the suffering of Jesus Christ upon the cross for the ungodly. Not only is the cross the picture of God's love for sinners, it provides additional substantiation of Christian hope.¹⁹ The cross is the end of Christ's humiliation, but is followed by his exaltation. Says Paul, "*You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*"

These are amazing words, and there is so much packed into these three verses, we can but skim the surface of them. The first point that Paul makes in verse 6 is that Christ died for us at the right time, when we were weak and godless. When seen in light of how these words have been used in earlier chapters, Paul's point is simply that Christ died for people who are weak in the sense of being unable to do any good whatsoever.²⁰ Christ also died for the ungodly, people who hardly deserve the grace which is now being bestowed upon them. From this it is clear that Christ died for people who are helpless to save themselves and that "God's love came to us when we were utterly helpless."²¹ Furthermore, in this text, Paul speaks of Christ dying "on behalf of" (ὕπὲρ), or "in the place of" sinners. Texts such as this one, give great support to the notion of a substitutionary atonement, that is, Christ dying in the place of sinners, bearing their punishment for them and in their place.

A second point has to do with the surprising nature of Christ's death. We can understand why someone would give their lives for another—say when a secret service agent is willing to jump in the line of fire to save a president, or when a soldier jumps on a live hand grenade to save his fellow soldiers. It is noble and rare, but we understand because the people involved are worth dying for. What is not so easy to understand is what Paul says in verse 8: *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* What is remarkable in this is that Jesus Christ did not die for good people—he died for sinners, those people whose sin was described in graphic detail in Romans 1:18-3:20. Jesus died for people who are enemies of God, as Paul will put it in verse 10. Jesus died for people who did evil, not good. He died for people who did not seek him, nor understand his gospel. He died for people who are unrighteous, ungodly and filled with all the evil things set out in Romans 1:28-32.

Therefore, the supreme demonstration of God's love is the fact that Jesus Christ died for the ungodly, a point which Paul will now continue to unpack in the following verses.²² Recall that in verse 1, Paul began with the fact of our justification. This right-standing before God is based upon grace (3:24), is received through faith (3:28), is connected to Christ's resurrection (4:25). Here in verse 9, Paul adds yet another facet of our justification: "*Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall*

¹⁹ Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 306.

²⁰ Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 306. Morris points out that the word the NIV translates as "powerless" (ἀπέθανεν) refers to moral, rather than physical weakness. (Cf. Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 222).

²¹ Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 306.

²² Unfortunately, the NIV omits the word indicating causal sequence (οὖν). See Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 224.

we be saved from God's wrath through him!" It is in his death upon the cross—his shedding of blood—that Jesus redeems us and turns aside God's wrath by bearing our sins in his own body. Because we have been justified by his death when Christ died for ungodly sinners who are enemies of God, how much more shall we be saved from that judgment yet to come!

In other words, by looking back to what Christ has done for us in the past, we can look forward with great confidence with the knowledge that we shall be saved from his wrath on that great and terrible day of judgment. Thus, Christ's death spares all those for whom he has died from his wrath. Why? Because Christ has already bore that wrath in his body when he shed his blood "for us." And since Christ's death turns aside God's wrath towards sinners, Christ death is said to save all those for whom he dies. But those for whom Christ does not die, will face God in the judgment and be punished for their sins.

Verse 10 begins with a conditional clause, which implies the truth of the condition.²³ *"For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!"* Although many of us were catechized in a doctrinally anemic evangelical church which taught us that the gospel started with "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life," Paul, on the other hand, speaks of sinners as God's enemies, as he does here in Romans 5, in and Romans 11:28, Philippians 3:18 and Colossians 1:21. As Leon Morris points out, the word enemies is a very strong word and means not someone just short of a friend, but refers to someone in the opposite camp.²⁴ Apart from the cross of Jesus Christ, we are God's enemies and it is our sin, which has estranged us from a holy God.

But the good news is that God seeks his people and he graciously takes all initiative in removing the very cause for the hostility which exists between God and sinners, namely our sin. When we were enemies, Paul says, God effected reconciliation through the death of his son. Indeed, having removed the guilt of our sin, Jesus Christ's death actually brings about reconciliation between and the Holy God and guilty sinners. With the cause of estrangement removed, God draws near to sinners, and sinners are now no longer afraid to draw near to God through the gospel. It is because of the cross that the war with God is over and peace has come—a peace with far greater ramifications than VE-Day. This peace has eternal consequences—for the result is that we are spared from God's wrath on the day of judgment.

Given Paul's eschatological categories, Paul not only considers what is past—that the death of Christ removes the guilt of our sins, establishing peace between God and sinners—but Paul also looks forward to the end of the age. Having died to bring about reconciliation, how much more will we be saved through Christ's life! Having made peace through the cross, Christ will certainly bring our salvation to its final goal, which is deliverance from God's wrath, eternal life and the reception of our inheritance. Christ's resurrection is proof that he has power over life and death and through our union with Jesus through faith, his resurrection life will be ours. We will be saved by his life, because such life was his reward for being obedient unto death. Through faith, we are united to a living and resurrected Savior.

But Paul has one more point to flesh out. In verse 11, Paul writes: *"Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."* In verses 2-3, Paul has already spoken of rejoicing (boasting) in our hope and in our present sufferings.

²³ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 225.

²⁴ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 225.

Now he speaks of rejoicing (boasting) in God, because of the great fact of the reconciliation accomplished for us by Jesus Christ. Because of what Jesus Christ has done, we can rejoice. There is a genuine joy in Paul's words, what one writer calls the "spontaneous exuberance of the Christian life."²⁵ And why not? The war is over. We are no longer God's enemies and we now have peace with God.

What do we take with us by way of application?

In many ways this entire section is application because by reminding us of the benefits of our justification, Paul is pointing out just how important this doctrine is, and how it impacts every facet of our lives as Christians. Because we are justified, we have peace with God. The very knowledge of the fact that God is no longer angry at us because of the cross of Jesus Christ gives us that one thing that so many people crave but can never have—a clear conscience. To know that our sins are forgiven and that we are reckoned as righteous is a blessing without measure—a blessing which silences the voice of doubt and self-condemnation. Beloved, we are at peace. The war is over. God was our enemy. But he is now a gracious friend with whom we enjoy the most intimate of access.

And because we are at peace, we have hope. We see that as Jesus suffered beyond measure, so too he triumphed. And so as we suffer, we have hope that we will triumph, even as Jesus was raised for our justification. And as Christ's suffering had a purpose, so too does ours. Suffering, Paul says, produces perseverance, and perseverance produces character, and character produces hope. Through suffering, we become like battle-tested veterans, awaiting the final victory which is certain to come, even as Christ's victory over death and the grave followed his own suffering and humiliation. And even though the meaning of our sufferings may be hidden until the next life and at times we despair and wish to give up, nevertheless, we have hope that one day we will see the glory of God, when all sin, sickness and suffering gives way to the glories of the age to come. Nothing helps us when we suffer as much as the sight of the goal to which our sufferings will take us—the glory of God and the renewal of all things.

And all of this because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is our life. With Paul, let us rejoice (boast) in our sufferings and in our hope of future glory. For God not only pours out his love for us in our hearts through the blessed Holy Spirit, we see in the cross of Jesus Christ that glorious fact that God loved us while we were yet sinners. And because of the cross Jesus Christ of Jesus Christ, we have peace with God. And that beloved is the announcement of a blessing from God for which we should rejoice!

²⁵ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 227.