

AT PEACE Romans 5:1-11

During Christmas of 1863, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow penned his now famous poem “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day.” A repeating refrain in every verse is “Of peace on earth, good will to men!” This is something that any sane, moral person would want. This was a time of great conflict in the nation and peace was not the norm. The saddest words in this poem are

*And in despair I bowed my head; "There is no peace on earth," I said; "For hate is strong
And mocks the song of peace on earth, good-will to men !"*

The uncertainty and threats of death and harm that come from a war or a pandemic can take away our peace. We have a sense of lack of control and helplessness which can lead to hopelessness. In a real sense, all of mankind is exposed to the possibility of death. We have read or heard “It is appointed unto man, once to die and then the judgment.” As they say, “no one gets out of this alive.” This should disturb our “peace” in a good way in that it should be a motivation to find a remedy. The remedy is found in God Who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to be a sacrifice for sin to deliver us from the judgment and, even more, to give us new life in place of death.

Justified with Benefits – 5:1-5

¹ Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. ³ And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; ⁵ and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. Romans 5:1-5 (NASB95)

The good news of salvation begins with the truth that those who believe God and trust in Him the way Abraham did are declared to be righteous before God. This is the meaning of being “justified” as a judicial act which has its ultimate Source in the grace of God and its enablement by the redemptive action of God Himself (in the person of the Son of God) dying in our stead to provide the payment for the penalty of sins. The fact that Christ had to die in our place which allowed us to be justified demonstrates that God is not morally indulgent toward sin.

The result of our having been declared to be in a “right relationship” with God is stated to be “peace with God” in most translations of the Bible. We normally think of peace as “the absence of hostilities.” It may be better (positively) described here as the opposite of an adversarial relationship or even the same as “coming together in unity.” The Greek word translated “with” is usually rendered as “unto” meaning “toward.” We can certainly all agree that such a relationship is created by the judicial act, however, we also realize that not all experience this “peace.”

Some scholars have noted that the most accurate translation of the initial part of verse one would be “let us have” rather than “we have.” This would turn the doctrinal statement into an exhortation to Paul’s readers to actively engage in “being unified and of the same mind” toward God that is possible for those who are justified. We could certainly argue that both interpretations are correct or truthful. Perhaps the need for us to be encouraged to enjoy or participate in what God has graciously provided is because we were conditioned in our fallen human nature to think that all relationships are adversarial. That is certainly the “way of the world” which is contrary to the way of the Kingdom of God.

We know that “justification” was made possible by means of what the Lord Jesus Christ

did on our behalf which was God's grace in action. It is by faith that we participate in what is available. The condition of "peace" comes with and is inseparable from "justification" and our participation in this peace is by the same faith that resulted in our justification. It may be helpful to think of both "justification" and "peace" as positional realities that are permanent. In verse two we discover that our "access" or "introduction" into this "reality" is through Christ by faith. This "place" or "positional reality" is categorized as "grace." We "stand" or we are "positioned" in this grace by faith.

While we are standing in this grace, we rejoice (have gladness) in anticipation (hope) of the glory of God. The more I learn about this phrase "the glory of God," the less I am sure of how it was being used in various passages in the Scripture. Typically, most of us think about the awesomeness, the majesty, the splendor, magnificence, and honor that characterize or describe God. Many are hoping to have or possess those attributes for themselves when we all get to heaven. We can point to verses such as 2 Timothy 4:8 where Paul writes about a "crown of righteousness" awaiting him in the future, and a similar reference in 1 Peter 5:4 where we find mention of an "unfading crown of glory" which we will receive when Christ appears. There are also references to our having a new resurrected body that is like that which Jesus has. All that will certainly be glorious. Another use of the Greek word "doxa" which is translated as "glory" was spoken of by Jesus in John's account of Jesus' life. He noted that many people seek the "doxa" of men rather than the "doxa" of God. In those passages the meaning seems clearly to be "approval" of men or God. This interpretation is in agreement with the parable of the talents that Jesus related right before his arrest and crucifixion. In that parable, the Master said to the faithful servants, "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter into the joy of your Lord." All of us can rejoice and be glad in anticipation of hearing those words from the Lord.

The fact that we are justified now and we have hope (in the future) of the glory of God does not exclude us from problems in this life. What about dealing with the "here and now?" How are we to view the problems that we experience in life? It rains on the just and the unjust. People get sick, family members die, and some may lose their jobs. We have troubles and tribulations. The proper way to approach such afflictions is to see them as situations that strengthen us and help us in adjusting our values from those that are worldly to those that are eternal. Paul saw a path from problems to patience and from patience to proof of the presence of the new man that reinforces our assurance of the promises that are yet to be experienced; that is, our hope. This sequence described by Paul is a precursor to what Paul would later write in Romans 8:28 (all things work together for good, etc.) and in the first part of Romans chapter 12 about being transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Verse five presents an interesting claim that the hope (confident assurance) we have will not disappoint us because God's love is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. As Christians, we have God in us in the Person of the Holy Spirit. Since He is the Source of our new life, then we experience the very character of God (God is Love) in the essence of our being (heart) on a continuing basis. This presence of God is the down payment (earnest) of our inheritance and is the proof or assurance or confidence that everything that God has promised will be fulfilled. (See also Ephesians 1:14.)

Justified through His Death – 5:6-8

⁶ For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:6-11 (NASB95)

While the answer seems quite obvious to us, there was probably a question in the mind of

the early Christians about the nature of “God’s love.” In this section, Paul describes just how great the God-kind of love is.

Added to the inward reality of God’s love being pour out for us through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit we have the outward reality of God’s great love demonstrated in the cross of Christ. In our human way of thinking, it is inconceivable for someone to die in the place of another person who was not deserving. This is exactly what Jesus did for sinful mankind.

Simply stated, “In our weakness, we could not save ourselves.” Our weakness is a result of our inherited traits to sin. Mankind is inherently weak and sinful. In the world in which we live, we do not have to look very far to see the results of man's sinful nature. We can look back only a few years and see evidence that the expression of this sinful nature is becoming more and more open and defiant. As we hear of depravity, we are repulsed and shy away from those who are living sin-filled lives. We tend to think that they get what they deserve and secretly hope that "they" will just go away.

If we are repulsed by the gross sins we see in the world, then it is logical that God (who is holy) would also be repulsed by not only these gross sins but also by those things that are contrary to His holiness that we might “excuse” because they have gradually become acceptable in our culture. In earlier comments related to God’s divine wrath (Romans 1:18) we noted the following:

We, commonly, think of the “wrath of God” as being such things as devastation and destruction of people and things in the physical world in which we live. According to Wuest (Word Studies in the Greek New Testament), “wrath” describes God’s personal emotion with regard to sin. It represents God’s abhorrence and hatred of sin. It is not punishment of sin but God’s attitude toward it.

But wait! Stop and ask yourself, "What would have been the outcome for mankind if God had the same attitude we have toward sinners?" As we consider this, we get some idea of the kind of love God has for people. It is a love that is beyond our comprehension. As Paul tried to put God's love into perspective, we might imagine that someone would be capable of giving his life to enable a really good and worthwhile person to live, but who would do such a thing to enable a really bad person to live. However, this is exactly what the love of God did. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Fortunately, God did not use the standards of the world to measure us for worthiness, but acted out of His nature.

Justified Equals Reconciliation – 5:9-11

⁹ Much more than, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath *of God* through Him. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. ¹¹ And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. Romans 5:9-11 (NASB95)

In the previous verses, Paul focused on the benefits provided by the death of Christ. Beginning in verse nine, Paul points us to consider the distinctions between the benefits we have as a result of the death of Christ and those we receive through His life. The concept of being **reconciled** is related to the concept of being **justified**. In parallel statements, Paul said we are “justified by His blood” and “reconciled to God by the death of His Son.” Both these concepts speak to the misalignment of mankind with God because of sin and they speak to the means by which the misalignment has been made right.

There is a lot to be learned by consideration of this word “reconciled” that Paul used in verse ten. The literal meaning of the Greek word is “to change or exchange.”

The following discussion follows arguments found in Wuest’s “Word Studies in the Greek New Testament.” As used here, this is a change in the relation of man-to-God and God-to-man that was enabled through Christ. This started as a move of God toward man to overcome

man's hostility toward God, to beneficially demonstrate the character of God (love and holiness) and to make clear the consequences of actions and attitudes contrary to God's will (conviction). The proper response of this revelation should be that mankind is drawn toward God because of the recognition of the love that God has for man as demonstrated in the sacrifice of God's Son for our sinfulness. This is repentance that should follow from genuine conviction and requires turning away from sin and turning to God in faithful obedience. This faith response by man results in justification. God then enables a transformation of the character of man through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit which leads man by communing with the new "born-from-above" spirit in man (sanctification). Since God sees the "end from the beginning," He views us as the finished product of being transformed into the image of His Son which has none of the attributes of "fallen, sinful man." God's abhorrence of sin (God's divine wrath) is no longer operative toward us since we are seen through the filter of the righteousness of Christ. This view or perspective results in God's approval rather than His wrath (glorification).

Unfortunately, it seems as if many professing Christians have the idea that "justification" is all there is to "salvation." The thinking seems to go like this: "I believe that Jesus is God's Son, I believe that He died for my sins on the Cross, I am saved and will spend eternity with God in heaven after I die." In verse ten, Paul called our attention to the "much more" of the full meaning of salvation that goes beyond the "death benefits" to the "life benefits."

If God loved us with such a great love when we were in rebellion against Him, then we should see even greater benefits abound from that love now that we are reconciled to Him. One of those benefits is being saved from the consequences of a life that continues in sin. In a parallel statement in verse 10, Paul used the phrase "saved by His life." It is the fact that Jesus lives in and through us who have been born again that enables us to align our lives with the will of God and thus avoid the inevitable consequence of sin. Knowing that we are at one with God and that we are the objects of His pleasure should bring great confidence and joy to our lives.

ADDENDUM – The following notes provide a transition from the first half of Chapter five to bring us to the next lesson beginning in Chapter six.

Why We Need Reconciliation – 5:12-14

¹² Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned— ¹³ for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. ¹⁴ Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. Romans 5:12-14 (NASB95)

The parallels and contrasts of Adam and Jesus Christ give us insight and understanding of mankind's situation. If we are "saved by the life of Christ" it is because His nature is in us by the new birth – our spirits have been born of the Spirit of God. In a similar manner, we were doomed to wrath because the nature of Adam was in us by reason of our physical birth. We inherited the "Adamic nature" and were under the rule of sin and death ("the soul that sins, it shall die") in much the same way the child of a slave is also the property of the slave owner. Therefore, all that are "in Adam" are subject to judgment that leads to condemnation -- "the wages of sin is death." In the same way, all that are "in Christ" and are "born of the Spirit" are subject to the law of grace and faith – "for by grace are you saved through faith" – "but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord."

Some would argue that by keeping the law (living in sinless perfection) that they should not come under the condemnation of the law of sin and death – in other words that they should have eternal life. Paul's counter argument in verses 12 and 13 amounts to saying that all human

beings are classified as sinners because of the inherited nature they obtained through Adam. Even before the “law” was given, people sinned but since there was not a “standard” available, the error was not counted against the person committing the error. The consequence of sin was still in operation in that people died during this time – not because they did what Adam did, but simply because they were descendants of Adam. We can make the statement that the fault was literally “inborn” and what mankind “did or did not do” could not change that truth. Therefore, all mankind needed reconciliation.

We Have Eternal Life – 5:15-21

¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. ¹⁶ The gift is not like *that which came* through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment *arose* from one *transgression* resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift *arose* from many transgressions resulting in justification. ¹⁷ For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. ¹⁹ For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. ²⁰ The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹ so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 5:15-21 (NASB95)

At the end of verse 14, Paul started to examine Adam and Jesus Christ in a parallel manner. The examination was not so much to compare the similarities as it was to contrast the differences. This “contrast” is what is meant by the words in the first part of verse 15: “the free gift is NOT like the transgression.”

The contrast between Adam and Christ shows up in the seven verses in this section. The following comments are adapted from the *Bible Knowledge Commentary* by Walwood and Zuck.

15: Because of Adam’s transgression many died. Because of Christ’s grace, many are justified.

16: Adam gave us judgment and condemnation. In Christ the many sins resulted in much more grace that leads to justification.

17: Through Adam’s sin, death reigned. Through Christ, believers reign in life.

18: Through an act of trespass, condemnation came upon all. Through Christ’s act of righteousness, justification is offered to all.

19: Because of the disobedience of Adam, many were constituted as sinners. Because of the obedience of Christ, many were constituted as righteous.

20: Sin was shown to be abounding through the law. In Christ, God’s grace abounded even more.

21: Sin reigned in death. Grace reigns in eternal life.

The bottom line is that the terrible and hopeless situation of death and condemnation in judgment that came upon all humanity is such that people cannot escape the consequences in their own strength; however, God (through His grace) is more than adequate to rescue anyone who will put his or her trust in what He has provided in His Son. That is the good news of what grace even beyond “peace” is all about.