

07. Romans 5



Romans 5:1-2

Therefore since we are justified out of (as the fruit of) faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus the Messiah, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

Paul opens this section with a summary statement of the thesis which he has demonstrated in the earlier part of the letter: 'In the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written: The one who is righteous will live by faith' (1:17). Jesus revealed God's gracious longing to redeem us from the dominion of sin and to draw us into a right relationship with him. Since God is love, the only right relationship with God is one of communion in love. All God asks of us is that we open our heart to his gift and welcome it in faith

Our faith comes out of ('**ek**') Jesus' faith. It is its fruit. Paul is thinking not only of what Jesus did when he gave his life for us in love on the cross. He is thinking of the living, risen Lord who takes us with him into God's presence where we enjoy their shared life. Living in this divine communion we stand acquitted before God's tribunal. At last we can experience '**peace**', as was promised through the prophet: 'the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever' (Isaiah 32:17).

It is through Jesus that we exult in the **hope** of final salvation when we will enjoy God's glory, when our whole being will be caught up in the eternal radiance of God's light and love. Paul is thinking here of the future, but he also retains the meaning which ἐλπίς has in the Psalms and in the prophetic writings, where it is generally best translated by '**trust**'. Paul's focus is not on longing, but on a present attitude of peaceful trust that, as we now share Jesus' life of communion with God, so, in the future, we will enjoy a full and eternal communion with him in the glory of God.

Romans 5:3-5

And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope ⁵and hope does not disappoint us, because **God's love** (a simple genitive) has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

When we find that we are being graced to remain faithful in the trials and afflictions that come upon us, we, like Paul, can rejoice, for ‘**if we** have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his’ (6:5).

The faith of which Paul is speaking, and the peace and hope, are all fruits of the communion in the life of Jesus which is being continually offered to us. Jesus is now living in glory, but during his life on earth he faithfully lived in communion with God as he endured the sufferings which he experienced, sharing fully as he did in our human condition. Paul, therefore, can add that we can take heart from the afflictions which we undergo as disciples of Jesus. Paul was able to rejoice in his sufferings sustained by the assurance that he was walking the way of the cross in union with Jesus, and that he would also share Jesus' glory.

For the first time in this letter Paul uses the expression ‘**God’s love**’. It is a simple genitive expression in Greek and so, while Paul’s primary focus is on the love which God has for us and so on the experience of being loved unconditionally and without reserve by God, he is thinking as well of the love which God gives us to give others, and so of the experience of being moved to love others in an unconditional way. This love has been ‘**poured into our hearts**’. In 1:21 Paul spoke of the hearts of sinners which lack insight, being darkened, and in 1:24 he spoke of the uncontrolled passions of the heart dragging people into sin. In 2:5, he spoke of the obstinate and unrepentant heart. In 2:15 he reminded his readers of the Gentiles who can show by their behaviour that God’s will is written in their hearts; and in 2:29 he claimed that true circumcision was a matter of the heart. In biblical usage, the heart is the centre of psychic consciousness, affection and will.

The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love who binds the heart of Jesus to his Father in an eternal embrace, has been poured into our hearts. We have been justified by grace and if we welcome God's gift in faith, we are already experiencing a sharing in this divine love-communion. Like the heart of Jesus, our hearts, too, are bathed in God's love.

Romans 5:6-9

For while we were still weak, at the right time the Messiah died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person — though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that **while we still were sinners** the Messiah died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God.

We are at the heart of the good news. If God were to cease loving us when we sinned, there would be no hope. But God is love, and Jesus has shown that sin does not stop God loving us. Jesus' whole life demonstrates this, for he chose to be with us sinners, not because he approves of our sin, but because he knows that only the experience of being loved could give a sinner both the awareness that change was possible and the grace to repent.

We are justified by love, God's love, and God's love is unconditionally offered. For our part we are to welcome this love by faith. If we remain obstinate in sin, we can continue to reject God's offer. If we pull down the blinds, our souls will remain in darkness. The good news is that the sun of God's love never stops shining upon us. If we dare to believe and so open our heart to the love that is being poured into them by the Holy Spirit, we will experience forgiveness, healing and the communion in which justification consists.

The faith of Jesus inspires and makes possible a sharing in his faith by others. By believing – something we can do because Jesus shares his faith with us – we welcome God's offer of communion and are brought into a right relationship with God. 'We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus the Messiah' (5:1).

‘We have been justified by his blood’

We recall Paul’s words spoken at Miletus as he headed for Jerusalem: ‘Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son’ (Acts 20:28).

Inn his correspondence with Corinth we read: ‘The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ’ (1 Corinthians 10:16). ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me’ (1 Corinthians 11:25).

Romans 5:10-11

If while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus the Messiah, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

We are now in a position to grasp more fully why Paul chose to begin his exposition of the gospel by describing the ‘**wrath of God**’. He did so in order to demonstrate that even the disorders that result from sin manifest clearly that people will not find life apart from communion with God.

In 5:1-11, Paul has touched on three aspects of how the change is effected which takes us from the degradation of sin into the intimacy of divine communion.

The first is our experience of union with Christ in his dying, in his self-giving in faith and love upon the cross: ‘While we still were sinners the Messiah died for us’ (5:8).

The second is our experience of his living and life-giving Spirit, now dwelling in us and empowering us to live in union with him: ‘God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us’ (5:5).

The third is our faith, based on these experiences, that Jesus is alive, in glory, having been raised to life by God. It enables us to exult in the hope of being with him in glory: ‘much more, surely, having been reconciled, shall we be saved by his life’ (5:10).

Romans 5:12

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all, because all have sinned —

Sin means death for it is a rejection of God, the only source of life. Paul is speaking of ‘death’ not as the breakdown of our present physical existence, but as separation from God. The sinless Jesus died on the cross, but he did not experience the ‘death’ of which Paul is speaking here, for he continued to live in communion with God.

According to the Genesis myth Adam gave sin entrance into the world and its poison has spread through the whole human race, and so ‘death spread to all’. Paul is about to make a comparison, but he breaks off at the end of the verse, and inserts a long parenthesis. We have to wait for verse eighteen to complete the comparison.

Romans 5:13-14

Sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned where there is no law. Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come.

Paul begins his parenthesis with an observation. The sin of Adam was a ‘**transgression**’ (παράβασις) because he acted against an explicit command. So it has been for those who act against the law given through Moses. Even though after Adam and before Moses there was, strictly speaking, no ‘transgression’ (because there was no law), there was still sin, and so death (separation from God) reigned. Paul has already described this situation in 1:18-32.

Romans 5:15-17

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the multitude died through one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man, Jesus the Messiah, overflowed beyond measure for the multitude. And the free gift is not like the effect of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings acts of righteousness. If, because of one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus the Messiah.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians: 'As all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in the Messiah' (1 Corinthians 15:22). This is Paul's focus here. Furthermore, he wishes to highlight the incomparable superiority of Jesus, 'the last Adam' (1 Corinthians 15:45), and the wonderful effects of what Jesus has done: 'much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ overflowed beyond measure for the multitude' (verse 15); 'much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man Jesus the Messiah' (verse 17). Adam let sin in and handed on an infected human nature. Everyone followed Adam's example. Without someone to reverse the process and introduce a new life into the world, we were all on the road to the death of eternal separation from God. Jesus has done this and now everyone can be made righteous, and 'exercise dominion in life.'

Romans 5:18-21

Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the multitude were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the multitude will be made righteous. But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might also exercise dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus the Messiah our Lord.

It is important here to keep Paul's perspective. His focus is not primarily on Adam, sin and death. Rather, he is highlighting the wonder of what Christ has made possible. The point he is making is that the condition of justification and its goal in eternal life which are consequent upon what has been done by the new Adam, Christ, are far more astonishing than the consequences of sin.

No one is excluded from God's offer of the justification that consists in communion in God's life. It is 'for all'. Human nature has been infected by sin since its origins. All have sinned and so all have inherited death. If we welcome the life of the Spirit offered us from Jesus, and if we share Jesus' faith, we will inherit life: 'as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ' (1 Corinthians 15:22).

It is Jesus' obedience that neutralises sin and all who draw their life from Jesus can share his communion with God: 'by one man's obedience the many will be made righteous'. Jesus' obedience is the fruit and expression of his faith. We cannot earn righteousness. We cannot do anything to gain it. It is a free gift offered to us in love by God. To welcome it we need faith, and it is Jesus who gives us a share in his faith and so enables us to receive the righteousness that God so lovingly offers.

Between Adam and Jesus came the law. What was its role? In fact its introduction led to an increase in sin, because now sin is an action of direct disobedience against God's known will (3:20). However, in the providence of God, it also brought hidden sins out into the open, thus making it more and more obvious that we are failing and need redemption. It helped us cry out to God in our need and seek pardon. It prepared us for God's merciful response in Jesus. Paul concludes by emphasising the abundance of God's grace and the eternal life that is offered to all 'through Jesus the Messiah our Lord'.