

Romans 5: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Romans chapter 5 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 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.

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die, but God shows his love for us in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since therefore we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.

[1 : 24] For sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for many.

And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.

For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

[2 : 31] Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness, leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In Romans chapter 5, Paul steps back and looks at the bigger picture. Having received good standing with and vindication from God, the alienation and enmity that once existed between us and God has been overcome through the work of Jesus Christ.

It is through Jesus that we enjoy the new gracious standing with God that we now possess. In this standing, we can also look forward to the future and hope. While justification is about the present status that we enjoy with God, much of its significance is seen in the fact that it anticipates a greater vindication that awaits us on the last day.

Being declared to be in the right with God, to have good standing with him, we can await the last day with hope and confidence, believing that God's verdict, declared on the basis of Christ's death for our sins and his resurrection for our justification, will be reaffirmed when we are judged according to our works on the last day.

The justification we enjoy on the basis of God's sheer and unmerited grace through the work of Christ is a justification that is a genuine anticipation of future justification according to our works. [3 : 53] Paul says that we have been given access to the realm of God's grace in which we now stand. Grace isn't just a one-time thing, but it is a realm in which we now live and move and have our being.

We live our entire lives out of and on the basis of God's grace. Grace doesn't just begin our standing in Christ, leaving us to our own devices. Grace surrounds and accompanies us on every step of the way.

Christian life is a life characterized by suffering, yet as our suffering is part of the larger movement by which we are conformed to Christ and led by God's grace from his declaration in our favor in our justification on account of Christ's death and resurrection to our final vindication on the last day, we can face suffering with joy.

Suffering is a means of our growth in Christian virtue. It produces endurance, and endurance produces deep down strength of character. This tried, tested and true character yields a depth of hope and confidence in the Lord, an enduring assurance in the Lord's goodness, even in the darkest places and hours.

Such hope will not be proved to be futile. We are assured of God's final judgment in our favor by the fact that he has given us his Holy Spirit as a down payment and guarantee.

[5 : 10] Through the Holy Spirit, the love of God has been poured into our hearts. The Holy Spirit could here be presented as the personal presence of the love of God within us. However, the Spirit is also the one by whom we are formed in love for God.

The gift of the Spirit is a bond of love that goes in both directions. By the Holy Spirit, God is also conforming us to the judgment of righteous that he will declare over us in the future.

We might have noticed that the opening five verses of this chapter are developed around the Christian virtues of faith, hope and love. When the fullness of time had come, Christ died not for the deserving, but for the ungodly, for the lawless, for those alienated from and at enmity with God.

One could scarcely imagine someone dying for another person who was merely upstanding and righteous. At a stretch, perhaps, one could imagine someone dying for a person who was good, a person who stood out from his fellows for his generous, noble and kind traits.

However, God's love for us was demonstrated in the fact that Christ died when we were still sinners and God's enemies. In Christ, God gave the costliest gift, but this gift was given to those who might seem to be the very least deserving of it.

[6 : 26] If we were justified by such a costly and utterly unmerited gift, we can have even greater confidence that we will be saved by Christ from the wrath of God on the last day. If the death of Christ dealt with the sin that alienated us from God, reconciling us to God and giving us good standing with him, how much more will his resurrection life accomplish the full reality of salvation for us?

All of this is a cause for confident rejoicing in God. God is going to carry through the salvation that he has begun in us, bringing it to its full completion. Paul compares the saving work of Christ with the means by which sin first entered the world through Adam.

In this section of the chapter, Paul is placing the saving work of Christ in a grand cosmic frame. The utterly unmerited gift of Christ is the means by which the entire human condition is addressed and reversed.

Going back to the very beginning of the biblical story, Paul identifies Adam as the one by whom sin first entered into the world, and death as a consequence of sin. This had disastrous consequences for the entire human race.

This is the classic biblical text for the doctrine of original sin, and it leads to a number of questions. Why is Adam, for instance, the one by whom sin entered the world, rather than Eve?

[7 : 43] Surely Eve sinned first by taking the fruit. There are a few points to make here. First, Adam represents the whole race. Adam is the father of us all. Adam is the one from whom Eve was formed.

Eve does not stand for the whole race in the same way. Adam committed a knowing trespass. Eve was deceived. Adam was given the law concerning the tree directly, whereas Eve received it secondhand, and the serpent played off her knowledge that she had firsthand against the knowledge that she received secondhand.

Adam also was the guardian of the garden and the tree. He was the one who was given the law concerning the tree. He was also the one charged to guard and keep the garden, and it was his failure to guard the tree, to uphold the law of the tree, and to protect Eve in the garden from the work of the serpent that led to sin coming.

The buck stopped with Adam, and when God confronted humanity, it was Adam in particular, Adam as an individual, who was most specifically charged with a responsibility. How can one man bring sin into the world?

First of all, Adam is the father of all humanity. He acts on our behalf. By his act of rebellion against God, he brought about the alienation of humanity from God, an alienation that we all live out of.

[8 : 58] As human beings, we all live with the consequences of what our forefathers did, and in a great many cases, we're continuing actively their legacy. After Adam and Eve's expulsion, we were all born outside of the garden.

However, this alienation is not something merely imposed upon us from without. It's written into the very logic of our existence in the flesh. Adam's rebellion is a continuing, an active rebellion, an active rebellion in us, something that's expressed in our very sinful nature, as theologians have termed it.

Adam started the story, but we are all continuing it. His first great sin, and our continuing sins, are all part of a sinful reality, all part of a single rebellion, like father, like sons and daughters.

Here again, it might help to look back at the story of Genesis, where the story of the fall is merely the first stage of a series of falls. The fall is played out again and again and again.

Adam's original fall has consequences for everyone. We are all born outside of the garden. We're all alienated from God. But Adam's fall is also recapitulated, played out again and repeated by his offspring.

[10 : 07] In all these different situations, when God brings people near to himself, the fall pattern is played out again. In Genesis chapter 3, the story of the fall is the first chapter of an ongoing story.

In the chapters that follow, we see that fall being spread out in its effects and its implications. Cain kills his brother Abel. A logic of vengeance becomes more pronounced in the story of Lamech and his wives.

And as we move further on into chapter 6, we see that the thoughts and intents of man's heart were only evil continually. Adam's sin, like ink, dropped onto tissue paper, rapidly spreads in its effects. Its consequence is alienation from God, enmity with God in sin, and death. Death is not just physical death. Death is primarily alienation from God, the giver of life.

Sin and alienation from God were active in the world between Adam's expulsion from the garden and Moses. However, the law brings a different relationship with sin. Under the law, sin becomes much more explicit.

[11 : 10] It's smoked out into the open, as N.T. Wright puts it. Outside of Israel, pagans continued sinning in spiritual darkness. Their sin was not really brought to light.

Their sin was not really counted either. The counting of sin is something that happens more when people are brought into God's presence. In Israel, the law involved a constant reckoning with sin under the sacrificial system, constant reminders of its alienating effects and its transgressive character, constant reminders of the working of sin and death within the human life and soul. Paul has argued for the comparability of the work of Christ and the work of Adam. However, despite the formal similarities, there are radical differences. The trespass of Adam led to the incredible spread of death, but the grace of God leads to a much more abundant gift.

The power of the trespass may seem great, but the free gift vastly exceeds it in power. One produces condemnation, the sin of Adam. The other, the work of Christ, produces justification. One leads to the reign of death over humanity. The other leads to the reign in life of humanity in Christ. The contrast here, we should notice, is not between death's reign and life's reign, but between death's reign and our reign in life.

[12 : 31] Jesus, as the last Adam and the second man, takes the entire destiny of the human race upon himself. The salvation and deliverance that Jesus brings is comprehensive in its relationship to humanity.

Christ isn't just salvaging some of the debris left after Adam's sin. He is forming a completely restored human race in fellowship with himself. Paul isn't teaching universal salvation, as some have argued here.

Rather, he's teaching comprehensive salvation of all in Christ. Adam's disobedience to his heavenly father constituted his offspring as rebels against God, alienated from him, and living out of that alienation.

Christ's obedience to his father in faithfully carrying out his commission brings us into right standing with God. What role does the law play in this story? The law, for Paul, came in to increase the trespass.

It's a very strange expression. What might Paul mean? The law, for Paul, seems to exacerbate the problem, and if anything, increase the alienation. While the rest of the nations did not directly deal with the Lord in the same way, by giving them the law, God brought Israel into a relationship with himself in which the more latent force of sin was incessantly inflamed into active rebellion and transgression, where sin became so much more sinful, where it was impossible to ignore because the law was bringing it to light.

[13 : 57] The problem introduced by Adam, the problem common to all of humanity, rose to its greatest height and visibility in Israel. However, in the very place of the magnification of the power of sin, God's grace was most powerfully revealed.

Just as sin reigned in death on account of Adam's sin, God's grace would utterly eclipse it through righteousness, through God's saving justice, his setting of the world to rights, to the end of eternal life, all through Jesus.

A question to consider. Paul personifies sin in this passage, presenting it as a reigning power. He treats sin's relationship with death, sin's relationship with the transgression.

He speaks of the way that Adam established a living legacy of sin, the way that sin is operative within us as we continue that legacy. In this, and a great many other ways, a larger account of sin is just beneath the surface of this passage.

If we were to give more attention to and develop in greater detail what Paul says concerning sin in this chapter, what might we learn?

