

# Romans 4-6

Justification by Grace  
through Faith

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*Romans 4-6: Justification by Grace through Faith*

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This volume was compiled using the notes from a series of sermons through the book of Romans that Pastor Paul delivered to his congregation at Branch of Hope OPC in Torrance, California.

This section, titled *Justification by Grace through Faith*, is comprised of sermons on chapters four, five and six of Romans.

At the end of each of his sermon notes, Pastor Paul has included a section of “Questions for Study and Meditation.”

We hope the reader will find these helpful in their study of and meditation on the Word of God.

***Soli Deo Gloria***



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# Romans 4:1-4

## *What Abraham Found*

February 24, 2013

**What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has *something* to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.*” Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt (Romans 4:1-4).**

### **Introduction**

I recently had the great honor of introducing Louis Zamperini when he was a speaker at a men’s breakfast. Louis was an Olympian in the 1936 Olympics (the Hitler Olympics) and a WWII veteran who survived 47 days on a life raft in the Pacific Ocean only to be rescued by those who would imprison and torture him for two years. Shortly after the war Louis came to faith in Christ and, according to him, that is when the real story begins and it continues to this day.

While writing this introduction, I received a phone call from an old friend who is an offensive coach for the Baltimore Ravens who just won the Super Bowl. He is a strong Christian man who was anxious and excited to inform me of the faith and faithful actions of many of the members and coaches of that team. Following the example of godliness is prescribed in Scripture. Paul writes:

**Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us (Philippians 3:17).**

In the passage before us this morning, Paul brings up the ultimate example: Abraham. Abraham’s example of faithfulness far exceeds anything most of us could possibly imagine. The Apostle James sees Abraham’s act of faithfulness as the acme of fruitfulness:

**Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar (James 2:21)?**

Of course James is not contradicting Paul, or the rest of Scripture himself for that matter (James 2:23). **“Justified”** in the context in which James writes means that something is shown to be legitimate by what it produces. We see Jesus using the word in a similar manner when He says, **“Yet wisdom is justified by all her children” (Luke 7:35)**. Jesus here does not mean that wisdom is forensically declared righteous, but that wisdom is shown to be wisdom by what it produces. And there is, perhaps, no greater example of faithfulness than Abraham’s willingness to obey God in the matter of Isaac.

So let us look at this passage recognizing that in Abraham we have the ultimate example.

**By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, “In Isaac your seed shall be called,” concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense (Hebrews 11:17-19).**

Abraham is listed among those **“of whom the world was not worthy” (Hebrews 11:38)**. What an astonishing statement about the faithfulness of any person! It is with this high estimation of Abraham that we enter into our text.

**What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh (Romans 4:1)?**

### **Father Abraham**

There is some debate as to how Paul is framing this particular question. Some argue that Paul is asking, “What shall we say that Abraham, who is our physical ancestor, has found?” Others argue that it could be interpreted, “What shall we say that Abraham found



out when he examined his own physical actions?” Is “**according to the flesh**” who he is or is “**according to the flesh**” what he did? Let me reverently suggest that, for our purposes in examining this passage, it may not matter because Paul will make his point quite clear.

Suffice it to say that appealing to an ethnic connection to Abraham was utterly unimpressive to John the Baptist, who said:

**And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham (Matthew 3:9).**

And when Jesus was confronted with Israelites who took comfort in their physical relationship to Abraham, His words were quite dismantling:

**They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are doing the works your father did” (John 8:39, 40).**

Jesus then goes on to inform them how they would respond to Him if God were truly their father, followed by pointing out who their actually is:

**Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires” (John 8:42-44).**

Apparently the truth can be a bit severe! Later in this chapter in Romans Paul will point out that Abraham is the father of all who have faith (Romans 4:16). Or, as Paul will write:

**And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise (Galatians 3:29).**

So, what did Abraham actually discover?

**For if Abraham was justified by works, he has *something* to boast about, but not before God (Romans 4:2).**

### **What Abraham Found**

If anybody had something to boast about on account of their works, it was Abraham. What Abraham discovered and what we subsequently discover is that, no matter how good the works, no one can boast before God. What we will see in verse five is that when it comes to standing before God, both Abraham and David (and the rest of us, as plainly taught in the first three chapters of Romans) are “ungodly”—a word meaning to live without regard for religious belief or practice—to live in the world as if there is no God!

What is very interesting, especially when we get to David, is that he appeared to have faith as a child (Psalm 22:9). He was a man who followed after God with all his heart (1 Kings 14:8), yet he is referred to as “ungodly.” In today's Latin lesson we would refer to this as *Simil iustus et peccator* meaning, “Simultaneously saint (or justified or righteous) and sinner.”

So we learn that Abraham (and the rest of us) has no place for boasting *kauchema* when it comes to human behavior before the face of God. We may think this is quite obvious, but since God's opinion of us should be the governor of who we are, our pride before each other becomes a symptom of our sense of entitlement before God.

The connection is made when Jesus ferrets out this disposition in His parables addressed to those who **“trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others” (Luke 18:9)**. No doubt, the seat of our deplorable behavior toward one another is often based upon a hidden sense that we have somehow merited the favor of God.

We embrace that we are saints *iustus* but forget that we are sinners. One cannot overestimate how this would affect every aspect of every one of our lives.

This is what Abraham found or discovered—he found that if he were “**justified**” *edikaiothe* by works, which here means to be declared or pronounced righteous, he would have something to boast about before God. The very thought would be the acme of absurdity if presented to any individual in Scripture who had the opportunity to encounter a holy God at any level. Any reasonable creature would respond more like Peter:

**But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8).**

**For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (Romans 4:3).**

## Scripture

In a remake of *Inherit the Wind*, a movie chronicling the Scopes monkey trial and extolling the virtues of teaching evolution in school, Jack Lemon engages in a speech where he condescendingly grants that the Bible is a good book followed by the conjunctive “but...there are other good books.” By this he means other good books of equal or greater credence and veracity. In light of this common, progressive, yet foolish supposition—a supposition that has gained a foothold in the church—it always comforts my soul and affirms my convictions when I see Paul appealing to the Scriptures.

## Accounted

And what does the Scripture say? It says that Abraham “**believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.**” It could be put this way: Righteousness was credited to the account of Abraham through believing God. “Accounted” *elogisthe* is a mathematical term. The righteousness of Christ is put in our banks and with it the riches of heaven itself:

**Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ (Ephesians 1:3).**

This righteousness was not given to Abraham when he faithfully brought Isaac to the altar. At the altar we see that Abraham's faith was made manifest:

**And He said, “Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only *son*, from Me” (Genesis 22:12).**

But the knowledge or evidence of someone's faithfulness is not synonymous with the faith itself. The quote from Scripture which Paul seizes to make his point is an event where Abraham does nothing but believe. Abraham (Abram) is bemoaning his lack of offspring (an offspring who would be Savior) in recognition of his and his wife being past child bearing age. God walks Abraham outside and tells him to look at the stars and count “if you are able to number them.”

**And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness (Genesis 15:5, 6).**

We must be careful when we associate any human action (baptisms, sinner's prayers or any faithful obedience) with our righteousness before God—which comes by a God-given faith in God's given Son. God walks him outside, shows him the heavens and makes him a promise. Abraham believed God and the righteousness of Christ was credited to his account. God has made a promise that whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved and calls men to believe—and it is through the instrument of that faith that we receive the righteousness of Christ. As Paul will later write:

**Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1).**

Paul then states the logical alternative to salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone:

**Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt (Romans 4:4).**

### **God in Debt?**

We should not conclude by this statement that Paul is against living a life in obedience to the law of God—that is, that we should do no works—*may it never be!* The context makes the reading: “Now to him who works *to be justified before God.*” Paul is about to do a *reductio ad absurdum* with the opposing view. He will reduce to absurdity the idea that a person can, in any way, at any level, add one iota to their own righteous standing before God based upon their works.

This may appear to be an unnecessary point until we hear our friends and neighbors (many of whom are Christians) give their take on how they will stand in judgment. It is shocking how many will say something to this effect: “I am not as bad as most” or “I have never done anything terrible” or “I always try to do the right thing” or “God knows my heart.” Every one of these answers (and those like them) argue for the wages (here to be understood as the payment of heaven) to be a result not **“as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24)** but as wages due!

Can any man look at himself, then look at God and utter the words “you owe me” and have that sentence be completed by any words other than “death and judgment?” What is God’s opinion of you? Does God love you? If so, why? Perhaps it would be best to conclude with this sterling observation of Calvin:

**Only let us remember this, — that those to whom righteousness is imputed, are justified; since these two things are mentioned by Paul as being the same. We hence conclude that the question is not, what men are in themselves, but how God regards them? not that purity of conscience and integrity of life are to be separated from the gratuitous favor of God; but that when the reason is asked, why God**

**loves us and owns us as just, it is necessary that Christ should come forth as one who clothes us with his own righteousness.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Calvin, J. (1998). *Romans* (electronic ed.). Calvin's Commentaries (Ro 4:3). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

## **Questions for Study and Meditation**

1. Is the idea of role models biblical? Explain.
2. Does James contradict Paul on the topic of justification? If not, how are they different?
3. In what way is Abraham a father?
4. What did Abraham find?
5. Explain what it means to be accounted righteous.
6. What are religious ways people can try to make God in debt to them?





# Romans 4:5-8

*Justifying the Ungodly*

March 3, 2013

**But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: *“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin”* (Romans 4:5-8).**

## Introduction

We open our Bibles and read of the actions of certain notables of the faith. We begin with the rebellion of sinless Adam (Genesis 3:6); the faithful preaching of “just” Noah, a man of integrity (Genesis 6:9), yet embarrassed with drunkenness (Genesis 9:20); the faith of Abraham (Genesis 15:6) followed by his foolishness with Hagar (Genesis 16:4). We read of Joseph, of whom very little negative can be found but also of his brothers of whom very little good can be found (Genesis 35-50).

We read of the great deliverer, Moses, whose disobedience kept him from entering the Promised Land (Numbers 20:11, 12). We read of David, a man who was declared to have followed God **“with all his heart”** (1 Kings 14:8) yet behaved deplorably in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Samuel 11). Not to speak irreverently, but one is hard-pressed to find a biblical character in the Old Testament we would feel comfortable with in our church!

And it is not as if the New Testament is entirely different. We see the apostles scattering and denying Christ (Matthew 26:31-35). We read of conflict and immorality going unchecked within the church (1 Corinthians 5:1, 2). Even after Pentecost we read of factions, fear and hypocrisy among the most faithful apostles (Galatians 2:11-14). Even the great Apostle Paul, in his full maturity as a follower of Christ, bemoaned his own unrighteousness and counted it merely as a vehicle to be used by God for God’s own glory:

**The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen (1 Timothy 1:15-17).**

As we shall see in verses seven and eight, it was the occasion of great sin that presented us with the message of God's great grace. I must offer the early disclaimer that what we are looking at this morning should never be thought of as a license for sin (1 Peter 2:16). As I have mentioned before, there will be the high call of human behavior to which the Apostle will turn in the twelfth chapter of this epistle:

**I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Romans 12:1, 2).**

Paul followed this call to the point where his sacrifice was no mere metaphor but cost him his own life, being “**poured out as a drink offering**” (2 Timothy 4:6). Peter, as well, would pay the ultimate price (John 21:18, 19). So when we begin our text this morning with the words “**But to him who does not work,**” it certainly should not be understood as somehow condoning disobedience or lethargy in our thoughts, words and deeds. Such would not be consistent with the teaching of the Scriptures nor the actions of its writers.

**Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God (1 Peter 2:16).**

But it must be stated up front that the righteousness and the beatitudes associated with that righteousness in the passage before us has nothing to do with (and by this is meant, are not on account of) even the most stellar holiness of the most righteous saint (Jesus Himself of course being excepted). In order for Peter's admonition to make sense, the "**freedom**" of which Peter writes must be grasped. Paul will later write that "**having been set free from sin, (we) have become slaves of righteousness**" (Romans 6:18). In this passage Paul sets his telescope and microscope on that freedom.

**But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness (Romans 4:5).**

### **Justifying the Ungodly**

Again, it would be a great error to read the words "**does not work**" as a license for sin. Perhaps a good paraphrase would be "**But to him who does not work to justify himself but believes on Him who justifies**" would be helpful.

We will often see pretty lofty descriptions of the faithful in the Bible:

**Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God (Genesis 6:9).**

**because David did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite (1 Kings 15:5).**

**There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil (Job 1:1).**

But when it comes to the issue before us, there is one word Paul uses to describe all of mankind: "**ungodly**" *asebe*. The word means irreverent, impious, to practice the opposite of what the fear of

God demands. To live in the world as if there is no God. One might say it describes a functional atheist. The modern western atheists (most of whom have been raised in evangelized nations adopting Christian values) comfort themselves with references to the great evil done in the name of religion. And certainly, bad religion and no religion are competitors when it comes to human sorrow and conflict.

But to live in a world as if there is no God means to place one's own opinion at the pinnacle of the human economy. We are left with the bowels of man as the oracle shaping our cultural, not to mention eternal, destinies. Needless to say, this became a Scriptural indictment against humankind:

**In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25).**

And it is not as if ungodliness is some sort of inert, victimless crime. I think it might be of interest to quote Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's take on the greatest tragedy to afflict the world, perhaps, since the beginning of time—a tragedy which claimed the lives of more innocent people than all religious wars in history put together. He wrote:

**Over a half century ago, while I was still a child, I recall hearing a number of old people offer the following explanation for the great disasters that had befallen Russia: "Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened." Since then I have spent well-nigh 50 years working on the history of our revolution; in the process I have read hundreds of books, collected hundreds of personal testimonies, and have already contributed eight volumes of my own toward the effort of clearing away the rubble left by the upheaval. But if I were asked today to formulate as concisely as possible the main cause of the ruinous revolution that swallowed up some 60 million of our people, I could not put it more accurately than to repeat: "Men have forgotten God; that's why all this happened.**

Quite the testimony! But here is the point. When it comes to peace with God, to being pardoned, to acquiring justification (acquittal of our sins and all that entails), we all fall into the category of “**ungodly.**” Paul makes his point by appealing to yet another Old Testament luminary, David. Whereas Abraham discovered he had nothing to boast about before God and was accounted as righteous by faith,

**David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: “*Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin*” (Romans 4:6-8).**

### **No Works Allowed**

The blessed man, the happy man, the man whose soul is at peace, the man who has true freedom is the man “**to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works.**” This is a message in which the young, strong, righteous, ambitious and forward thinking person may have little interest. But the sick and the broken (people who, when you’re in the ministry, you seem to be in contact with quite often) find unfathomable solace!

It is by the God-given gift of faith alone in Christ alone that a person is not only pardoned but is an heir to all blessedness that heaven has to offer. Question 73 of the Larger Westminster Catechism says it:

#### **How doth faith justify a sinner in the sight of God?**

**Faith justifies a sinner in the sight of God, not because of those other graces which do always accompany it, or of good works that are the fruits of it, (Gal. 3:11, Rom. 3:28) nor as if the grace of faith, or any act thereof, were imputed to him for his justification; (Rom. 4:5, Rom. 10:10) but only as it is an instrument by which he receiveth and**

**applieth Christ and his righteousness. (John 1:12,  
Phil. 3:9, Gal. 2:16)<sup>2</sup>**

It is not the other graces which always accompany faith, nor is it the sanctifying work of the Spirit in our lives that somehow prepares us for our meeting with God, but it is the imputed righteousness of Christ alone credited to my account that finds me at peace with God.

**But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith (Philippians 3:7-9).**

Ironically, it is the very sanctification of the Spirit—that process of being made holy—which often becomes the greatest enemy of our appreciation of the unaccompanied grace of God. Paul will quote David’s thirty-second Psalm to explain and buttress his point—a Psalm, one might argue, that young David, who struck down **“both lions and bears” (1 Samuel 17:36)**, not to mention Goliath (**verse 49**) would never have written.

### **Psalm 32**

In this Psalm we begin to get a deeper appreciation of what it means to have our sins forgiven. When our children offend one another we tell them to say they’re sorry, then we tell the offended child to forgive, which usually amounts to the words “that’s okay” or something like that; then the day just moves forward. But the forgiveness of God is not so one-dimensional. When God is offended, He is not only offended as a person, but as a Just Judge

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<sup>2</sup> *The Westminster Larger Catechism: With Scripture Proofs.* 1996. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

who, in order to be true to His own character, must punish sin and cannot acquit the guilty (Exodus 23:7).

So when we read of the blessed man **“whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sin are covered”** we must ask *by whom are they covered and how?* And “covered” does not mean, as some suggest, that the sins are not vanquished but merely hidden. **“Covered”** here can be used the same way we might tell someone who we’re eating with that we have the bill covered—in other words, we’ll pay.

Clearly, the One who pays is Christ. And what is the payment? The short answer is His own life (Matthew 20:28). But a longer and more thorough answer (and a necessary answer for this passage to make sense) is that His payment includes His entire life of righteousness, which included an entire life of suffering, culminating with the wrath of the Father falling upon Him for the sins of all those He would save (Isaiah 53:6).

David writes of it in the negative when he says: **“Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.”** But Paul writes of it in the positive when he writes of **“the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness.”**

It is the glorious transfer of our sin to Christ (with all its judgments) and His righteousness to us (with all its riches) which produces the blessed man. So it might be of value to ask if this includes you. Have you abandoned your own righteousness that you might find rest and freedom in a righteousness that is not your own? Even as a Christian, have you taken comfort in your own righteousness in the face of God?

We might finish with a quick look at the Psalm Paul chose, for it not only includes this glorious imputation but, in a very personal and experiential way, David comments on what held him back from appreciating the grace of God.

**Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer. I**

**acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,” and You forgave the iniquity of my sin (Psalm 32:1-5).**

When David kept silent about his sin, when he ignored it, when he failed to confess it, when he sought to hide it from God, **“his bones grew old”** and God’s **“hand was heavy”** upon him and his vitality was **“turned into the drought of summer.”**

It is precisely here that we bring nothing to God but our confession of sin. The beatitude, the blessedness, the true and eternal joy and happiness is found in the righteousness of another. Let our hearts turn toward Him as we prepare for the Lord’s Supper.



## **Questions for Study and Meditation**

1. Why do you suppose there are so many characters in the Bible who don't seem to do well when it comes to righteousness?
2. Paul will write: "But to him who does not work." Does this mean Christians should not seek to walk in obedience? Explain.
3. What does it mean to be "ungodly"? Who are included among the ungodly? What are the consequences of ungodliness?
4. Define and discuss faith, justification and imputation. Why are these important?
5. According to Psalm 32, what might keep someone from appreciating the grace of God?



# Romans 4:9-12

*The Sign, A Seal*

March 10, 2013

**Does this blessedness then *come* upon the circumcised *only*, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had while still* uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only *are* of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham *had while still* uncircumcised (Romans 4:9-12).**

## Introduction

Polycarp was a second century bishop of the Christian church in Smyrna. He was famous for his martyrdom—burned at the stake, then stabbed when the fire failed (for some reason) to touch him. Afterwards, his bones were gathered for relics which, they thought, could work miracles. This was not a terribly uncommon practice; in fact, the word ‘relic’ means remains and was primarily applied to the saints of old. It was believed that the body parts of a martyr (skulls, teeth, bones, femur, fingers) would have healing value. John Calvin said:

**Hence we may infer, that the human mind is, so to speak, a perpetual forge of idols.<sup>3</sup>**

Or, said another way:

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<sup>3</sup> Calvin, J. (1997). *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

**The human heart is a factory of idols... Every one of us is, from his mother's womb, expert in inventing idols.**

Fascination or taking some sort of refuge in relics, whether in the original sense or in some other idolatrous sense, is not an uncommon practice. Whether it is the shroud of Turin, searching for Noah's ark, parts of the cross, portions of ancient biblical manuscripts, or other significant artifacts, man seeks to fill an insatiable appetite in his own soul—a soul plagued by ignorance and emptiness. Man is incurable idolatrous. Even the bronze serpent God appointed Moses to make to heal those bitten by serpents became an object of worship (2 Kings 18:4).

I am sure most of us are quite confident that we are above such primitive idolatrous proclivities, but it is just here that I find myself quite concerned—that we are not alert to those idols seeking to find the cracks in the cement of our souls, especially when they can be so close—even found in God ordained religious institutions! Circumcision was not man's idea.

**This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you (Genesis 17:10, 11).**

But this God-ordained sacrament had become a source of division and controversy in the church. The sacrament, which carried with it the testimony of our corruption, had become a work whereby which men thought they had merited approval before God. Like vestments which were designed to hide the preacher becoming garments of prestige, the sacraments were transformed into badges for pious men rather than a message from a holy God.

Certainly there may be a sense where the sacraments are a public testimony of man's faith, but over and above that they are a testimony of God's mercy and or our own corruption. In the Lord's Supper there is a call to remember that it is through the shed blood of Christ that we have remission of sin. Our testimony, therefore, is that

we are sinners in need of faith which God graciously provides. Baptism carries with it a sign of cleansing. Our testimony, therefore, is that we need to be cleansed. Circumcision carried the same message as baptism. Ironic that instead of circumcision continually reminding the Israelite of their need for the shed blood of the Messiah, it became a symbol of merit and prestige where those who had it set themselves above others who did not. With this in mind we observe the passage which is not overly complicated:

**Does this blessedness then *come* upon the circumcised *only*, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness (Romans 4:9).**

### **Faith Accounted for Righteousness**

The blessedness of which Paul writes is the blessedness found in the prior verse—“**Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin**” (Romans 4:8). It is the glorious transfer of our sin to Christ and of His righteousness to us. Paul had already made the point (Romans 4:3) which he repeats here that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to sinners by faith—Abraham “**believed the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness**” (Genesis 15:6).

But then a question arises—certainly Abraham is counted righteous by faith, *but is it by faith alone?* Was it not necessary that Abraham be circumcised? Was not circumcision (or in our case, its New Testament anti-type, baptism) necessary to complete his salvation—to grant him the full righteousness necessary to stand acquitted before a holy God? Paul continues with the question and its answer:

**How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised (Romans 4:10).**

### **Righteous Before the Sign**

It was when God took Abraham for a walk, showed him the stars and made a promise that Abraham believed and the righteousness of Christ was imputed to him (Genesis 15:5, 6).

Sometimes we don't think of the Old Testament this way, but Abraham was evangelized:

**And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed" (Galatians 3:8).**

It is two chapters, and many years, later<sup>4</sup> that God institutes the sign of circumcision. Paul's point is clear. Abraham was accounted righteous before any religious symbol was put upon him.

One danger here, a very prominent danger in our current culture, is to make the false assumption that these signs are either dispensable or of little importance—something Moses learned to be quite untrue when the Lord **"sought to kill him"** due to his failure to put the sign of the covenant on his son (Exodus 4:24-26).

So, it would appear that one danger is making the signs unimportant, the other is making them too important—or, perhaps more accurately, assigning undue power to the sacrament itself thus entering into an *ex opere operato* "by the work worked" discussion. Suffice it to say for now that when God institutes a sacrament it is extremely critical that His church honor that institution. Let us also realize that to partake in that sacrament apart from faith in that to which sacrament points (and faith in that alone) transforms the event into a source of judgment. Abraham certainly did not neglect the sign:

**And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had while still* uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only *are* of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham *had while still* uncircumcised (Romans 4:11-12).**

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<sup>4</sup> Ishmael was born when Abram was eighty-six and the sign of circumcision was presented to Abram at age ninety-nine (Genesis 16:15; 17:1).

## The Sign

Abraham received the sign (*semeion*) of circumcision, as we should receive the sign of baptism. The nature of a sign is that it is not itself the thing or the destination, but it is that by which something is pointed to or known. A sign tells us where to go, where to look or what something is. When Judas kissed Jesus it was a “**sign**” telling the soldiers who to seize (Matthew 26:48). What we often translate as “**miracles**” the Bible calls “**signs**” or “**powers**” (*semeion* or *dunamis*). Signs, in particular, pointed to the authenticity of the one performing the sign, that their message was legitimate or “**confirmed**” (Mark 16:20).

Circumcision was a sign which pointed to a great many things: inclusion among God’s people, the sin of man, the need for cleansing—but above all these things we are told that the power of God is the active agent in accomplishing all of these things:

**And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live (Deuteronomy 30:6).**

Like baptism, over and above it pointing to man’s testimony, it is God’s testimony of what God will do or has done. When it comes to justification it can’t be overly stated that man is justified by what God alone does through the cross of Christ. We often utilize the example of the criminal crucified next to Jesus as an argument against the need to be baptized to be saved, and it does certainly provide a good example. But let us also recognize that if we were to take all our good works in a lifetime of faithful service before God and placed those things on a conveyer belt to heaven, we would have no greater claim on the pardon of God than that criminal had in those few hours of faith.

Had that criminal been given the opportunity to be baptized it would have served, more than all things, as a demonstration of his own corruption (to which he, no doubt, would have given a hearty ‘amen’) and God’s mercy; and these without any accidental spilling of human works into the message of the sacrament.

## Seal

Paul uses another word, “**seal**” (*sphragida*). A seal was an instrument for stamping—often with a scepter or ring pressed into melted wax. It indicates proof that something is genuine. Paul viewed the body of believers at Corinth as a “**seal**” of his genuine office of apostle (1 Corinthians 9:2). The seal also carried with it the idea of security and destination—the way we might think of a certified letter and the assurance we are given that it has reached its destination.

Circumcision, and its New Testament anti-type baptism, is a “**seal of the righteousness of the faith**” that we had while still yet un-baptized. It’s as if God, in His recognition of our weakness, puts His stamp upon us that we might be more fully assured that we are His—that we have been found—that His name is upon us.

We recently went to Disneyland and wrote our phone number on our six-year-old’s arm. Sure enough, we at a certain point in the day became separated, but our little guy had the comfort of knowing (even though he had memorized the number) that our mark (or ‘seal’) was upon him. Within minutes our phone rang and we were united.

But let it be known that the sacrament is only valuable to the extent that it points away from itself and to the righteousness that comes by faith in Christ. Cannot the same be said regarding any religious activity including the church itself? In light of these things, the words of Calvin are of a value:

**And though they are dead and unprofitable symbols to the reprobate, they yet ever retain their import and character (*vim suam et naturam*:) for though our unbelief may deprive them of their effect, yet it cannot weaken or extinguish the truth of God. Hence it remains a fixed principle, that sacred symbols are testimonies, by which God seals his grace on our hearts.<sup>5</sup>**

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<sup>5</sup> Calvin, J. (1998). *Romans* (electronic ed.). Calvin’s Commentaries (Ro 4:11). Albany, OR: Ages Software.



## A Sign of Faith on Infants?

It might also be worthwhile to address at least one common objection to infant baptism. Circumcision was a “**sign and seal of the righteousness of faith**” that Abraham had while yet uncircumcised. The objection often made against infant baptism (one I have myself made) is that it seems wrongheaded to put a sign of faith on one who has made no profession of faith. And yet God commanded that the sign of faith be put on, not only Abraham, but every male child at eight days (Genesis 17:12). If the Bible be our guide, it cannot, in principle, be wrong to put the sign of faith on those who have made no profession of faith. In fact, it serves well to drive home the monergistic (power coming from one source) nature of salvation. Again, Calvin:

**He therefore reminded Abraham by the external sign, that he was spiritually to cut off the corruption of the flesh; and to this Moses has also alluded in Deuteronomy 10:16. And to show that it was not the work of man, but of God, he commanded tender infants to be circumcised, who, on account of their age, could not have performed such a command.<sup>6</sup>**

### Father Abraham

Paul’s references to Abraham were no mere history lesson to the church at Rome, nor should Abraham or the matters contained in this epistle merely be a history lesson to us. Abraham is the father of all those who believe, whether circumcised or not. What was Paul’s pastoral concern and what is ours? Paul is certainly not arguing against a proper observation of the sacraments (although it does seem like he is always correcting an improper use of them, as in 1 Corinthians 1:13; 11:22). The church’s neglect of the sacraments has been the source of untold damage to the kingdom of Christ in our generation. It would be nothing less than a blessing to God and His

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<sup>6</sup> Calvin, J. (1998). *Romans* (electronic ed.). Calvin’s Commentaries (Ro 4:11). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

people if the proper administration of the sacraments should find their way back to center stage.

But it is the other issue that seems to be the pastoral concern of Paul (whether it is the primary concern or not I couldn't say). This other issue is that the church contains those who have performed all the correct duties and yet do not **“walk in the steps of faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.”**

When we go to the Lord's Table we ask that one only partake if they are a baptized member in good standing of a Christian church. We believe this is a biblical admonition derived from a Scriptural observation of how the table is to be fenced. But baptism and membership in the visible church are just that—*visible*. There is something else we ask—that you *believe* in that to which these elements point—or more accurately, believe in the One to whom these elements point. And that is known only to you and God. Perhaps it was Paul's pastoral concern, I know it is mine, that we do not have in our midst those who have walked through all the right doors—baptized, communicant members in good standing—but don't truly believe! It seems to be a major point Paul makes that being part of the visible church is not synonymous with being born again. It is simply stated by Jesus:

**Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).**

## **Questions for Study and Meditation**

1. Do you agree with Calvin that the human heart is a factory of idols? Can you think of examples in today's society? In your own life?
2. What was circumcision supposed to be? What did it become?
3. What is the glorious transfer that happens by faith in Christ?
4. When and how did Abraham receive the righteousness of Christ?
5. Are the signs God gives His church important? What are the dangers in the signs?
6. What is the nature of a sign? To what do the signs of God point?
7. What is a "seal" and how is it of value to a believer?
8. How does the "sign of faith" contribute to the discussion of infant baptism?
9. What, in this passage, do you think was the Apostle Paul's pastoral concern for the church at Rome?



# Romans 4:13-15

*Heir of the World*

March 17, 2013

**For the promise that he would be the heir of the world *was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the law *are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law *there is no transgression (Romans 4:13-15).*****

## Introduction

Many years ago I had a roommate who was a world class pole-vaulter. Every weekend I would watch him on television during the opening credits of ABC's Wide World of Sports. It was a clip of him doing a celebratory back-flip after breaking the indoor world record with the voice over of Jim McKay uttering the words, "The thrill of victory."

Not many of us have had exhilaration at that level—spreading our arms with the weight and power of the Titanic behind us and the wind and ocean before us, screaming "I'm king of the world!" Of course, for Leonardo DiCaprio the world would soon devour him in a frozen sea of desolation. The world can be a very disobedient subject. Many have tried to possess it, rule it or just get ahead in it, only to find that the world relentlessly spins while we begin to fatigue. Alexander the Great, in a very brief period of time, conquered and ruled nine time zones, only to die at the age of thirty-three.

So it would appear that when it comes to a culture changing, world transforming force, no individual wins. In fact, it can easily be shown that no nation wins, no dynasty wins; a crown may shift from king to king or from Caesar to Caesar, from oligarchy to oligarchy or from republic to republic, but eventually they, along with their manifestos and constitutions, crumble up and blow away.

So what are we to make of this promise God made to Abraham that he would be "**heir of the world?**"

**For the promise that he would be the heir of the world *was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith (Romans 4:13).***

Let us not lose sight of the primary point the apostle puts forth—that God has made a promise, a promise accessed by faith in Christ. The nuclear core of the Christian faith—the venue which contains the fuel and power, without which the impressive plant would merely be a well-constructed ghost town—is faith in Christ. Faith in Christ is the instrument by which His righteousness is freely given to us and our sinfulness is placed upon His shoulders.

**Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin (Romans 4:7, 8).**

### **Who is the Seed?**

Yet it would be exegetically irresponsible to ignore such a gargantuan statement that Abraham was promised the whole world—especially when we consider that the promise is not merely to Abraham but also **“to his seed.”** Now what is meant by that? Who is the seed?

**Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring (seed). It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ (Galatians 3:16).**

So it appears that the seed is referring to Christ. Hebrews 1:2 speaks of Christ as the one **“appointed heir of all things.”** So we must be careful to avoid thinking that somehow this great promise of the inheritance of the earth is bestowed apart from Christ. There is no ‘end-run’ that mankind is capable of by which the world will be his. But we should also recognize that those who have faith in Christ become, as it were, joint heirs.

**And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise (Galatians 3:29).**

Perhaps this is what Jesus had in mind when He taught:

**Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5).**

Paul will later write:

**The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together (Romans 8:16, 17).**

Neither Jesus nor Paul taught a works righteousness, but they both would teach of the true and necessary fruit of those who are saved by grace (in this case, meekness and willingness to suffer for the faith). So even though the promise is an inheritance by grace and not earned or, so to speak, a debt, the inheritance at some level involves human behavior. This is where things get tricky.

To this point we've been speaking in a very isolated sense of justification by faith—something Abraham received before he had some anything. But **“heir of the world”** is a more pregnant term. And Abraham had an active role to play in order for this to unfold. And at the risk of over-coaching I think I have a pastoral responsibility to ask everyone in this room just how active you are in living out this calling. Of course, in order for us to live out the calling, we must have some idea of what the promise consists of.

### **What is the Promise?**

What is the promise in its fullness? There are a wide variety of answers you'll be given in Christian circles. There is a very popular yet somewhat modern option that all the promises, whatever they may be (apart from the promise of heaven), are reserved for a period after the return of Christ. According to this view, the current

age, in spite of a worldwide evangelistic effort, is consigned to the ash can of history.

Others relegate all the promises to the realm of the immaterial or eternal. That which is happening in the observable world is of little consequence. There may be some hat-tipping to political or societal transformation but, for the most part, there is what might be called a commitment to cultural insignificance. Time does not allow me to suggest why I view these positions as destructive—not merely to culture but to the souls of men—suffice it to say for now that the promise is a very thorough promise. Calvin offered this comment:

**The chief thing was indeed the restoration of life; it was yet necessary that the fallen state of the whole world should be repaired<sup>7</sup>... not only the hope of a heavenly life was exhibited to Abraham, but also the full and complete blessing of God, the Apostle rightly teaches us, that the dominion of the world was promised to him.<sup>8</sup>**

Calvin seems to be beckoning back to the original mandate given to Adam to serve God by taking dominion **“over all the earth” (Genesis 1:26)**. Adam failed to be a blessing, to always do that which was pleasing to his Father, but Christ would not fail. Christ would restore that which was lost in Adam, a restoration which begins with the souls of sinners. But how wide is the blessing? Is it meant for this age? Is there anything concrete to it? I would say ‘yes.’ Read the promise given to Abraham:

**Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you (Genesis 17:4-6).**

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<sup>7</sup> Calvin, J. (1998). *Romans* (electronic ed.). Calvin’s Commentaries (Ro 4:13). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*



So the promise involves “**nations**” and “**kings.**” There are no nations in heaven or the immaterial realm and there is only one King. How could Abraham have taken this in any other way than to understand that through his seed—through the victory of Christ—there would be worldwide transformation? Let us take just a moment to read some passages which supplement this notion:

**I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, ‘You *are* My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give *You* the nations *for* Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth *for* Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.’ Now therefore, be wise, O kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish *in* the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed *are* all those who put their trust in Him (Psalm 2:7-12).**

It is the judges “**of the earth**” who are called to be wise and “**serve the Lord.**” What is the obvious reading of the text? It does not appear to be immaterial. And, if it is after the return of Christ, why would a warning like this even be necessary since the transformation would have been immediate and cataclysmic? But it is not merely the call to “**Kiss the Son**” there is the promise of the universal success and blessing:

**I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice (Genesis 22:17, 18).**

**All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall**

worship before You. For the kingdom *is* the Lord's, and He rules over the nations (Psalm 22:27, 28).

For God *is* the King of all the earth; sing praises with understanding. God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne (Psalm 47:7, 8).

He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow before Him, and His enemies will lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles will bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba will offer gifts. Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him...His name shall endure forever; His name shall continue as long as the sun. And *men* shall be blessed in Him; all nations shall call Him blessed. (Psalm 72:8-11, 17).

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days *that* the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore (Isaiah 2:2-4).

Indeed He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the

earth.’ Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, their Holy One, to Him whom man despises, to Him whom the nation abhors, to the Servant of rulers: “Kings shall see and arise, Princes also shall worship, because of the Lord who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel; and He has chosen You” (Isaiah 49:6, 7).

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good *things*, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns!” Your watchmen shall lift up *their* voices, with their voices they shall sing together; for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord brings back Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, you waste places of Jerusalem! For the Lord has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God (Isaiah 52:7-10).

Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you—the sure mercies of David. Indeed I have given him *as* a witness to the people, a leader and commander for the people. Surely you shall call a nation you do not know, and nations *who* do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, and the Holy One of Israel; for He has glorified you (Isaiah 55:3-5).

“And it shall come to pass *that* from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me,” says the Lord (Isaiah 66:23).

“For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that they all may call on the name of the

**Lord, to serve Him with one accord. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshipers, the daughter of My dispersed ones, shall bring My offering” (Zephaniah 3:9, 10).**

One would be hard-pressed to read passages such as these and not come away with the notion that the blessings of Christ will shower the earth—and that those blessings will manifest themselves in every conceivable way from displacing tyrants to feeding the poor to protecting the innocent.

When the world acknowledges a wise, loving, benevolent and sacrificial King, it will necessarily address man’s inhumanity to man. At this point my Dispensationalist friends cry “It sure doesn’t look that way to me” and my Amillennial two kingdom friends accuse of “triumphalism.” It is my opinion that they both err in ways too numerous to address here. But on point, this is what I believe we’re looking at when we read “**heir of the world**” in this text.

### **How is it Accessed?**

But even more on point, how is it accessed?

**For if those who are of the law *are* heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law *there is* no transgression (Romans 4:14-15).**

Though there may be disagreement regarding the breadth of what it means to be “**heir of the world**” there is agreement, for the most part, on how the promise is accessed—our paths that diverged now are cinched back together. At its heart, the promise is accessed by faith in Christ. Apart from faith there is no promise, there is no blessing, and there is no inheritance. This is why you’ll often hear, and rightfully so, that the problems of darkness within any culture begin at the pulpit.

Should we seek to obey the law? Certainly—but law without faith is a “**ministry of death**” (2 Corinthians 3:7). It is through the law, or rather our inability to keep it, that we come to realize that we are dead in our sins. The boundary markers of God’s law open our

eyes to see that our feet have clearly transgressed, we have trespassed and are deserving of the wrath of God—a wrath that Jesus took upon Himself at the cross of Calvary.

Whatever the inheritance looks like, whatever effect it might have on this world, it is all null and void apart from individuals who, by the grace of God, call upon the name of Christ as their only hope in this life or the next.

## **Questions for Study and Meditation**

1. Give examples of how people might seek to possess, rule or get ahead in this world. How does that generally work out?
2. What is the Apostle Paul's primary point in this passage?
3. Provide a full explanation of who the "seed" is in this passage.
4. Is the phrase "heir of the world" synonymous with justification or does it go beyond that? Explain.
5. What are the various explanations for what the promise given to Abraham might look like? What are their strengths and weaknesses?
6. Will God fulfill the promise given to Abraham? Describe the promise.
7. What are the benefits of the world acknowledging a wise, loving, benevolent and sacrificial King?
8. How is the promise accessed? How is it not accessed? What are the dangers of confusing this?

# Romans 4:16

## *The Certainty of Faith*

March 24, 2013

**Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (Romans 4:16).**

### Introduction

*Faith* has become such a flimsy word. We speak of a “leap of faith” to express what we do when we’ve come to the end of rational thinking. I recall, as a younger Christian (and even well into maturity as a Christian), a willingness not to require of my religious life the same sort of critical thinking I would apply to other areas of my life. When it came to economic decisions or career choices or personal health I would run all options through a severe grid of reason. But when it came to faith in God and its attending interactions of ethics, history, science, sociology, politics, etc., I would not impose my fallible ability to exercise logic upon an infallible God.

Now as humble as that might sound, it became a source of great consternation and even destruction, not only to me but to the church in general. Stadiums, auditoriums and churches full of people who will not engage in critical thought (in the name of spirituality) become fodder for religious charlatans who are counting on their listeners checking their brains in at the door. The critical thinker is confronted with Isaiah 55:8—“**God’s thoughts are not your thoughts.**” When God says His “**thoughts are not your thoughts,**” He is not suggesting that He is entirely ‘other’ in His definition of truth. If so, truth wouldn’t mean anything to us. He is rather proclaiming His righteousness against our wickedness—the way the thoughts of a righteous king would be distinct from the thoughts of an evil king.

Because of the church’s willingness to operate with this brand of thinking (this is not merely a modern problem) there was a great cultural divide in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries brought about by the so-called ‘Age of Enlightenment.’ It was the age of reason where ideas

of faith and tradition were put to the test. Scientific breakthroughs emboldened philosophers such as Spinoza, Locke and Voltaire to spread their philosophical wings.

But the Age of Enlightenment or Reason was not merely about men seeking to think clearly; it was a celebration of man's elevation to being the source of profound and absolute insight. Accessing truth now would require a buggy ride, not to the church but to the university.

The philosophers and professors were now the pastors—but the source document of their exegesis would not be the Scriptures but rather their own personal reflections. Voltaire was one of the great critics of the church, but it didn't keep him from constructing his own pulpit. We see an example of this in his writings:

**It does not require great art, or magnificently trained eloquence, to prove that Christians should tolerate each other. I, however, am going further: I say that we should regard all men as our brothers. What? The Turk my brother? The Chinaman my brother? The Jew? The Siam? Yes, without doubt; are we not all children of the same father and creatures of the same God?**

This was Voltaire's own version of the COEXIST bumper sticker. To whatever extent that above statement is accurate is not the point here; one must recognize the ethical challenge in it. There is an 'ought' to Voltaire's words—and even an appeal to God. But the question must be asked, how does one, by pure reason or empiricism, arrive at the conclusion that we "should tolerate each other" at all? The atheist, Marxist despots (Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Mengistu Mariam of Ethiopia, Pol Pot of Cambodia, Kim Sung of North Korea, Milosevic of Serbia) of the 20<sup>th</sup> century certainly didn't arrive at that conclusion through pure reason or science as they slaughtered tens of millions of people.

One thing we learned from the Age of Enlightenment is how to more efficiently kill innocent people while developing a secular philosophy to justify it. Secular philosophy and carnality are a formidable couple—a quick visit to almost any university today sadly proves this point.



Why the long introduction? I mention these things because the church, in an effort to answer the assailing forces of secular criticism, has, perhaps unwittingly, utilized the very methodology of the ungodly. We think we can philosophically or empirically **“answer fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes” (Proverbs 26:5)** when we may very well be ignoring the admonition to **“answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself” (Proverbs 26:4)**. When we use the “Age of Enlightenment” approach to argue for our system of beliefs, we have invited the fox into the henhouse, which will inevitably soon be inhabited by only foxes.

And, sadly, our fear of (or at least undue respect for) methods and conclusions of secularism can color our approach to Scripture. Perhaps this can be observed in the modern affinity for rejecting six sequential 24-hour days of creation.

Even the radio station that airs our sermons recognizes the problem with its slogan, “The intersection of faith and reason.” The only downside of the slogan is that it implies that reason has its own freeway that may, at some point, intersect with faith. Or that faith, at some point, is not reasonable. I don’t think the Apostle Paul would allow for such thinking. It is in Christ and, I might add, Christ alone that **“all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”** are hidden (Colossians 2:3).

One thing the great tyrants of history were able to accomplish was to convince others that they knew what they were talking about and could accomplish their particular task. Keep in mind, Hitler was *elected*! Sadly, history is one long ballad of people who were solidly convinced that others had their best interests at heart and had the chops to deliver the goods. As one gets older and reflects upon the history of one’s own life and the history of the world, it becomes quite obvious that those who can speak with certainty and fulfill the certainty of which they speak are on the short list (one or three is you’re speaking of substance or person). The Apostle Paul would have us ever turn our hearts toward the only true source of certainty.

**Therefore *it is* of faith that *it might be* according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed (Romans 4:16a).**

## A Sure Promise

We spoke last time of the “**promise**” that Abraham and his seed would be “**heir of the world**” so I won’t speak much about it here. Suffice it to say that God has made a promise to restore through Christ that which was lost in Adam. Paul makes the point that to be included in that glorious restoration, at its heart, means to be justified before a holy God via faith in the person and work of Christ.

Again, here I risk veering from Paul’s point, but from a ministerial perspective it is difficult to keep ones foot on the exegetical gas when you see the phrase “**so that the promise might be sure.**” There is a certainty attached to faith. So far from faith being a traditional wet noodle sucked up and spit out by Voltaire, it is faith which digs its moorings into the solid Rock.

The word used by Paul for “**sure**” (*bebaian*) speaks of something that can be relied upon not to disappoint.<sup>9</sup> It is used to describe an anchor:

**We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 6:19, 20).**

Peter uses the word to describe the word of God itself:

**And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed (*bebaioteron*), to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts (2 Peter 1:19).**

There is a certainty to our faith. Though it is immaterial, not something that can be tested in a laboratory, and it is not something that the natural man will arrive at through his own wisdom or philosophy:

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<sup>9</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (3rd ed.) (172). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

**For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe (1 Corinthians 1:21).**

True faith, a faith in **“Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2)**, is deeper, more certain and inescapably true. I sit with my secular friends and they speak of incontrovertible facts, whether it's the age of the universe, the origin of man or their systems of ethics which flow from these things. Interviews needn't last long before it becomes apparent how false the claim of incontrovertible is. But what they can't seem to shake is an inherent knowledge that there is a God. It may make them feel guilty or angry and they may scream in vehement disbelief. The only thing truly incontrovertible is the denial of something they know to be true.

So when the apostle tells us that the promise is **“sure”** (even a promise which, as we shall see next time, involves giving life to the dead) he is not asking us to check our brains in at the door or to believe something against all sound reason. He is rather affirming that of all things in our human experience as believers, there is nothing more solid than the faith (a faith no doubt checkered with human hesitation) we have in Christ and the promises attached to Him and His victory over sin and death.

### **According to Grace**

And why is that? Why is faith so solid? Because it is really not the faith itself that makes it sure. What does the passage teach? **“...it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure.”** Faith is certain because it is according to grace. Among Christians who might designate themselves as Reformed, grace is a very precious noun. True grace is a one-way street, perhaps more like a living, full, powerful and eternal waterfall. It embraces, cleanses, directs and irresistibly escorts us to our glorious destination.

True grace is not about the works of man, the ability of man or the choices of man—though it will have its affect upon all those things and more. True grace recognizes the power of God, the victory of Christ and a hope that does not lie within us but in a righteousness

that is nor our own. True saving faith is according to God's grace. So even though we may wrongly define it, be weak in our assurance of it and from time to time live as if we don't have it, because it comes from the grace of God it simply will never leave us. The Westminster Confession XIV, 3 says it nicely:

**This faith is different in degrees, weak or strong; (Heb. 5:13–14, Rom. 4:19–20, Matt. 6:30, Matt. 8:10) may be often and many ways assailed, and weakened, but gets the victory: (Luke 22:31–32, Eph. 6:16, 1 John 5:4–5) growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance, through Christ, (Heb. 6:11–12, Heb. 10:22) who is both the author and finisher of our faith. (Heb. 12:2).<sup>10</sup>**

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<sup>10</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. 1996. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

## **Questions for Study**

1. What are different ways you've heard faith defined? What are the strengths or weaknesses of these definitions?
2. What is meant when God says "His thoughts are not our thoughts"?
3. Is "reason" important for Christians? What was the "Age of Reason" (the Enlightenment) and how did/does it affect the church/the world?
4. How have Christians been unduly influenced by the Age of Enlightenment?
5. Review what the "promise" given to Abraham was. Of what did it consist?
6. How does the Apostle Paul speak of faith?
7. Why is faith so certain?



# Romans 4:17

*In the Presence of God*

April 14, 2013

**(as it is written, “*I have made you a father of many nations*”) in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did (Romans 4:16-17).**

## Introduction

Throughout the course of our normal mundane routine we engage in what might be called standard dialogue. We tell people where we’re going, what we plan to do, when we will be back, and so forth. Sometimes we succeed in following through and sometimes we fail. We may not call it failure because setbacks happen. I have friends who I am quite confident will not be on time, others who have a 30-50% chance of not showing up at all.

But if I were to ask any of these people (or if I were asked) to promise to be at a certain place at a certain time (after perhaps an awkward pause, wondering why I would make such a request) they would likely do one of two things: Not make such a promise knowing their own character, or make the promise resulting in a greater likelihood of showing up on time.

Every child knows that a promise is a precious thing. That they made a promise, or that a promise was made to them, ups the ante of any given circumstance. An oath has been made, perhaps even a vow! We seldom make oaths or vows. Such sacred activities are generally reserved for our weddings, or vows as a church member or officer. And this makes sense since we may consider many extenuating or mitigating circumstances which might justifiably cause us to be late for lunch—things which might overrule our mundane agreement to be on time (something as simple as a very serious conversation from which we could not responsibly walk away). But when a vow is made to God, or an oath to man, we are saying that that activity will take precedent over virtually everything else. We are saying, “I will do it!” or “I will be there!”

Now, a highly significant aspect of what it means to be a Christian revolves around this idea of promise. And it is not so much our promises to God or each other (though we should certainly make and seek to keep those promises), but it is God's promise to us. God has made a promise. We often use the word 'covenant'. A covenant is a solemn and binding agreement. But the author of Hebrews, at least to some extent, sees *covenant* as synonymous with *promise*.

**For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise (Hebrews 6:13-15).**

God had made a covenant with Abraham (Acts 3:25) which the author of Hebrews calls a promise.

### **What, and to Whom, is the Promise?**

We might at this point ask ourselves, *what the promise is and to whom is the promise made?* Has God made you a promise? What is it? And is He keeping it? Because of the way these questions have been asked and answered, it has caused many to question the very faithfulness of God.

There is, in my opinion (and not only my opinion, but the opinion of Christendom historically) a great error wafting through evangelicalism when it comes to at least one aspect of God's promise—an aspect of God's promise that He has been faithfully keeping. This error comes in the popular understanding of the initial promise given to Abraham.

**Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:1-3).**



There appears to be three aspects of this promise: From Abraham will come a great nation; God will bless those who bless that nation and curse those who curse that nation; in Abraham all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

Who is this nation that God promised to Abraham? Peter, writing to Christians, writes this:

**But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once *were* not a people but *are* now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy (1 Peter 2:9, 10).**

The “**nation**” refers to those called out of the darkness into His marvelous light...those who have obtained the mercy found in Christ.

The blessing we read of in Genesis 12:3 is described by the Apostle Paul:

**And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (Galatians 3:8, 9).**

The blessing of Genesis 12:3 is justification by faith, that the gospel would be preached and believed throughout the world. But it is the middle promise “**I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you**” that is isolated from the other two and is grossly misunderstood. I think an appropriate New Testament statement made by Jesus explains this aspect of the promise:

**And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18).**

This is not God protecting a geo-political entity. It is God's promise to preserve His church. The Westminster Confession states it nicely:

**The purest Churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; (1 Cor. 13:12, Rev. 2–3, Matt. 13:24–30, 47) and some have so degenerated as to become no Churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan. (Rev. 18:2, Rom. 11:18–22). Nevertheless, there shall be always a Church on earth to worship God according to His will. (Matt. 16:18, Ps. 72:17, Ps. 102:28, Matt. 28:19–20)<sup>11</sup>**

The nation is the church, the heart of the church is justification by faith and the promise contains God's preserving power throughout the ages.

## **A Land without Churches**

For many the church is an enemy; for others (even Christians) it is viewed as expendable. It is difficult to imagine a land without churches, where there is no notion or presentation of the law and gospel of Christ, where hope and goodness are dictated by human nature, wisdom and ingenuity. It is my understanding that Disney, by design, had no church on Main Street. It could be the happiest place on earth apart from Christ. But even my children understand that the depth of happiness offered by the fantasy and adventures of Disney would rapidly lose their interest—eternity in Disneyland would be hell.

I was once told that the presentations of Hollywood were horrifying to R.J. Rushdoony because he saw in them an attempt to create a world where God was absent. To the shallow thinker this may be preferable—like teenagers excited to find their parents will be leaving on a vacation. The house will be at their disposal! But even a shallow thinking teenager would recognize the horror of finding that the parents are gone for good.

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<sup>11</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. 1996. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

What happened in the Old Testament church and was making headway in the New Testament church was the idea that the church, as a community of people participating in certain rituals, had inherent value in the eyes of God. That this community which would perhaps do good deeds, or perhaps not, (perhaps their very deeds were a stench to God) would either de-emphasize or dismiss altogether the need of justification by faith in Christ to be a church at all.

It is worth noting in our current culture how churches which dismiss the central doctrines of the Christian faith amplify works as the primary mission of the church (many of the works falling in lockstep with an unbiblical social agenda). As the confession teaches, many churches so degenerate as to lose their status as a legitimate Church of Christ and become, as Jesus taught, synagogues of Satan. We might ask ourselves, *how is it a church descends into a synagogue of Satan?* The answer, generally speaking, is *one person or one doctrine at a time*. So a community of faith will only remain a community of faith if the individuals in that community remain faithful.

Not to downplay the importance of word, sacrament, discipline and all the other elements that comprise a faithful community, but if there is not true saving faith in the individuals of the community, all of those elements become a sort of Disneyland storefront Christianity—a conglomeration of meaningless religious activity. Even worse, the entire show of religiosity becomes a sort of ironic and pathetic drama with the cast members mocking the very God who will hold them in derision and judgment.

### **Is Abraham Our Father?**

It is in light of this that we might ask ourselves if Abraham truly is our father—and by this I mean, *do we have the faith in God's covenant promise fulfilled in Christ that Abraham had?* Or to put it Paul's way, how are we viewed **“in the presence of Him?”** How does God see us/you/me? We may look fine sitting in church today—perhaps even a member in good standing. But how do we look when gazed upon by the searching eyes of a righteous and omniscient Judge?

It causes one to think of Peter in all his bravado—willing to die for Jesus (Matthew 26:35), willing to take on the Romans armies for Jesus (John 18). But when it got right down to it:

**But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly (Luke 22:60-62).**

Christ, even in His physical body, “**turned and looked at Peter**” which resulted in an utter breakdown for the great, brave apostle. Perhaps Peter there began to develop a superior appreciation for his inability to stand before a holy God.

## **Who Gives Life**

Paul then offers attributes of God “**who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did.**” So the faithful participation in this community is not likened to the mere joining of a club or organization. Is not merely having the wisdom or presence of mind to pick the correct social or cultural guild. No, the faithful participation—to stand before a God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things which do not exist as though they did, requires His giving of the very life that is required.

Paul may be using these two actions to describe the Jew and gentile. The Jew who was a member of the covenant community but dead in sin is made alive, and the gentile who was altogether excluded from the covenant community is then called to exist in it. Either way, it is quite remarkable that Paul seems to compare regeneration (being born again) to creation itself. Not only were we dead in our sins, we might think of our being new creatures in Christ as a sort of creation *ex nihilo* (out of nothing).

This brings us to a topic in the discussion that levels all opposition. For not even the pagan gods claim to bring into existence that which does not exist. And all the empiricists laid end to end

come face to face with their own dusty humanity when pondering the beginning and something springing from nothing. It is necessary to our reality, yet inexplicable apart from an eternal self-existent God from whom all things flow.

But let us not lose the point, that the power necessary for creation is the power necessary for re-creation in Christ with the instrument of that power being faith in Christ and the subsequent imputation of the righteousness of Christ **“who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification” (Romans 4:25)**. Calvin explains:

**We have here also a type and a pattern of the call of us all, by which our beginning is set before our eyes, not as to our first birth, but as to the hope of future life, — that when we are called by the Lord we emerge from nothing; for whatever we may seem to be we have not, no, not a spark of anything good, which can render us fit for the kingdom of God.**<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Calvin, J. (1998). *Romans* (electronic ed.). Calvin’s Commentaries (Ro 4:17). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

## **Questions for Study and Meditation**

1. How is a promise different than the normal things we may say we'll do or not do?
2. What is a covenant and why are they so important for Christians?
3. Discuss the covenant God made with Abraham as recorded in Genesis 12:1-3. To whom does it apply? What is its heart? What is a great misunderstanding today about that covenant?
4. Would the world be better or worse without the church? Explain and defend your answer.
5. How do churches descend into synagogues of Satan?
6. Is Abraham your father in the faith? When God sees you, what does He see?
7. Why does Paul mention God's power to raise the dead and bring into existence that which does not exist?

# Romans 4:18-22

*In Hope against Hope*

April 21, 2013

**...who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, “*So shall your descendants be.*” And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore “*it was accounted to him for righteousness*” (Romans 4:18-22).**

## Introduction

I’m not quite sure what Abraham was up to for the first seventy-five years of his life, but I tend to think it had to be at least moderately misspent youth; the Chaldeans were pretty rough and pagan people (Job 1:17; Habakkuk 1:6); this was Abraham’s ethnic and national lineage (Genesis 12:31). His initial name, *Abram*, (meaning “father is exalted”) did not likely refer to God the Father of the holy trinity but of a father deity of a moon god in the moon cult of Ur<sup>13</sup> of which Abraham’s father, Terah, was a follower (Joshua 24:2).

When God changed Abram’s name to Abraham (Genesis 17:5) it signaled a clear cut from his past to his future and the great promise that from him all the world would be blessed; *Abraham* means “father of a multitude.” For seventy-five years, formative years, Abram lived in a world of pagan idolatry before God called him out of his country, out of his father’s house to a land that would typify deliverance from death to life, from bondage to freedom (Genesis 12:1). So I think it is safe to say that Abraham wasn’t raised in a Christian household—enjoying the benefits of a Christian family

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<sup>13</sup> Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (11). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

and Christian church or anything resembling a Christian culture; yet he is often trotted out as the archetype of faithfulness.

## **Abraham's Faith**

Paul uses words in this passage to describe Abraham's faith which appear to run, as their chief design, the engines of an inferiority complex to those of us who harbor much less impressive examples of piety. Yet even a cursory reading of the exploits of Abraham in Genesis 12 through 25 (though not as treacherous as many other Old Testament characters) yield something less than what one might consider pristine faithfulness.

Twice Abraham lied about being married to Sarah for fear of his own life (Genesis 12:12, 13; 20:2) and received a rebuke from pagan kings for putting them in this awkward predicament. Had God not appeared to Abimelech in a dream and threatened him with death (Genesis 20:7) Sarah could have been absorbed into Abimelech's harem and the promise of offspring would have ended right there.

We also read of Abraham offering some doubt as to whether God would actually give him children in Genesis 15:2, 3:

**But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir" (Genesis 15:2, 3).**

This is followed by one of Abraham's greatest lapses with Sarah's handmaiden, Hagar:

**Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai (Genesis 16:1, 2).**



This faithless and ill-devised plan of Sarah's that was merely "listened" to by Abraham created a rift in the Middle East that exists even to this day! There are other imperfections, it would appear, in Abraham's faith. Some believe his laughing when God said he and Sarah would have a child at 100 and 90 years old, respectively, was a laugh of mockery (Genesis 17:17). The simple point I am seeking to make is that Abraham, when it came to faithfulness, (though his example of faithfulness in his willingness to sacrifice his own son, Isaac, was beyond remarkable) was not without some defect.

Yet in this passage, the Apostle Paul uses a brief series of verbs to describe Abraham's faith as an impenetrable fortress. He begins by informing us that Abraham was not "**weak in faith**" (**Romans 4:19**), though that would seem human enough. But he then goes on to explain that Abraham "**did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief**" (**Romans 4:20**). To waver *diekriithe* means to be in strife with oneself, to doubt or hesitate. Now it certainly seemed like there was a little of that going on with Abraham. Finally, Paul offers that Abraham was "**fully convinced**" (**Romans 4:21**) *plerophoretheis* meaning, at least by one definition, having "perfect certitude." What are we to make of this apparent conflict?

The conflict only arises if we confuse the *faith* of Abraham with the *faithfulness* of Abraham—even his psychological faithfulness, i.e. what was going on in his own mind. If Abraham's hope were resting upon his own successes—if at the close of the day he were to seek to find respite in his own psychological, emotional, verbal and active obedience he would have only wept himself to sleep in a pool of despair.

No, this is not Paul chronicling a life of unsullied faithfulness but rather a life which is characterized by the basic pattern of faith—that thread of God-given faith which ever pulled Abraham in one direction with one true hope. On any given day, or moment, any one of us may be asked if we are being a faithful Christian which may result in an answer peppered with reflection and hesitation. But at the same time if asked (as with our membership vows) in whom do we believe? In whom do we trust? We, if we understood those questions accurately, would not hesitate to name our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

A close and critical friend at that point may lovingly point out our failures (failures from which we should repent, no doubt). But

the answer to this criticism is that our hope is not in ourselves but in Christ. It is the very failure that one observes (and I hope this is not construed as a license for sin for I am not currently speaking of our walk of faithfulness, which Paul will shortly address, but the object of our faith) that ever drives us to a hope which lies outside of us.

## **Strengthened in Faith**

It would appear that Abraham's willingness to acknowledge that his hope was outside of himself (in a moment we will address the notion of *hope*) that served to function in the strengthening of his faith. When Paul writes that Abraham **"was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God" (Romans 4:20)** he presents for us a connection between the two things.

Thomas Schreiner makes the observation that Abraham's faith was strengthened "by giving glory to God... by acknowledging his ability to carry out his promises as the resurrecting and sovereign God." Schreiner observes that Paul had already presented the fundamental sin of humans beings as being their failure to give glory to God (Romans 1:21-23) and to worship the creature rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25). "But the supreme way to worship God" Schreiner writes, "is not to work for him (r:4-5) but to trust that he will fulfill his promises. Abraham's faith did not stem from his unusual abilities (cf. Rom. 4:19). Its origins lay in contemplating the power of God (cf. v. 17), for he surely has the power to accomplish what he has promised."<sup>14</sup>

It may be easily argued that it is man's lack of faith that God can and will do what He has promised that has become the innovatively dark fountain from which multitudes of great evil flow. For it can escape our notice that worshipping the creature rather than the Creator includes the elevation of human endeavors as the source of our hope. It is precisely here that Abraham provides an example of faith that is comforting to our troubled hearts and profitable to humanity's well-being. And here we will look at the phrase **"hope against hope" (Romans 4:18 NASB).**

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<sup>14</sup> Schreiner, T. R. (1998). *Vol. 6: Romans*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (238–239). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

## Hope against Hope

When Paul writes that Abraham “**contrary to hope, in hope believed**” he is not suggesting that Abraham abandoned all reason. This continual and bedraggled accusation by the modern atheist that the Christian faith is an affront to reason is itself a shallow and unreasoned assertion. There is nothing contradictory or self-refuting with the notion of an all-powerful, eternally self-existent God who can bring something into existence from nothing or give life to the dead. The fact that the creature can’t create *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) does not provide logical argumentation against the existence of a God who can. In fact, it is the unreasonable creature who fantasizes that he himself is not a creature at all but somehow sprung himself into existence with his bag of unexplained absolutes.

“Hope” *elpis* in this passage is not synonymous with wish, as it is so commonly used today, but should be understood as a confident expectation of a yet future or promised event. If one had a terminal disease for which there was no cure, it might be said that they have no hope (at least in terms of a temporal cure). But imagine that research and development finds the cure and the patient is informed that it now exists. They now have hope—even if the cure had not yet been administered.

When Paul writes “**hope against hope**” (one in the accusative and one in the dative) he is pitting the promise of God against the observable power of man (in this case the power of man being his own body’s ability to have a child). But hope against hope can easily form a theme for the entirety of the Christian’s life. Calvin writes:

**Let us also remember, that the condition of us all is the same with that of Abraham. All things around us are in opposition to the promises of God: He promises immortality; we are surrounded with mortality and corruption: He declares that he counts us just; we are covered with sins: He testifies that he is propitious and kind to us; outward judgments threaten his wrath. What then is to be done? We must with closed eyes pass by ourselves and all things connected with us, that nothing may hinder or prevent us from believing that God is**

true...but experience proves, that nothing is more uncommon, or more difficult, than to ascribe to God's power the honor which it deserves. There is indeed no obstacle, however small and insignificant, by which the flesh imagines the hand of God is restrained from working. Hence it is, that in the slightest trials, the promises of God slide away from us. When there is no contest, it is true, no one, as I have said, denies that God can do all things; but as soon as anything comes in the way to impede the course of God's promise, we cast down God's power from its eminence. Hence, that it may obtain from us its right and its honor, when a contest comes, we ought to determine thus, — that it is no less sufficient to overcome the obstacles of the world, than the strong rays of the sun are to dissipate the mists.<sup>15</sup>

The deadness of Abraham's body and Sarah's womb provide a supreme example of the unilateral nature of God's promise. As we see the promise unfolding in the Old Testament and culminating in Christ, we see a series of events revealing man's inability to contribute to what God has promised—from the barren womb of Sarah to the virgin birth of Mary it is all hope against hope and all attributed to the loving power of God.

### **Imputed Righteousness**

One might ask at this point why Abraham (not to mention all of Scripture) was so obsessed with having a child. As difficult as it might be for some parents to accept God's closing of the womb, is it worthy of so much text? We must recognize that it was not that Abraham merely wanted to be a father, but that he, at some level, recognized that his own hope of eternal life rested in something/someone who would come forth from his progeny.

In Galatians we are told that the gospel was preached to Abraham, saying **“in your all the nations shall be blessed”**

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<sup>15</sup> Calvin, J. (1998). *Romans* (electronic ed.). Calvin's Commentaries (Ro 4:18–22). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

**(Galatians 3:8).** At a very significant level Abraham would be included in the accomplished work of redemption, only to wrestle with the notion that his contribution was no contribution at all, since he was in a state of death to contribute (his body being past contribution).

As the story of the accomplished work of redemption unfolds, we see that it is all of God—the Father, the Son and the Spirit—with man contributing nothing but his own sin. Jesus is born of a virgin (no help from man) and He is crucified while the apostles scatter (no help from man). It is all of God; we have nothing to contribute. Abraham’s faith was strengthened as he grasped this. And we should recognize the same is true, not only with the accomplished work of redemption, but with the applied work of redemption as well. By outward observation you see Jesus being born of Mary and Joseph as descendants of Abraham and Sarah. But further analysis reveals it is all of God. By outward observation we have men and women calling on the name of Christ and receiving the inheritance of heaven, but further analysis reveals that these activities and this faith are all of God.

Abraham did not believe in himself or his own power to deliver. His faithfulness had its high and low points. But what did exist in Abraham was the God-given knowledge/faith/belief that God had made a promise He was **“able to perform” (Romans 4:21)**, and it was through the instrument of that faith—faith in Christ and His righteousness—the gospel—that the righteousness of Christ was imputed to Abraham.

This is the heart of grace. To “impute” means to credit to one’s account. Jesus knew no sin but became sin, bearing the full charge of our debt before God. At the same time our account, our ledgers, before God are filled to overflowing with the righteousness of Christ, which is how we are seen by God. With this thought before us, let us now turn to the Lord’s Table.

## **Questions for Study and Meditation**

1. What do we know about the first seventy-five years of Abraham's life?
2. Discuss Abraham's faith. What verbs does Paul use to describe it? Is there a difference between *faith* and *faithfulness*?
3. How was Abraham's faith strengthened?
4. Define "hope" as it is used in the Bible.
5. Does "hope against hope" mean Christians should not exercise reason? What does it mean?
6. Why was Abraham so obsessed with having a child?
7. What is imputed righteousness and how is it received?

# Romans 4:23-25

*The Message for Us*

April 28, 2013

**Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification (Romans 4:23-25).**

## Introduction

There is as much history between Abraham and Paul as there is between Paul and us. So, for Paul's readers, Abraham was an ancient figure. Notable characters in history often fall into exaggerated categories. We may view them as overly vilified or overly canonized—often neither is entirely accurate. With this exaggeration we might view historical figures as something other than mere humans. And this could certainly be the case with someone as notable as Abraham, the father of the faithful. But when it comes to the topic before us in these chapters of Romans, Abraham is simply one of us, and the message for him is the message for us.

When it comes to the imputation of righteousness—being accounted righteous before God by faith—that which was true of Abraham was true of Paul and is true of us. In these three short verses we have what Charles Hodge called “a comprehensive statement of the gospel.”<sup>16</sup>

- In verse 23 and 24a we learn that the events recorded in Scripture are designed for our benefit.
- In verse 24b we are told that it is the believer who receives this benefit, the benefit of the imputation of righteousness. With that we are told what the believer is to believe.
- Finally, in verse 25 we are informed of what the Father did with the Son and why He did it.

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<sup>16</sup> Hodge, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, p. 129.

**Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him but also for us (Romans 4:23-24a).**

### **Now it's Personal**

Paul now gets very personal. Up until now he has engaged off and on in a diatribe (an argument with an imaginary opponent) to make his points. But it is here in the discussion where you look the person straight in the eye to challenge what they believe or how they behave. It is no longer hypothetical. It is about us. This is not a novel or a piece of interesting history. That which is written in Scripture has an authoritative claim on the lives of every one of us.

**We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come (1 Corinthians 10:9-11).**

**For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope (Romans 15:4).**

It is no wonder that the world would like to reduce the message of Scripture to mythology to feel more comfortable in ignoring it—something at which they tend to miserably fail. This antipathy should not come as a surprise to those familiar with Scripture. Paul explained it quite simply:

**But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is**



**sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God’s word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ (2 Corinthians 2:14-17).**

The message contained in Scripture contains the smell of life for some and the smell of death to others. An exception would be those who peddle God’s word which, by implication, would not carry a message of life or death—a benign message designed merely to motivate or cheer the congregation, perhaps through a particularly difficult week. This is something we’re beginning to see with more regularity in our current culture.

But we also must be careful to avoid pursuing our theological studies as a mere academic endeavor lest we find ourselves taking the name of God in vain. The Scriptures must be read more like a will which explains the conditions of our inheritance. When the estate lawyer utters the words, “the billion dollar inheritance will be yours when you...” we all listen very intently, seeking to understand and ready to act. Either way, Paul is informing us that the message is for us.

**It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead (Romans 4:24b).**

### **Belief in What/Whom?**

That which was true of Abraham, true of Paul and which is also true of us is that we stand in need of an imputed righteousness—an alien righteousness—a righteousness that is not our own but which comes by faith in God—the God who raised Jesus from the dead. The simple, yet profound, question might be asked: *How does one obtains the requisite righteousness for entrance into heaven and eternal peace with God?*

Abraham believed God and via that belief he was accounted righteous before God. Abraham is in heaven to this day through the instrument of faith—but faith in what or whom? Is it the simple bald yet inactive statement of believing in the existence of some god out there; something, even with the modern swell of contemporary atheism, uttered by a majority of people with great ease? Few will

admit not believing in a god of some sort. It would appear that it is not merely believing in a god who may, or may not, have done certain things, but believing in Him who raised Jesus from the dead.

Abraham believed that God could bring life from the dead. And the drama surrounding Abraham's life, as mentioned earlier, was not merely that of a man who desired children, but a man who knew that his very redemption revolved around this promise and power—a promise and power culminating in the resurrection of Christ Himself—though his perception of Christ might have been distant and obscure. Jesus taught:

**Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad (John 8:56).**

So, what is it that the believer believes? If a person walks into church or if we are in a conversation with a neighbor who asks the question *what must I do or believe to be saved*, how is that answered? When the elders of a church meet with a prospective communicant member and seek to ascertain whether or not there is a credible profession of faith, what is the faith we are seeking to discover—faith in who or what? There may be ancillary or attending doctrines, but at the heart of what the believer believes is the resurrection of Christ.

Early in Acts, this was on the lips of the apostles:

**And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all (Acts 4:33).**

Along with the Lordship of Christ, this is what Paul will communicate to be believed requisite to salvation:

**But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:8, 9).**

In short, the believer who believes that God raised Jesus from the dead is the one who, by the very grace and power of that event, receives the imputed righteousness which grants eternal life and all that entails.

**And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life (John 3:14, 15).**

Paul then completes his thought with a very brief explanation of why this must be believed and why this message is for us.

**...who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification (Romans 4:25).**

### **The Love of Deliverance**

At least in this passage, it would appear that Paul would direct our praise to the Father as “**deliver up**” and “**raised**” are both in the passive. Certainly God the Son played an active role in His own passion and resurrection, but here it is the Father who gives His Son. And this act on the part of the Father (in the most commonly memorized verse in all of Scripture) is that act which most deeply presents to us that great love with which we are loved.

**For God so loved that world that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16a).**

Jesus was delivered up. Delivered up to what? To pain, suffering, death and wrath beyond human comprehension. Who can grasp the depth of a virtually inexpressible phrase that He became a “**curse for us**” (Galatians 3:13)? That He became “**sin for us**” (2 Corinthians 5:21)? That “**He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree**” (1 Peter 2:24)? In God’s covenant made with Abraham (that through his seed all the world would be blessed) the fulfillment of that promise was not that God would ignore the sins of man but that He would satisfy His own divine justice by sending His Son to weather the blow of sinful humanity in His own person.

To be honest, a comprehension of the depth of the wrath eludes me, as does the depth of the love. I don't love any person enough to give up one of my children. So if I am to grasp, by comparison, the magnitude of God's love for me in delivering His Son I can only seek to take refuge in Paul's prayer for me that I might have the strength to comprehend **“the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge” (Ephesians 3:18, 19)**. In light of these things I must conclude that the phrase **“surpasses knowledge”** is no hyperbole.

Add to this, so far removed from our general perception of ourselves, Paul's explanation of our own character when this love is administered:

**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 (Romans 5:6-8).**

It is a love administered to enemies, transforming them into sons and heirs. And this delivering grace and love of God forms the platform for all Christian comfort.

**He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things (Romans 8:32)?**

This is called a *lesser to the greater* argument. Would the Father perform the greatest act of love and follow through with any form of neglect? Would He provide a mansion yet fail to provide running water? Hardships, discipline, trial and tragedy now can be understood from the perspective of coming from the hands of a loving Father who works all things **“together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28)**.

## **Raised For Our Justification**

And what is meant by the words **“and was raised because of our justification”**? Various suggestions include the resurrection being the observable testimony of Christ’s victory in securing the Father’s favor on our behalf. That when the angel moved the rolled away the stone so as to set Christ, the prisoner, free from the tomb, it provided the greatest assurance possible that **“divine justice was satisfied.”**<sup>17</sup>

We have not merely been saved from the first death by a dead savior, as noble as that might be. But we have been eternally saved by the living Savior who has come forth from death as a Mighty Conqueror and in whom, by virtue of our unity with him, we receive the designation **“more than conquerors” (Romans 8:37).**

With that comes the suggestion that Jesus was raised for our justification as He continues the office of our great High Priest who ever intercedes for us (Romans 8:34) carrying his own blood into the most Holy Place. He would suffer in the outer court but ascend to heaven where He would present His own righteous blood before the Father for our justification. The brethren are accused **“day and night before our God” (Revelation 12:10).** But God’s gracious answer to that accusation, an accusation which does not readily escape the hearts of God’s children, is:

**Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us (Romans 8:33, 34).**

The priestly office of Christ should serve as a great source of comfort and conviction for the believer:

**Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession (Hebrews 4:14).**

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<sup>17</sup> Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Ro 4:23–25). Peabody: Hendrickson.

I tend to think Paul means these things, and more besides, in this passage. Our minds like to put things in categories, which is often useful. But as Paul is writing about the accomplished work of redemption, it is safe to conclude that the deliverance and resurrection of Christ assume the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension—all of which were necessary for redemption. After all, in the Lord's Supper, where Paul explains that in partaking we are proclaiming **“the Lord's death until He comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26)**, he is not excluding the Lord's resurrection when, a mere four chapters later, he will make clear that apart the resurrection his entire ministry would be mere vanity (1 Corinthians 15:14).

The message for Abraham, Paul and us is a message that righteousness and its attending redemption is acquired by faith in a God who raises the dead, and who delivered His Son whose victory is the great spring and foundation of all true comfort.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Ro 4:23–25). Peabody: Hendrickson.

## **Questions for Study and Meditation**

1. What do we tend to do with historical figures? How might this affect our reading of Scripture?
2. How does Paul get personal in this passage? Why is this both loved and hated by people?
3. What is imputation and how is it acquired?
4. What is a believer to believe?
5. What does it mean that the Father delivered the Son? Delivered to what? What is achieved through the deliverance? What do we learn of the Father's disposition toward us from the deliverance?
6. What are some things we can cling to because of the resurrection of Jesus?





# Romans 5:1-5

*Peace with God*

May 5, 2013

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

**Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1).**

## The Point Thus Far

Paul sums up the last four chapters with this simple statement, **“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** It’s as if he has made his point and is now briefly restating that point as he moves his epistle into round two. And what is that point?

In short, the point is that all men know there is a God and suppress that knowledge in unrighteousness; that being raised as a Jew or a gentile does not make a person more or less favorable to God, for all are under sin; that true righteousness is through faith in Jesus Christ; justification by faith was as necessary for David and Abraham as it was for Paul and you and me; and this great mercy is accomplished by sending His only begotten Son to die for our sins and rise again for our justification.

## Peace with God

There may not be a verse that I have quoted as much and have taken as much comfort in as in Romans 5:1. The statement Paul makes about what has been accomplished is beyond remarkable—**“we have peace with God!”**

Of all the goals, of all the quests, of all the potential odysseys in which any human being might find himself, there is no journey that has a higher end than peace with God. The final chapter of any book, the closing scene of any film, the last stanza of any song that fails in this is tragic. We may comfort ourselves with the notion that we can pursue a life of inner peace, seeking to make this world a better place.

We can say, “Peace with God is of little concern to me; I desire peace in my culture—peace on earth.” But peace with each other requires peace with God. As we shall see, peace with my own life is dependent upon peace with God. The twentieth century became a sort of catastrophic global laboratory where we tested man’s utopian efforts apart from bowing the knee to our benevolent Creator—they’re still cleaning up the blood.

But when we get right down to it, mankind does have some sense of his creaturely-ness. We seem to know that we did not make ourselves and that there is, out there somewhere, someone or something to whom we must give account. The world is full of religion and there are a variety of ways people seek to find peace with their deity. It might be the pursuit of ethics, the discipline of piety, engaging in meditation or even through the channels of church and sacrament.

### **The Precondition to Peace**

But here Paul presents that which is ever so simple as a precondition to peace with God. The justification—the acquittal of our sins and that righteousness necessary to approach a holy God—is accessed by faith. Peace with God is ours by believing that the very God who we desire to approach, to have peace with, delivered up His own Son to pay for our sins (sins which would most assuredly condemn us) and raised Him up as our living, eternal High Priest.

We look for ladders, windows, footholds, ropes on which to climb to obtain that elusive peace. But the ladder has come to us and simply bids us to believe. Certainly true faith, true belief, requires a God-given monumental shift in our entire nature. With true faith come eyes that see a different, more accurate world and an inclination toward a standard of holiness. But it is the faith, and the faith alone, in Christ alone, that justifies us before our Maker which then results

in peace with God, or, as Charles Hodge puts it, a God who **“is at peace with us.”**<sup>19</sup>

In short, verse one tells us that we have been acquitted of our sins, declared righteous, as Paul would state elsewhere, given a righteousness that is not our own (Philippians 3:9), that the righteous **“requirement of the law”** is **“fulfilled in us” (Romans 8:4)**, that it is the imputed and freely given righteousness of Christ in which we are clothed (Job 29:14; Romans 8:14; 2 Corinthians 5:1-5). The instrument by which this righteousness comes is faith, the fruit of which is peace with God—all of which is accomplished **“through our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

**...through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God (Romans 5:2).**

## **No Tenuous Peace**

Peace can be so tenuous. We fight back the anxiety of what the world might look like for our children. When I was very small we had drills in school to prepare us for the threats of the Cold War. During my entire childhood we were embroiled in Viet Nam. In the past twenty-five years we have had escalated conflicts in the Middle East. We have no absolute assurance of continued peace—not so with our peace with God. Paul would have us rejoice in this eternal rock of peace.

If invited to international peace talks, we might walk away thinking, “That went pretty well, things should go smoothly for a while.” But because of the men involved (any men or women) we would also recognize that another meeting may soon have to take place. Things change, people change, alliances form; the world is an unpredictable place.

But there was a peace talk between the Father as our Judge and the Son as our Mediator. The Son presented His own precious blood for peace (1 Peter 1:19) and the Father’s divine justice was satisfied. We have now been invited into the room. There have been times in my life where I’ve been invited into rooms full of luminaries. I recall feeling awkward and out of place. I was forced to re-gather

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<sup>19</sup> Charles Hodge, Commentary on Romans, p.132.

myself and recognize that I was merely surrounded by sinful dustballs such as myself.

But feeling awkward and out of place does not begin to describe our condition as we approach the throne of God, inside the veil, the presence of God—the presence of Christ. John was the apostle whom Jesus loved, the one who reclined on the bosom of Christ in the Last Supper (John 13:23). Yet when confronted with the glorified Christ, we see that familiarity quickly evaporate:

**Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands *One* like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair *were* white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet *were* like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance *was* like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I *am* He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen” (Revelation 1:12-18).**

## **Standing in Grace**

Our reasonable (and perhaps involuntary) response to the holiness of God would be to fall down “**as dead.**” But Paul writes of “**this grace in which we stand.**” Paul uses this image addressing inappropriate human judgments:

**Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand (Romans 14:4).**

None of us would do well standing under the flawed nature of human judgments; how much less hope would we have in standing before the righteous judgments of a holy God? Yet the Lord is able to make us stand. In fact, the phrases “**we have access by faith**” and “**in which we stand**” are both in the perfect tense (“**we have had access**” and “**we have stood**” would be good translations—something completed in the past which extends into the present). We are called to a strong confidence with these words.

This idea of standing carries a couple of thoughts: We stand in the presence of a God who would otherwise consume us like rice paper in a volcano, but it also carries the notion of assurance and perseverance. Hodge explains:

**The state into which the believer is introduced is not a precarious one. He has not only firm ground on which to stand but he has strength divinely imparted to enable him to keep his foothold.<sup>20</sup>**

We stand and, therefore, take a stand and persevere in it.

**Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58).**

This is no mere isolated religious experience. The person who, by grace through faith, has stood before God will ever stand. Calvin adds insight:

**And by the word *stand*, he means, that faith is not a changeable persuasion, only for one day; but that it is immutable, and that it sinks deep into the heart, so that it endures through life. It is then not he, who by a sudden impulse is led to believe, that has faith, and is to be reckoned among the faithful; but he who constantly, and, so to speak, with a firm and**

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<sup>20</sup> Charles Hodge, Commentary on Romans, p.133.

**fixed foot, abides in that station appointed to him by God, so as to cleave always to Christ.<sup>21</sup>**

How can this possibly be with the vicissitudes of human sin and weakness? It can only be accomplished with our eyes fixed outside of ourselves and ever on Christ, who is said to be both the author and finisher of faith (Hebrews 12:2). It is the iron-clad approval of God through Christ that is our hope and joy. Hodge writes:

**The general believer ever falls short of his privileges, and goes limping and halting, when he should mount up as with the wings of an eagle. Assurance is not an unseemly presumption but a privilege and a duty.<sup>22</sup>**

### **Rejoice In Hope of Glory**

It is in this that we rejoice, which here means more than mere joy (as if that wouldn't be enough); it is to *boast*—to express a high degree of confidence. We have been informed that in our natural state we would not glorify God as God (Romans 1:21) and that in our sin we have fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), but now we are promised that very glory. In His High Priestly prayer Jesus prayed:

**And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one (John 17:22).**

*The glory of God* is a very brief phrase which encompasses all the volumes of that which can define blessedness. Paul will later explain by a negative correspondence that all the human suffering does not go as deep as the glory goes high:

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<sup>21</sup> Calvin, J. (1998). *Romans* (electronic ed.). Calvin's Commentaries (Ro 5:2). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Hodge, Commentary on Romans, p.134.

**For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Romans 8:18).**

It is a glory which extends to our very bodies:

**So also *is* the resurrection of the dead. *The body* is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory (1 Corinthians 15:42, 43).**

It is through the lens of this hope—this sure expectation of peace with God and its attending glory—that we are to view the entirety of our lives. This becomes the platform on which we stand and will never fall, even amidst the great tribulations which will inevitably find their way into our lives. We will address these things in our next meeting.

## **Questions for Study and Meditation**

1. What do you think was Paul's main point in the first four chapters of Romans?
2. Why is peace with God so critical? Is peace with God necessary for us to have peace with each other or peace with self?
3. What are various ways people might seek to find peace with God?
4. What is the precondition to peace with God?
5. From where does our righteousness come?
6. Is our peace with God tenuous? Why or why not?
7. What does it mean to stand in grace? What are the implications?
8. What is the glory of God?



# Romans 5:1-5

*Not Only That*

May 12, 2013

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

## Introduction

A few hours after I had preached the gospel for the first time I received a phone call informing me that the closest person in my life had been killed in an automobile accident. This was followed by twelve of the most difficult years imaginable (at least for someone my age with my immaturity), taking care of the other person who was left behind. The anguish and difficulties of those years are not something I would wish upon anybody. But there was nothing that more prepared me for the ministry than that somewhat lengthy chapter in my life.

And it wasn't so much the fatigue or the economics or sacrifices or inconvenience that was so purging to my somewhat self-centered soul; rather, it was being committed to something that had no end in sight and no immediate reciprocation. It was a matter of faithfully (and sometimes not so faithfully) enduring the difficulties that could easily last from my twenties to my sixties without so much as an occasional thank you. I thought of it this week when I received a message on Facebook; it was a photo of a bird crouched down and being pelted by wind and rain and the heading read: "Sometimes, you just have to bow your head, say a prayer, and weather the storm."

In light of those events the general difficulties associated with ministering in a church and being a husband or father have been very light and enjoyable episodes. Seeking to find peace and solace with God and the life He has given us when that life becomes stormy has

its purposes, not the least of which is how it aids us in our love and interactions with others who find themselves in similar struggles.

**Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God (2 Corinthians 1:3, 4).**

And in an effort to avoid sounding as if this is an “I have arrived” moment, I must say that the efforts employed as a young man seeking to navigate through troubled waters is not a matter of reflective nostalgia. The battle rages. So when I come to a passage like the one before us I find it highly consoling.

In verses one and two Paul had summed up his focus of the first four chapters—that we have peace with God, having been justified by faith. It is the bedrock of our eternal soul. Through Jesus Christ we have access by faith into God’s grace—a grace in which we stand. Perhaps the greatest weakness of Christians is our lack of vision of who we are and what is ours, thus inhibiting our ability to rejoice in hope of the glory of God—a shortcoming of which we will be immediately healed when the Lord takes us home.

Paul transitions into verse three with the words: “**and not only that...**” We don’t merely “**boast (for boast *kauchometha* would be a good translation of rejoice in verse 2) in hope of the glory of God,**” we also boast (rejoice, glory and boast are all translated from *kauchometha*) in our tribulations.<sup>23</sup>

**And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope (Romans 5:3).**

## **Tribulation**

When Paul writes that we glory in our tribulation, it is in the indicative not the imperative. He is not telling us to glory in our

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<sup>23</sup> As opposed to “the glory of God” at the end of verse 2, which is the standard word for glory *doxa*.

tribulation but that we *do* glory in our tribulation, an assertion to which many Christians might respond with hesitation. One of the reasons Christians rejoice in our future glorification is because all affliction is left behind. Paul moves right from the peace, grace, joy, hope and glory of heaven to the glory of tribulation. Many of us would have preferred for the “not only that” be followed by “but all tribulation will be excavated from your lives.”

In order for this to truly make sense and begin to be a source of comfort, it is critical that we realize that God is no less present and no less sovereign in the *right here and right now* than He is in heaven itself. That sin has shrouded my perception of His loving, gracious, righteous and powerful hand, does not mean His hand has become too short.

**Is my hand shortened, that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? Behold, by my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a desert (Isaiah 50:2).**

It is only in the light of recognizing God’s sovereign hand (and by *sovereign* we mean that He ordains whatsoever comes to pass) that we can, with a sound mind, begin to glory in tribulations. For it is not merely glorying *through* or *during* the tribulations, but glorying *in* tribulations.

And what are the tribulations of which Paul writes? We might think of tribulation as that which is suffered for our testimony and witness of Christ in the world; and it certainly would include that.

**Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:10).**

But tribulation *thlipsis* is a more general term here. It can refer to the difficulties of war (Matthew 24:21), the pain of childbirth (John 16:21), lacking the necessary sustenance to thrive (2 Corinthians 8:13), and more. The word here means *to crush, to squeeze, to afflict*. It refers to the general and overall anguish of humanity.

To restrict this to those things we suffer for righteousness sake would cast us into such endless introspection that it would remove the desired comfort Paul seems to want us to have. For who has such pure motives, even when standing for righteousness, that a deep and thorough investigation would not unearth some human sinfulness attached to even our most righteous deeds?!

No, we are to rejoice in our tribulations (no matter what they are or what their source) because we realize that all of creation—even in this fallen estate in which we find ourselves—is an operating room and our tribulations are a scalpel in the hands of the Master Physician (Mark 2:17) who works without ceasing until Christ is formed in us (Galatians 4:19).

When I was a teenager I had knee surgery and had the opportunity to do rehab at UCLA. One athlete, Happy Hairston, who played for the Lakers, had had knee surgery. Apparently a great deal of scar tissue had developed around the injury and the trainer, the legendary Ducky Drake, decided to handle the issue personally. I don't recall exactly what Ducky was doing (he was yanking pretty hard on Happy's leg), but I'll never forget Happy screaming, "It hurts Ducky, it hurts!" Ducky didn't stop. He apparently knew what he was doing, and from Ducky's perspective it had to be done.

I have personally found that the chain of events of which Paul writes work best when I have no answer for the tribulation—when I am forced to think of things from an eternal perspective—when going to my knees is the only option left; or, as Paul would say it, to that which is not seen.

**Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).**

It is natural and certainly desirable to avoid tribulation. There is nothing inherently righteous about looking for trouble and seeking

pain; sanctification through self-abasement is man-centered piety. But sometimes there is just no avoiding the accident—enduring the pain, at least for the moment, is the only option. There is no clever navigation out. It is precisely there, when we realize that we are at the mercy of God, that we can fully rejoice and take comfort in the knowledge that we are, in fact, at the mercy of God who is a merciful God. And it is through this tribulation that God is producing something, the end of which is hope.

## **Perseverance**

Before we arrive at hope, we are informed of the links in the chain. Tribulation produces perseverance or patience. It's been said, "Patience is the quiet endurance of what we cannot but wish removed."<sup>24</sup> It is the capacity to hold out or bear up in the face of difficulty. We think of the person who is **"quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" (James 1:19)**. We think of Christ who **"when He was reviled, he did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23)**.

Counseling throughout the years, I have found that one of the most valuable pieces of advice I can give someone is to be prepared for the long haul. Troubles don't go away overnight. We must persevere. We must be patient. As Paul wrote above, we must not lose heart. It is in light of the continual battle, the ever-present affliction, which inevitably ends in death that Paul writes:

**Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58).**

Put in crass terms, God knows our tendency to be quitters. But when we are confronted with afflictions that provide no exit signs, He is forming endurance within our naturally reluctant hearts. Therefore the chain continues...sometimes longer than we'd like.

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<sup>24</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Ro 5:3–5). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

**...and perseverance, character; and character, hope (Romans 5:4)**

## **Character**

“**Character**” *dokimen* is a noun which speaks of seeking to learn the genuineness of something by examination and testing. Character is akin to integrity—something that is sound or unimpaired. When repeatedly bent, metal will often lose its integrity and then is more easily broken apart; it’s like bending a paper clip over and over until it snaps.

An athlete with integrity is the one who can continue to play hard, keep his cool and stay focused in the midst of fatigue, bad calls, a discouraging crowd, a strong opponent and frustrated team-mates. But my metaphor is lacking, for the promise in this chain is that the Christian will not break through the continual bending. It can be thought more as a refining fire where the integrity is being ever renewed, followed by the hammer of a master blacksmith who tightens and sharpens with his powerful blows.

Some say that this chain will only succeed—the patience, character and subsequent hope will only be achieved—if there is an appropriate response to the tribulation. Since we recognize the tribulation as a tool in the hand of God, we should ever seek to respond appropriately to trials and temptations. But Paul, at least here, doesn’t mention an appropriate response. The passage seems to be about what God is doing rather than how we are responding. But let it also be noted that we have a heavenly Father who, unlike earthly parents, never grows discouraged or fatigued in His task of sanctifying us. He will never give up. There is something He wants us to have.

**For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Hebrews 12:11).**

So where are you on the chain...which link? We should not view ourselves at any given time living in only one link in the chain. At various levels and through various means we are ever confronted with tribulation which is ever producing perseverance and character in

our lives. We, therefore, recognize that at a certain level hope is something we currently have. But all of this comes into sharper focus throughout the course of our lives.

## Hope

The end of this chain is hope *elpida*. The surgical procedure of tribulations removes dross and heightens the acuteness of our mental discernment and soundness of judgment in order that we may focus on that which is worthy of our true and undivided attention. This hope is the confident expectation of yet future, or currently veiled, reality. It is a hope which is distinct from all others.

**Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us (Romans 5:5).**

## No Disappointment

The hope the Christian has is one that does not “**disappoint**” *kataischynei*, which means to “put to shame.” The world is full of those who have hopes and dreams, aspirations and ambitions regarding who they want to be and what they would like to world to look like. In all of this men ignore their tacit self-deification—as if we know best. But there is only one hope that will stand under the scrutiny of eternal wisdom and righteousness. There is only one Name that can be named that keeps men from infinite shame.

**Keep my soul, and deliver me; let me not be ashamed, for I put my trust in You (Psalm 25:20).**

## The Love of God

Just in case we think of these things as cold facts, let us recognize that the work we speak of, the end it will produce and our very inclination to embrace it, comes from a God who has poured out His love in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Even in our limited wisdom we can see that a parent who fails to discipline is not exhibiting love for a child but neglect. What we find difficult to grasp in our capacity

as creatures is how there can be a God whose wisdom and power knows no limitations. His love is infinite, and His classroom extends to the entire created order. And we are the objects of His love.



## **Questions for Study and Meditation**

1. What are some tribulations you have gone through in your life? How did you respond? Can you think of what they produced in you?
2. What must we know about God in order for our glorying in tribulations to make sense?
3. What is the difference between glorying *through* tribulations and glorying *in* tribulations?
4. Is a tribulation only that which is suffered for righteousness sake? Explain your answer.
5. When does the chain of events of which Paul writes work best?
6. Define perseverance. Why is it important?
7. What are some examples of character or integrity?
8. Does this chain only work when we respond properly?
9. What is a Christian's hope and why does it not disappoint?



# Romans 5:6-8

## *Dying for Sinners*

May 19, 2013 & June 2, 2013

**For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:6-8).**

### Introduction

There may not be a more ancient debate than the one revolving around man's role in his own redemption. One wonders whether or not the animals sought to distance themselves from Adam and Eve as they, perhaps, bickered over the effectiveness of fig leaves to hide their shame (Genesis 3:7). Were there any critical thinkers during the construction of the Tower of Babel who rolled their eyes at the prospect of building a structure to heaven (Genesis 11:4)?

Disagreement continued through the early church, most notably in the fourth and fifth centuries between Augustine and Pelagius. Pelagius didn't embrace the notion of original sin. He was a strong believer in man's natural ability to choose good over evil, the only grace needed was access to the law. His position was in stark contrast not only to Augustine's understanding of human nature but the entire church, for at the Council of Carthage he was declared a heretic.

Shortly after Pelagianism was declared heretical, semipelagianism surfaced in the fifth and sixth centuries. According to semipelagianism original sin does exist, but it has not so affected human nature as to restrict man's ability to make "the first move" toward God. Although the view was also labeled heretical at the Second Council of Orange in 529, variations of it wafted through the church until the Reformation when the debate was reignited by Luther, Calvin, Arminius and their respective followers.

Forms of semipelagianism still play a dominant role in contemporary Christian thought. It is safe to say that the vast majority of evangelists over the past two hundred years have

presented the gospel with a semipelagian theme—the gospel offered as a choice for men while God remains somewhat inactive. I write “somewhat inactive” because many evangelists will agree that the Holy Spirit will play some role in prompting a response, but it is ultimately left to the man or woman. God, it has been said, is a gentleman who will not force His way into our lives.

This semipelagian view is popular because it seems to accurately reflect our experience. We are volitional creatures who make choices; every single day every human being chooses to either believe or not believe that there a God in heaven who sent His Son to die for sinners. Semipelagianism is also attractive because, at least at a surface level, it explains human culpability. If the choice is, in the final analysis, left with me, then it makes sense that I am responsible for it.

I say “surface level” because we often ignore the independent, antecedent cause for making the right choice. Why is it some people choose poorly and others wisely? A variety of answers are given: parents, culture, environment, influences, intellect, etc. Of course this just begs the question, from where or whom are we given parents, culture, environment and so forth? What is the first cause of these things...of *anything*?

So even though semipelagianism seems to explain my experience, deeper reflection reveals that it falls short. Add to that, as Christians we should not arrive at theological conclusions via the limited perceptions of our experience; we should rather evaluate our experiences via the spectacles of Scripture. My experience tells me that I have chosen to believe in Jesus; the Bible tells me why I have made that choice.

That God is the first cause of creation—creation *ex nihilo*—is of little debate among Christians. But there is perhaps nothing greater for a Christian to know than whom or what is the first cause of their redemption and the basis for it. The knowledge of this becomes our starting blocks for our worship of God and our love for our neighbor. This is not to be thought of as a cold, academic, theological endeavor. This is God wrapping us up in the warm blanket of His love, whispering His wisdom in our ears and sending us out with fresh resolve as to who we are and how we are to live.

What we will see in our study of these verses is how they speak to, at least, the following:

- Our worship of God
- Our humility before God
- Our humility before others
- Our assurance before God
- Our forgiveness of others
- Our love of God
- Our love of others

**For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly (Romans 5:6).**

### **Without Strength**

The “**for**” at the beginning of this verse attaches it to verse 5, where we are told of the love of God “**poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.**” “**Due time**” was that unique time in history when Christ died.

**But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons (Galatians 4:4).**

When it comes to redemption, salvation, eternal life and peace with God we are not to look to some future event or a variety of past events. We look to a single event that happened at the perfect time. Those before Christ looked forward to that event via God’s promise and those after look at the promise fulfilled. Our temptation to look to the events of the past, our expectations of the future or even our own pious pursuits as a source of redemption is to look away from our only hope.

In this verse we see two attributes shared by all humanity when it comes to a relationship with God: the attributes of *weakness* and *ungodliness*. “**Without strength**” *asthenon* means just that—having no strength. I recall my old friend Bob Wieland who lost his legs in an explosion in Viet Nam. He had been a great athlete, but after the injury he said he could barely lift his arms. In time he lifted small weights, then heavy weights, then became a national champion.

Mankind can expect no such progress through his own efforts in reaching heaven. *Without strength* doesn't mean, as with a Pelagian or semipelagian, a little strength; it means an incapacitation as so many cross references can easily show. Elsewhere Paul describes the condition:

**And you *He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1).***

## **Ungodly**

But Paul doesn't stop at the mere incapacitated state, as if we desire something which we are incapable of reaching. Christianity is often presented with the difficulty of the fictional scenario of the far-off person who has not yet heard of Christ having no provision for his desire to be right with God. But if the totality of Scripture is used to address that scenario, no difficulty exists because that person simply doesn't exist.

We all fall into the category of not merely being weak, but being **“ungodly.”** The ungodly *asebes* person may be a good neighbor or a trustworthy friend. They may stand up for moral values and work hard in their contributions to society. But the virtues (that is, their very definition of virtue) of the ungodly can change in a moment's notice because they are not attached to anything eternal or absolute. The signature characteristic of the ungodly is that they live in this world as if there is no God. And because all men know that there is a God, this means they live in opposition to what they know to be true.

In one respect we know there are no atheists because all men know that God is (Romans 1:19-21), but in another respect all men are born atheists in actively opposing what the fear of God demands—generally characterized by immoral and impious behavior.

My atheist friends like to point out all the blood shed throughout history that happened in the name of religion. In response, I have often pointed out the tens of millions of innocent citizens killed in the twentieth century via atheist dictators. They will then point out that atheism isn't a life and world view; it is merely the lack of believing in a god. Even if that argument were granted (and I don't grant it) the conviction that one does not acknowledge an absolute and

transcendent source of ethics leaves a vacuum only to be filled by human visions and desires with no restraints—hence the bloodshed.

That being said, man is **“without”** the **“strength”** spiritually, physically, morally or in any other way to reach God. But beyond that, there is no desire on the part of natural man to seek after God and, therefore true goodness. We are estranged from God whilst still in the **“womb”** and **“go astray from birth, speaking lies”** (Psalm 58:3). All men are **“born to trouble as the sparks fly upward”** (Job 5:7). We offer no signs of genuine redemption; we make no initial move toward God or true goodness. As Thomas Schreiner aptly observes:

**Christ did not die for sinners because he detected in them an inclination toward God or (v. 10) a desire to end the enmity toward him. He died to overcome the enmity and hostility of the ungodly toward God.**<sup>25</sup>

We are like the beasts in *Aliens* who offered nothing but death and destruction, and that just need to be nuked from outer space. But instead of sending nukes from outer space, the Father sent His own Son from heaven. In Christ we can be called godly and it is in His strength that we find deliverance. Scripture offers no short list of those who, by faith, were made strong out of weakness:

**And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness (Hebrews 11:32-34).**

But let us not miss Paul’s point, which is the undeserved sacrifice of Christ.

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<sup>25</sup> Schreiner, T. R. (1998). *Vol. 6: Romans*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (260). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

**For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die (Romans 5:7).**

### **For Whom Would You Die?**

Jesus taught:

**Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13).**

But this seems to stretch significantly beyond this great love. The point of this verse seems very simple. History can provide many examples of heroes sacrificing their lives for others. A “**righteous**” man or a “**good**” man can be understood as a just man or a kind man.

The form of the statement would even allow a translation of not merely a good man but a good cause. A person may give their life for someone or something they believe worthy of the effort. But it extends beyond human reason that a man would lay down his life for that which he believed to be unjust, evil, bad or an enemy.

It might be said that it is Jesus’ laying down His life that actually makes the person His friend. Jesus is not laying down His life for a righteous person asking for help. He lays down His life for those who would otherwise profane the name of His heavenly Father and curse and kill Him. Paul now restates verse six, making it personal:

**But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).**

### **A Demonstration**

William Hendriksen points out:

**The word “demonstrates,” (is) *present* tense. Although it is true that for Paul, at the time he wrote this letter, as well as for us today, the death of Christ was an event that had occurred in the past,**



**its lesson remains an ever *present* and glorious reality.<sup>26</sup>**

This is the great demonstration of God's love toward us—that while we were in a state of utter rebellion (over and against both the Pelagian and semipelagian views) Christ died for us, thus granting us peace with God and the riches and glory of heaven. I had mentioned earlier how this, among other things, affects our worship of God, our humility before God, our humility before others, our assurance before God, our forgiveness of others, our love of God and our love of others. I can only briefly touch on these things, but it won't be difficult to ascertain how far this reaches.

## **Worship**

It affects our worship of God because it brings to light the depth of our sin and the height of His grace. It should be our prayer that we, along with Paul, would begin to grasp our naturally wretched condition that we, along with Paul, would move from that realization of wretchedness to praise and exaltation:

**O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 7:24, 25)!**

## **Humility**

This passage places a finger of light upon our humility before God and others when we recognize that if left to our own devices, our nature would bring us only to a place of utter shame and contempt. It is our reasonable service to bow before God and count others as more significant than ourselves. It was with his eye to the cross that Paul wrote:

**Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than**

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<sup>26</sup> Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953-2001). *Vol. 12-13: Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*. New Testament Commentary (173). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

**yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others (Philippians 2:3, 4).**

How much deeper must we be driven in that humility when we understood our nature when Christ died for us?

## **Assurance**

A passage like the one before speaks deeply to our assurance. God chose to love us while in a state of utter rebellion. He loved us when there was nothing about us that would attract Him to us. The Apostle John explains this love:

**In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:9-10).**

In the passage, our love for God is downplayed in light of His love for us. In 1 John 4:19, John will explain that **“we love because he first loved us”** demonstrating that His first love is not merely chronological but causal; His love for us is what creates our love for Him. In the very next chapter John will seek to instill a sense of confidence and assurance in his readers:

**I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:13).**

If we are to have full assurance (to know with confidence that we belong to Him), we must recognize that God chose to love us while in a state of stark and unvarnished rebellion. If He loved us only because we love him, it would be easy for us to conclude that it would only last as long as we loved Him. But since we love Him because He loved us (His loving being eternal) it assures us that our love for Him will last.

## **Forgiveness**

And how does this speak to our forgiving of others? God didn't wait for us to come to our senses before He forgave us. But He actively and effectively brought us to repentance (2 Timothy 2:25), then He forgave us.

## **Love**

It is not difficult to extract from these principles how such love for us would affect our love for God and others. Jesus said it simply this way: **“He who is forgiven little, loves little” (Luke 7:47)**. The more we grasp the depth of our sin and forgiveness, the greater our capacity to love others. Having spoken of the love of God in sending His Son to die, John continues the thought:

**Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another (1 John 4:11).**

God's love for us was a sacrificial love for that which was not worthy of love. This is the heart of our faith. The great demonstration of God's love is that He loves sinners.

## **Questions for Study and Meditation**

1. Why do you suppose there is such great debate revolving around man's role in his own redemption?
2. Define Pelagianism. Define semipelagianism. How common are these views in today's church? Why do you think there are attractive?
3. How much moral or spiritual strength do people have when it comes to their relationship with God?
4. Define *ungodly*. Why is ungodliness such a volatile attribute?
5. How did God respond to our naturally hostile condition?
6. What condition were we in when Christ died for us? How does this affect our worship, humility, assurance, forgiveness, love, etc.?

# Romans 5:9-11

*By His Death, By His Life*

June 9, 2013

**Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when 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. And not only *that*, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation (Romans 5:9-11).**

## Introduction

Over the years we have entertained the idea of purchasing a dog. We have owned animals that require less attendance such as fish, a rabbit and cats. In my mind, our level of excellence in caring for these lower maintenance animals have been a sort of test of how we would fare with a canine. Everybody is initially excited at almost any type of new animal—bunnies, kittens, puppies. But how responsible will we be once the initial infatuation wears off? Will we still faithfully clean, feed, walk and otherwise care for the pet?

A potential dog for our household was brought to our attention even this very week, which was followed by my wife engaging in a very thorough investigation of the type of dog and the responsibilities behind owning such an animal. Does the dog shed, bark incessantly, has it had its shots, is it playful, does it bite, how much does it eat, how often do you have to walk it, etc. At first these things won't matter if it's a cute puppy; but down the road they will be the big issues of whether or not the dog gets attention. You wonder if animals could talk, would they express some level of sorrow regarding how excited everybody was when they first arrived versus how ignored they are now?

And could we not say the same for our relationships with other humans? And even more importantly, can we not say that in a walk with God? Jesus addresses the church in Ephesus with this chastisement:

**But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first (Revelation 2:4).**

And in Jeremiah we read:

**I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown (Jeremiah 2:2).**

But similar to many marriages, it did not take long for the grumbling in the wilderness to begin (Exodus 15:24; 16:2; 17:3). It requires effort to continue to appreciate—it is a virtue—a virtue sadly lacking in a culture demanding continual and immediate gratification.

Our pets should rest secure in the knowledge that if we purchased them (especially if the purchase price was very expensive) we will take care of them. Our spouses should gain an increased sense that if we vowed to marry them, we should ever love them, as in the devotion of our youth. But again, because of our sinful estate and the sinful world in which we live, this takes effort.

*Now here is the problem:*

We think that because it is in our sinful nature to struggle with a declining love for God and others (even pets), we assume the same of God. Of course we may not answer the test question that way; we know the Lord **“does not faint or grow weary” (Isaiah 40:28)**. But our experience can be quite different. There can be two people in a marriage where one has given up and the other is still working hard. But if asked, the one who has given up may not acknowledge that the other is devoted because they are viewing the entire relationship through their own lazy, sinful and selfish disposition.

In this passage the Apostle Paul assures us that there is one Person who is making this relationship (the relationship between God and the sinner He saves) work. And because of His faithfulness, we can be assured that He does not grow weary in attending to those whom He purchased at a very expensive price:

**...knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the**

**precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot (1 Peter 1:18, 19).**

**Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him (Romans 5:9).**

### **Saved From Wrath**

This is what is known as a *greater to the lesser* argument, and in a couple of ways: As Charles Hodge comments **“Christ died for His enemies, he will surely save his friends.”**<sup>27</sup> Also, if the precious blood of Christ was shed in order for sinners to be justified or acquitted (declared righteous) God will certainly not fail to complete the fullness of that salvation by subjecting those for whom Christ died to His own wrath. Paul writes of **“Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Thessalonians 1:10).**

Wrath *orges* is where we derive our word ‘orgy’ which signifies unrestrained passion. It’s as if human history gets glimpses of God’s wrath in the tragic events both recorded in Scripture and observed in the natural world (both nature and human nature). But the full wrath of God is held back, as it were, by a dam of His own patience:

**The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed (2 Peter 3:9, 10).**

There will be a day of reckoning where the dam will break and God’s wrath will be unrestrained. And it is from that day that those who are covered by the blood of Christ—those who are justified by faith (Romans 5:1) will be saved.

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<sup>27</sup> Charles Hodge. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. p. 138.

## The Maintenance of Faith

God is not like men (even Christian men) who grow weary in maintaining relationships—in doing good in general (Galatians 6:9). Similarly, Paul elsewhere teaches:

**And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6).**

This is why it is so important for us to know the source and nature of our faith—as the Westminster Larger Catechism’s answer says: “**Justifying faith is a saving grace, (Heb. 10:39) wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit (2 Cor. 4:13, Eph. 1:17–19) and word of God...**”<sup>28</sup> And the gift of faith is not merely given at regeneration but is ever sustained by that same God. There is a reason why our faith remains. Peter explains that we:

**...are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:5).**<sup>29</sup>

We have salvation through faith, a faith which comes from the power of God, and this is how He keeps us. We belong to Him and He keeps us. This is what Jesus prays for us:

**Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:25).**

And His prayers are always answered.

**For if when 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 (Romans 5:10).**

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<sup>28</sup> The Westminster Larger Catechism: With Scripture Proofs. 1996. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>29</sup> The New King James Version. 1982 (1 Peter 1:5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.



## Justified and Reconciled

Verse 10 is similar to verse 9, but seems to move in a more personal direction. He mentions Christ's "**blood**" in verse 9 and Christ's "**death**" in verse 10, which are both references to the same thing. He also mentions being "**saved through Him**" in verse 9 and "**saved by His life**" in verse 10, which seem to mirror each other. Both of these are very thick doctrines—the death of Christ, the subsequent resurrection and current priestly office of a living Savior—things we've touched on briefly. But "**reconciled**" *katallasso* in verse 10 is a bit more personal than "**justified**" *dikaiothentes* in verse 9.

"**Justified**" has a very forensic dimension to it—a legal pronouncement of acquittal—whereas "**reconcile**" denotes a move from enmity to friendship. And it must be added that even though this enmity was, in a sense, mutual—that is we, in our sin, were hostile toward God and He, because of His holiness and purity, could not even look on our wickedness (Habakkuk 1:13)—the context seems to indicate that what has primarily been dealt with by the blood of Christ is God's enmity toward us. In Christ, the Father can look upon us as His beloved.

We should not merely look at this as a courtroom transaction where the somewhat reluctant judge gavels our acquittal and sends us on our way. For even though our offense was against the Judge, His love was made manifest in sending His own Son to endure our sentence. But it goes beyond this! He then adopts us, puts His name upon us and calls us His own. It is with this backdrop in mind that Paul expresses that the beloved of God can and should expect "**much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.**" Friends of God—the beloved of God have a bright eternity!

We are saved by His life. It is because of His life that we can have a certain anticipation of our own eternal life:

**A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also (John 14:19).**

**And not only *that*, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation (Romans 5:11).**

### **A Current Reconciliation**

Paul completes his thought with a reference to our rejoicing and the reason why we rejoice. We come to church and sing praises to God—why? Is it because of what He will do? Certainly it is, in part. But in this verse the adverb “**now**” indicates that we rejoice in what He has done and what we currently have: “**we have now received the reconciliation.**” For those who have faith in Christ, everything necessary for their justification, reconciliation—for our salvation—is complete! Although at times it doesn’t seem that way.

We wrestle with sin, doubt, fatigue. As mentioned earlier, our love for God wanes. We don’t see the kind of growth we’d like in our behavior. We should ever wrestle through these things—exhibit the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-24) and “**strive to excel in building up the church**” (1 Corinthians 14:12).

But the rejoicing Paul writes of here is in that which has happened outside of us and has an eternal impact upon us. We are rejoicing here in our acceptance before a holy God. And the grounds, the substance of that acceptance is not our works, it is not our faithful obedience, it is not the work of Christ in us, it is not even our faith—which at times may be strong or weak. The substance of our acceptance before God is not found in what Christ has done *in* us but in what Christ has done *for* us.

Christ has purchased us, knowing precisely what we need. He daily cares for us and sustains our faith. He has effectively justified and reconciled us to Himself by the blood of Christ, and He will most assuredly save us “**on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed**” (Romans 2:5).

## **Questions for Study and Meditation**

1. Have you noticed certain relationships where your enthusiasm and love have grown cold? Specifically, what does this look like and how should you respond?
2. Does it sometime appear that God has lost interest in you? Why do you think of that?
3. Who is making your relationship with God work? What does that look like?
4. What is the wrath of God and how can you know you will be saved from it?
5. How do you know if your faith will endure?
6. What is the difference between *justified* and *reconciled*?
7. What is the substance of our acceptance before God? What are some things that can lead us away from the peace of knowing that?



# Romans 5:12-14

*Through One Man*

June 16, 2013

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

## Introduction

When I add up the number of memorial services I have either officiated or attended, it easily extends into the hundreds. It's a common occurrence in these services to open the mic for those who would like to say a few words on behalf of the deceased. This can be a very intimate time to hear significant, funny, nostalgic or heartfelt stories which help us appreciate a loved one from a perspective we didn't have. The open mic can also be philosophically illuminating; especially when the person moves from talking about their friend to giving their perspectives on life and death.

These perspectives can range from profound to humorous to absurd. Over the years I've noticed one very common sentiment given by those seeking to assuage the grief of the occasion—it goes something like this: “Death is a part of life; death is natural.” It is not difficult to understand, given our limited observation, where people would arrive at this particular sentiment. Since death happens to everybody, it is supposed that it must be natural. If by natural we mean inevitable, I agree. But if by natural we mean it is necessary to human nature, we err. We have embraced something we should not accept. We become like the house-elves in Harry Potter who are more than happy to accept their roles as unpaid, unappreciated servant/captives.

Death is not natural nor is it necessary to human nature. Adam was human prior to the fall “**wherein life was promised to (him); and in him to his posterity, (Rom. 10:5, Rom. 5:12–20)**

**upon condition of perfect and personal obedience. (Gen. 2:17, Gal. 3:10).<sup>30</sup>** Sin and death may be universal, but they are not necessary to humanity and we should not think them natural in accurate or positive way. *Death is a curse!* Charles Hodges calls death, in the passage before us, **“penal evil, and not a consequence of the original constitution of man.”<sup>31</sup>** Death is a punishment.

I am being careful not to overstep my boundaries. Death can be compared to a sacrament in that it points to something—something we are to remember and contemplate.

**O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am! Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath (Psalm 39:4, 5)!**

**So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom (Psalm 90:12).**

Pondering the shortness of our days and the inevitability of our futures should bring our minds to wisdom. There is no true wisdom derived from the notion that death is natural. Death is a curse, it is the consequence of sin and it is an enemy of man and Christ.

**For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death (1 Corinthians 15:25, 26).**

Until this is squarely before us, it will be very difficult to appreciate the glory of this passage.<sup>32</sup> At the dawn of man something unspeakably horrifying transpired: shame, conflict, sorrow, pain, sweat, deception—man returning by death to the ground, which is itself cursed (Genesis 3:16-19), only begins to summarize the

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<sup>30</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. 1996. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>31</sup> *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. Charles Hodge. p. 147.

<sup>32</sup> By saying “this passage” I include Romans 5:12-21.

wreckage of human sorrow emerging from man's initial act of rebellion.

Add to this how Jesus uses one of the most dreadful geographical settings on earth to help us appreciate the eternal consequences of human rebellion as it relates to death eternal. Jesus warns:

**And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28).**

The word for “**hell**” is *Gehenna* which was the “**Valley of Hinnom**” where idolatrous practices were carried out, most notably the unthinkable infant sacrifice associated with the worship of Molech (1 Kings 16:3; 21:6; 2 Chronicles 28:3; 33:6; Jeremiah 19:56; 32:35). The valley, just outside of Jerusalem, was later used for the burning of garbage and the dead bodies of criminals. Physically, spiritually, temporally and eternally *death is an enemy and a curse*—a “**penal evil**”—a punishment.

Now the remarkable message in this passage is not that each man's individual sin deserves death—as true as that is, for “**the soul who sins shall die**” (Ezekiel 18:20). This passage focuses on the consequential death which falls upon all due to the sin of Adam. Paul will make that clear in verse 15, where he writes “**by the one man's offense many died.**” So we read verse 12:

**Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned (Romans 5:12).**

### **Through One Man**

The “**therefore**” ties this verse to what Paul had just stated regarding God's demonstration of His love for sinners by sending His Son to die for us. The context is that we are justified (counted as righteous) and reconciled (made to be God's friends) through the death of Christ and the power of His life.

Paul will now begin to compare what happened through Adam to what happens through Christ. So, to fully appreciate what is

accomplished by Christ, we have to grasp what was lost in Adam; for the work of one (in a very opposite sense) correlates to the work of the other. It is not entirely uncommon for people to complain that they weren't in the Garden of Eden when Adam ate and fell, so why should we be the recipients of his curse? Of course, the same people would never complain that they weren't on the cross next to Jesus, so why should we be the recipients of His blessings? We were neither in the Garden of Eden nor Gethsemane, but those two events and those two men have, and will, determine the course of each one's destiny.

## **Sin Entered**

This is clearly seen by what happened through Adam—“**sin entered the world.**” This doesn't mean that sin somehow merely showed up in the world as if it were some unwanted guest making the party uncomfortable while people scurry from room to room seeking to avoid his presence. It means the world (that is, all of mankind) became sinners. But the tentacles of the curse extend even further.

In the early 1800s Isaac Watts wrote a hymn which has become a carol commonly sung during Christmas. It's entitled *Joy to the World* and is based upon what God will accomplish through His Son as recorded in Psalm 98. In a clear reference to the fall of man he writes:

**No more let sins and sorrow grow,  
Nor thorns infest the ground.**

He then writes of how far the work of Christ will extend:

**He comes to make His blessings flow  
Far as the curse is found,  
Far as the curse is found,  
Far as, far as the curse is found.**

We will get into the extent of Christ's blessings in a future sermon, but right now we ask *just how far does that curse extend?* Sin has entered the world. It permeates the created order. How deeply can the curse be found? For some reason it makes me think of the deep ocean where, it is said, light can no longer penetrate; the



pressure is so intense that life seems impossible. 25,000 feet below the surface of the ocean is surely immune to the effects of the fall. But not so! Paul will later write **“the creation itself will be delivered from the bondage of corruption...that the whole creation groans and labors...”** (Romans 8:21, 22).

### **Sinned in Adam**

Sin has entered the world **“and death through sin,”** and there is no escaping it. No one gets out alive. **“Death has spread to all men, because all sinned.”** Again, even though it is true that all people have sinned (a point Paul drives home in the first three chapters of this epistle) Paul, I would argue, is still speaking of Adam’s sin, as if to say **“all have sinned in Adam.”** As Hodge explains:

**The aorist (sinned) does not mean do sin, nor have sinned, nor are accustomed to sin. It is the simple historical tense, expressing momentary action in past time. All sinned, i.e., sinned in Adam, sinned through or by one man.**<sup>33</sup>

A similar point is driven home by Paul in 1 Corinthians:

**For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive (1 Corinthians 15:21, 22).**

Paul continues.

**For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come (Romans 5:13, 14).**

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<sup>33</sup> *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans.* Charles Hodge. p. 149.

## The Reign of Death

Paul is making a distinction here between the period of time between Adam and Moses and Moses and Christ (or Moses and *now*). Moses brought the law which revealed man's guilt before God (Romans 7:13). But what Paul is conveying here is that death reigned before the law was given. And though one might argue that God's law always existed, when Paul writes that **“sin is not imputed when there is no law”** he seems to be calling upon another principle which brought the reign of death; and that principle (or action) was the sin of Adam.

What is meant by the words **“those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam”**? Some have held this to refer to infants, but the context doesn't seem to admit to that conclusion. It is more likely referring to those who had been given certain and specific commands directly from God. Again, Paul seems to be removing the rest of humanity and their actions from the occasion that ignited the reign of death.

## A Type

I have perhaps overly labored the isolation of Adam. But since, as Paul writes, Adam is a **“type of Him who was to come”** i.e. Jesus, it is critical for the distinction to be made. **“Type”** *tupos* is the noun form of the verb which means “to strike” or make an impression by a blow. In a wider sense it means a figure or a form. Adam prefigures Christ. So, in the context, what is said of Adam teaches us of Christ. With that in mind, we will end with this thought:

## Three Imputations

Paul is attaching the entire spectrum of sin and death to the physical father of us all, Adam. It's as if our own sin (though it is real and we are culpable for it) were the fruit or evidence of a plague that hit the human race at dawn of man—but it is not the cause of the plague. The sin of Adam is imputed to the rest of humanity. His sin is reckoned or imputed to you and to me. It is laid to my account in my affiliation with humanity. The event of this destruction happened outside of you and me—the event was the day he ate.

*Why is this critical to our faith?* Because there are two other imputations. My sin is reckoned to Christ—charged, as it were, to His account. And He pays in full the due penalty, that penalty being hell itself. Jesus (as a man) was not there when I sinned. And He certainly did not join or conspire with me in it. Yet He takes the burden of it as His own to the extent that He even becomes sin itself (2 Corinthians 5:21).

And that final imputation—that wonderful and inexpressible gift given to those who have found reconciliation with God through Christ—is His righteousness reckoned or imputed to us. We are His body and what belongs to Him belongs to those who believe in Him. We were nowhere near Eden, but neither were we anywhere near Golgotha (the hill where Christ was crucified).

All humanity is attached to the curse of Adam. The universality of sin and death provide endless testimony to this truth. This attachment is by our physical birth. But our attachment to the last Adam—to Christ—is by what Jesus called a *second birth* (John 3:3). It is a birth from above by grace and consequent faith; it is by faith in who Christ is and what He has done that we find forgiveness of sins and become heirs of the riches of heaven.

## **Questions for Study and Meditation**

1. How have you heard people explain the notion of death? Is death natural? Is it part of life? Is it necessary to human nature? How can death be compared to a sacrament? Explain your answers.
2. How does Jesus describe eternal death or hell?
3. Have you ever thought it unfair that the sin of Adam should have such an effect upon you? How does that speak to the passage at hand?
4. What does it mean that “sin entered the world?” How far does the curse reach?
5. Why is it important to recognize that the curse is a result of Adam’s sin specifically?
6. What is a *type* and why is it important?
7. What are the three imputations and why is this so critical to our faith?

# Romans 5:15-17

*Leaving Adam*

July 14, 2013

**But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. And the gift is not like *that which came* through the one who sinned. For the judgment *which came* from one *offense resulted* in condemnation, but the free gift *which came* from many offenses *resulted* in justification. For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ (Romans 5:15-17).**

## Introduction

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July a member of our church handed me a full page ad she had cut from the L.A. Times encouraging the people of America to “Celebrate Our Godless Constitution” and which contained dubious and out of context quotes from various founding fathers of our nation. The ad, paid for by the *Freedom From Religion* organization, was dark, deceptive, inaccurate and destructive on so many levels. The member who handed me the page recognized this, as did I. I hadn't written a column in a while so I thought it would be a source of information and encouragement to engage the error found in this ad. Sadly, I am finding there are fewer and fewer media outlets interested in the opinions of those who hold to a Christian life and world view.

I, at times, wonder if we fully recognize and appreciate the great battle in which we are engaged. Being older, in the ministry and a parent, perhaps it hits me with a bit more severity when I survey my surroundings. We can see it in the fashions, the celebrities, the trends, the leaders and the laws they're seeking to introduce; it is seen in the current disdain for the things of God, the Scriptures and the gospel of Christ; I am reminded of this battle during hospital visitations and the tubes and the inevitability of our own mortality; it is observed in the corruption and compromising disposition of the church itself. In all

of these things, and more, there is something that should be patently obvious—mankind is in a conflict with what Paul refers to as the reign of death.

In verse 18 of the above passage Paul writes of how death reigns. In verse 21 he will amplify that thought, conveying that “**sin reigned in death.**” So the reign of death does not merely mean that all men die (as true as that is). The reign of death, and its attending sin, reveals to us that there is an active kingdom (hence the word ‘**reign**’ *ebasileusen* which can also be translated ‘king’) governed by these things.

We are in the midst of a passage where the Apostle Paul compares Christ to Adam—Adam is type or foreshadow of Christ (Romans 5:14). The Bible speaks of two kingdoms and two kingdoms only—the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan (Matthew 12:26; Luke 11:18). It was through Satan’s deception (2 Corinthians 11:3) and the sin of Adam (Romans 5:11) that his kingdom became a plague to the entire created order.

It is as if we are surrounded by a deadly and highly contagious disease. We might toy with the disease, unaware of how its darkness is crawling up our arms and seeking refuge in our hearts. Parents recoil when they see their children either unaware or unconcerned with the virus of human iniquity with which they play, similar to the way a foolish child might tease a poisonous reptile. It would have been a very familiar passage for students of the Scriptures when Paul referenced God’s exhortation:

**Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty (2 Corinthians 6:17, 18).**

The passage before us this morning, of course, says nothing about touching no unclean thing—about remaining unstained by the world (James 1:27) or engaging in the battle with “**the weapons of our warfare...to destroy strongholds**” (2 Corinthians 20:4). I mention these things merely as a reminder of what we ought to know—that there is a kingdom of Christ and a kingdom of Satan.

One is of Adam and the other is of Christ. Prerequisite to a proper understanding of Paul's point in this passage is something we might find shocking, but something very much deserving our attention—and that is, at conception, every last single one of us, by virtue of our connection to Adam, are citizens of that dark, deadly, sinful kingdom.

The Christian man can hardly grasp this and the natural man—as he continues to remain embroiled in it—can do nothing but reject his current status as being merely myth and folly. The curse of Adam contains, for the natural, sinful man, a built in resentment for the very curse that holds him in bondage. And there is not a one of us in this room, or in this world, who has the natural capacity to extricate himself from this dark and powerful kingdom marked by sin and death. We need help, help which is referred to as a **“free gift.”**

**But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many (Romans 5:15).**

### **The Dissimilarities**

Adam is a type of Christ, but Paul spends a great deal of energy informing us of how the benefits of Christ are **“not like”** the curses of Adam. Certainly there are great similarities. In a nutshell, Paul teaches:

**For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive (1 Corinthians 15:22).**

But there are great dissimilarities as well. Death came through Adam, but Paul adds the **“much more”** in reference to Christ, followed by a small structure of glorious nouns and verbs: **“the grace of God...the gift by the grace (and how that gift) abounded to many.”** How is the gift greater than the offense? It is not in terms of pure numbers of those saved for the curse is universal but the gift particular.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> At least in terms of individuals saved. The gift will, though, eventually redeem all of creation.

But there are numerous ways in which the gift is superior.<sup>35</sup> For one, it is always easier to make a mess than to clean one up. As Thomas Schreiner notes:

**It is one thing to blemish what is beautiful, but it is much harder to set straight what is already crooked.**<sup>36</sup>

But it would appear, looking at the next verse, that the superiority of the last Adam goes even further.

**And the gift is not like *that which came through the one who sinned*. For the judgment *which came from one offense resulted in condemnation*, but the free gift *which came from many offenses resulted in justification* (Romans 5:16).**

### **The Superiority of Christ**

The superiority appears also in the magnitudes of Christ's victory. Adam committed one sin and from that one sin came death. But Christ did not merely die for that one sin—He did not die for Adam only. Jesus died for the countless offenses of all who would ever call on His name.

But the superiority goes even deeper.

Judgment and condemnation came to all in Adam, but the free gift resulted in justification (what might be called the gratuitous pardon of our sins). And here is a monumental difference—the blood of Christ delivers me from judgment and condemnation, but nothing can deliver me (if I can put it that way) from the grace of God—a point we see that Paul will hammer in granite when we get to chapter 8. It was something already taught by Jesus:

**My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch**

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<sup>35</sup> Some believe the “much more” refers not to a qualitative or quantitative superiority but merely to a surety, as if the “much more” is a reference to certainty.

<sup>36</sup> Schreiner, T. R. (1998). *Vol. 6: Romans*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (283-286). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.



**them out of My hand. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand (John 10:27-29).**

We should not view ourselves as having merely been brought back to the state of Adam's innocence. We have what Adam never had: a *certainty*.

**That sin and death will never triumph over (us).<sup>37</sup>**

Even in Adam's innocence it was possible for him to fall, to be condemned. But when the blood of Christ is applied to a sinner, that sinner becomes a saint, entering into an eternal covenant of grace and glory with his maker. When it comes to peace with God we can disregard our shaky legs and our troubled hearts.

Where Adam failed Christ did not fail. And as sure as there is sin in the world through Adam, we can have even greater confidence that there is a mansion in a glorious, sinless, uncorrupted eternity for those who are in Christ. To remain in Adam is to be subject to the reign of death. Do not remain in Adam.

**For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ (Romans 5:17).**

## **Leaving Adam**

Adam sinned; consequently, we have all sinned and death reigns. All people must do in order to remain in this damnable and pathetic legacy is *nothing*. One needn't contend for destruction; the one we need to contend for the faith. The reign of death merely requires the natural man to follow his natural inclinations—as the movies like to say: “Follow your heart.” There is, of course, an alternative. There is an exit. We can leave Adam and his eternal infection. John Calvin taught so many years ago:

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<sup>37</sup> Schreiner, T. R. (1998). *Vol. 6: Romans*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (283-286). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

**...in order to partake in the miserable inheritance of sin, it is enough for thee to be a man, for it dwells in flesh and blood; but in order to enjoy the righteousness of Christ it is necessary for thee to be a believer; for a participation of him is attained only by faith.<sup>38</sup>**

Righteousness that is acceptable to God is a righteousness which comes from God. It comes from the abundance of His grace and it is called a gift. Have you received that gift? It is the gift of life through the One, Christ.

## **Reign In Life**

What does it mean to “**reign in life?**” Some think it refers to ruling and reigning with Christ. I tend to think it is not so complicated. I think it means we will have and know true life. There is a morbid fascination in movies and television shows with the walking dead. Maybe we could put it to some use here. In these shows there is the horrifying expectation that the living might become one of those walking dead. Their lives, as difficult and miserable as they are, are superior to the walking dead because they still have an inkling of what it means to be alive, in the image of God, fearfully and wonderfully made. But given eyes to see, they would perceive that though they too are dead it has not been fully manifested. They cannot say with Paul, *for me to die is gain*.

The “**reign of life**” is true life as God had intended.

**“Life” is represented as the glorious territory or atmosphere of that reign.<sup>39</sup>**

**And he says, that it is by *one man*; for the Father has made him the fountain out of whose fullness all must draw. And thus he teaches us, that not even**

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<sup>38</sup> Calvin, J. (1998). Romans (electronic ed.). Calvin’s Commentaries (Ro 5:14-17). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

<sup>39</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Ro 5:15–17). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

**the least drop of life can be found out of Christ, — that there is no other remedy for our poverty and want, than what he conveys to us from his own abundance.<sup>40</sup>**

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<sup>40</sup> Calvin, J. (1998). *Romans* (electronic ed.). Calvin's Commentaries (Ro 5:14–17). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

## **Questions for Study and Meditation**

1. What battle rages in life? What does it look like? Who or what is actually in conflict? How does one engage? Whose side are you on?
2. What are the similarities between Adam and Christ? What are the dissimilarities?
3. In what ways is Christ superior to Adam?
4. How does one remain in Adam? How does one leave Adam?
5. What does it mean to reign in life? Can you say this of yourself?

# Romans 5:18-19

## *One Man's Obedience*

August 4, 2013

**Therefore, as through one man's offense *judgment* came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act *the free gift* came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous (Romans 5:18, 19).**

### **Introduction**

Many years ago our church made a self-conscious effort to form a more structured liturgy. Some people thought it was a good idea, others didn't. After making an effort to explain why we were doing this, a member asked the rhetorical question, "So you're doing this out of fear?" I wasn't sure if it was an encouragement or a criticism. The Bible speaks of fear in both positive and negative lights. A healthy fear of God is certainly a desired attribute, yet many times Jesus comforts the faithful with the words "fear not."

In a recent movie (one I didn't see) the ad for the movie coined the phrase, "The danger is real, but fear is a choice." Perhaps in some sense that might be true, but it certainly seems that fear can invade a person (like a virus or a strong breeze) and, at times, be for no obvious reason. There is no rational explanation for why we might fear some things and not fear others. There are psychiatrists who deal exclusively with what might be considered fears or phobias. This list of these types of things usually include: flying, public speaking, heights, the dark, intimacy, death (usually not at the top), failure, rejection, spiders, commitment, etc. I have come to recognize that there are things I fear that are silly, and other things that I should fear that don't bother me at all.

Toward the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus foretold a great number of fearful events that would soon befall the community and nation of His time. History indicates that there were those who were courageous and faithful during these things and others who were not.

But there was one event that was so fearful that even the bravest and most faithful crumbled.

Jesus spoke of a judgment that would soon inflict Jerusalem, centering on the destruction of the Temple (Matthew 24). Although we might think of the Olivet Discourse as a highly attended event, there appears to be an intimacy to it: **“the disciples came to Him privately” (Matthew 24:3)**. In that discourse Jesus taught of the unspeakable tragedies that would attend the destruction of the temple along with parables designed to prepare people for God’s judgment.

After Jesus taught all these things He reminded His disciples that in two days the Passover was coming and that He would be crucified (Matthew 26:2). The true Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7) stood before them. During this brief period some very intimate things took place. A woman with a very expensive flask of ointment poured it on Jesus’ head to prepare Him for burial (Matthew 26:12). We read that Judas plotted to betray Jesus (Matthew 26:14-16); this betrayal reached its climax during the very affectionate and communal experience of the Lord’s Supper when Judas dipped his hand in the dish with Jesus (Matthew 26:23). This would be like trying to drown somebody in the very blood they shed to save you.

We then read of the institution of the Lord’s Supper; Jesus in the very intimate setting with His disciples breaking bread and taking the cup and proclaiming His body broken and His blood shed for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:26-28). Then they sang a hymn (can you imagine singing a hymn with Jesus! Of course we should realize this is precisely what we do every time we gather for worship) and Jesus informed them of something that they didn’t seem prepared for. He told them they were all about to **“fall away” (Matthew 26:31)**; the Shepherd would be struck and the sheep would scatter. It wouldn’t be indefinitely, they would return, but the events that were about to transpire were events for which they could not muster up courage. It might easily be argued a great fear through them for which they had no answer.

Peter, of course, wouldn’t have it. His famous objection **“I will never fall away” (Matthew 26:33)** received what had to be a vexing response by Jesus, who prophesied Peter’s threefold denial. This could not have been much of a pep talk on the part of the Captain of their salvation (Hebrews 2:10). It wasn’t as if Jesus was trying to prepare them to succeed as much as He wanted them to recognize the

inevitability of their failure. It might be added that Peter stood brave against the soldiers and priests and Pharisee, drawing his sword, cutting off the ear of the high priest's servant (John 18:10). He would also eventually die for his faith on a cross of his own (John 21:18).

But as the hour drew near, when the cross of Christ was nigh, we begin to see all of these prophecies (and more that I have not mentioned), of course, come to pass and even the most faithful would scatter. There would be no one to lift the arms of Christ except for those who would lift them to crucify Him. The true Passover would be no group effort—no coalition, no committee, no militia, no team. It was as if God, in His providential oversight of the cross, emphasized Jesus in His isolation that we might know that the “**free gift**” resulting in “**justification of life**” came through “**one Man's righteous act.**”

**Therefore, as through one man's offense *judgment* came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act *the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life (Romans 5:18).***

### **One Man's Offense**

Paul, in this passage, has been comparing Christ to Adam; Adam was a “**type**” of Christ (Romans 5:14). In this comparison Paul has shown similarities and dissimilarities. One of the great similarities we see in these verses is the emphasis on the “**one man**” (in the Greek it is just the “one” *enos*). One needn't work too hard to show how Adam's offense was done in isolation since there was no one else on the planet except Eve and we've already discussed Adam's culpability in the sin as it relates to Eve.

Now we should not assume that Paul's emphasis of Adam's offense in any way alleviates our own sinfulness and our responsibility for our sins. But in the topic under our current consideration we need to know this—our failure is inevitable. We might tell people that redemption is found at the foot of the cross, and in a certain sense that might be true. But the bravest apostles (with the exception of John, who attended the mother of Jesus [John 19:24]) wouldn't go to the actual foot of the cross.

The point here is, in order for us to appreciate the magnitude of one Man's righteous act, we need to grasp the extent of the one man's offense. The consequence of one man's offense was judgment, resulting in condemnation. We, as a race, have been judged and condemned. People enjoy quoting Christ in saying, **"I did not come to judge the world but to save the world" (John 12:27)**. It is true that Jesus did not come to judge the world because the world was already under judgment. Why would He need to save something that wasn't under judgment—in need of saving?

Simply put, Adam created a mess into which we were all born. And the human race adds to that mess daily **"storing up wrath"** for ourselves **"on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed" (Romans 2:5)**. Again, we are culpable and volitional (decision making), but the genesis of our problem is found in the book of Genesis. The judgment and condemnation of the human race, its inevitable failure to find redemption or properly govern itself in any positive direction, is the fruit of Adam's offense. And if death reminds us of anything, it reminds us that there is no way out—well, almost no way out.

## **One Man's Righteous Act**

Perhaps by now we are feeling victimized by Adam. Paul emphasizes **"one man's offense"** and *that one man wasn't me*—at least not as a volitional, decision-making participant (as if I would have done better than Adam). Nonetheless, feeling victimized by Adam might be a useful tool right about now. A true and pure victim is one who finds themselves in a state or condition through no fault of their own (which seldom happens). *There was simply nothing they could have done!*

As I said, this might be helpful when we think the same way regarding the **"free gift"** resulting in **"justification of life."** When it comes to **"justification of life"** (the righteousness requisite to be pardoned before God) there is simply nothing we can do. If we were to turn the feeling of being a victim because of Adam on its head, instead of saying something like "how am I guilty and condemned in Adam?" (again, let us not forget that we are sinners worthy of judgment) I might say something like "how is it I am acquitted and accounted righteous in Christ?" I wasn't on the cross with Christ, I



didn't bleed for my own sins, I didn't feel the wrath of God, I didn't remain a righteous lamb, I would have most assuredly been among the ones who scattered. I offer no virtue, no humility, no righteous act, and yet...*I am accounted righteous?* Paul now dials in his point.

**For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous (Romans 5:19).**

### **Made Sinners**

Last week's sermon was entitled *The Devil Made Me Do It* where we saw how Christ discussed the work and purpose of God's use of the devil. Years ago a comedian named Flip Wilson used the phrase in a way to excuse his own behavior—an excuse I am quite sure God is not buying. Similarly, the above verse could be used by those who might argue that *Adam Made Me Do It*—again, an argument that God is not going to buy. But in the context of the subject before us, it is true that we are made sinners through Adam's single act of disobedience. It was not all of his offenses, for there were surely many after the fall, but the condition of sin, judgment and condemnation in the world was through the “**one offense.**” Adam is our federal head. He was head of the human race and represented us all. And because of his disobedience we were made sinners.

No wonder that many used Paul's doctrine to justify their own sin and neglect. Paul has quick works for them:

**And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just (Romans 3:8).**

**What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound (Romans 6:1)?**

**What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means (Romans 6:15).**

## Made Righteous

Paul won't suffer the sophistry of those who seek to justify their own rebellious hearts. We are made sinners in Adam and we are made righteous in Christ and there are attributes which accompany those who are made righteous in Christ which Paul will pursue in the chapters to come.

The point here is that in the same way that it was through one man's disobedience that men were made sinners, it is through one Man's obedience that many will be made righteous. It is through the obedience of One—the obedience of Christ, the Lamb without blemish (1 Peter 1:19)—that men, infected by the sin of Adam and willfully living out that infection by our very thoughts, deeds and actions, can find a righteousness before God. Calvin taught:

**And then, as he declares that we are made righteous through the obedience of Christ, we hence conclude that Christ, in satisfying the Father, has provided a righteousness for us. It then follows, that righteousness is in Christ, and that it is to be received by us as what peculiarly belongs to him.**<sup>41</sup>

Paul elsewhere writes:

**Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith (Philippians 3:8, 9).**

Are you still in Adam? Or do you have that faith—that righteousness which is not your own but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith?

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<sup>41</sup> Calvin, J. (1998). *Romans* (electronic ed.). Calvin's Commentaries (Ro 5:18). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

## **Questions for Study and Meditation**

1. Is fear good or bad? Is fear reasonable or unreasonable? Explain your answers.
2. What did Jesus teach would happen to His followers as He came closer to the cross? Why do you think He taught them this?
3. What happened as a consequence of Adam's offense?
4. Does the fall of man in Adam excuse me from my own personal sins? Why or why not?
5. How does my condition in Adam help me better understand my condition in Christ?
6. In Adam men were made sinners and in Christ men are made righteous. How does this take place? Are you in Adam or in Christ?



# Romans 5:20-21

*The Law Entered*

August 11, 2013

**Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 5:20, 21).**

## Introduction

We live in rapidly shifting times. Here in 2013 people make jokes about how a certain song or fashion might be *so 2012*. When I was a senior in high school in 1973 a movie called *American Graffiti* was produced. It was a period piece—a days-gone-by movie about high schoolers and the decisions they were faced with in life. It was very nostalgic and I recall thinking how cool it would have been to live in those days. But the days-gone-by period was 1962; I was alive in 1962. A mere 11 years had transpired.

But 1962 in America looked very little like 1973. Music was different, fashions were very different, the relationship between the things of God and the functions of society were being severely redefined. The constraints of biblical morality, which has since been renamed *traditional values*, were loosened, if not tossed away altogether. **“Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us” (Psalm 2:3)** could have been the mission statement of that decade in American history.

In the throes of this national moral downturn came the response in the late 70s of an organization known as the Moral Majority founded by Jerry Falwell. Its membership of millions began to play a significant role in American politics with the formation of the New Christian Right, perhaps reaching its apex during the Reagan administration. Then, in the late 1980s, Falwell declared “Our goal has been achieved” and the organization dissolved.

People—even Christian people—have mixed thoughts about the notion of a Christian Right or some type of religious presence in politics. That has become very apparent to me during the past six or seven years, having written about 70 socio-political columns in a

secular newspaper. Some of you are here today as a result of these columns while others are still running in the opposite direction. There are brands of theology which seek to either vilify or stress the insignificance of promoting a religious ethic in the public venue. The arguments sound plausible when given a fleeting glance: One cannot legislate a changed heart; a nation's hope is not built upon legal codes and prescriptions; you shouldn't force religion upon an unwilling people, etc.

Of course, these types of arguments ignore the necessary fact that for a nation, any nation, to function there must be legal codes, and those codes must have some moral foundation. Because a person is unwilling or incapable of identifying the source of their political ethics doesn't eliminate the reality that every time they vote they are seeking to force their beliefs upon those with whom they disagree.

I have addressed these types of issues elsewhere and won't labor it further here except to say that I can't speak with authority regarding the motives of the Christian Right or the Moral Majority in their political pursuits, but the brief passage before us this morning speaks loudly regarding the importance of a widespread proclamation of what is right, what is wrong and how and why we make those types of distinctions.

**Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more (Romans 5:20).**

### **The Law Entered**

In an epistle where Paul is seeking to sort out problems related to the Jew/gentile distinctions, significant ink has been dedicated to Adam. Of course, Adam was not a Jew. In chapter 4 Paul had referenced Abraham and David; Paul's Jewish readers might have been wondering why Paul is going so far back in history to make his point. What about the Israelite? What about the law?

That **"the law entered"** here is a clear reference to Moses and the Ten Commandments. There were many reasons for the entrance of Mosaic law/administration into the course of human events. It more clearly defines the standards for the restraint of evil (1 Timothy 1:8-11); it reveals the behavior commensurate with true love

(Matthew 22:36-40; 1 John 5:3); it reveals to us the character and nature of God and much more.

But here Paul writes that the law entered in order **“that the offense might abound.”** What could he mean by that? Why would God want the offense to about? A variety of answers are given: Some think (Augustine, for one) that it is the nature of man to rebel against given laws. For example, how many fingerprints might you find on a button that says does ‘Do Not Touch’? Though this might be true of human nature, I don’t think it is Paul’s point in this passage.

Others have suggested that the offenses are due to the thorough and numerous laws given. The Torah (the Law) is thick with precepts, standards, exhortations, codes, law—there are more offenses because there are more laws. This certainly is true as well. Righteousness, according to the will of God, is much deeper and broader than any of us could possibly imagine. I don’t doubt that at perhaps some level Paul has both of the above in mind when he writes the words, **“that the offense might abound.”** But I think Paul’s point is clearly and briefly given in the chapters to come:

**What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet” (Romans 7:7).**

**Did that which is good (i.e. the law), then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown (lit. *to shine*) to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure (Romans 7:13—parenthesis mine).**

The law of God shines, as it were, a bright light upon our sin. As Paul taught in Galatians:

**Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions... (Galatians 3:19).**

Calvin taught:

**He indeed teaches us, that it was needful that men’s ruin should be more fully discovered to them, in order that a passage might be opened for the favor of God. They were indeed shipwrecked before the law was given; as however they seemed to themselves to swim, while in their destruction, they were thrust down into the deep, that their deliverance might appear more evident, when they thence emerge beyond all human expectation. Nor was it unreasonable, that the law should be partly introduced for this end — that it might again condemn men already condemned; for nothing is more reasonable than that men should, through all means be brought, nay, forced, by being proved guilty, to know their own evils.<sup>42</sup>**

It might be a healthy introspection to ask ourselves if we are indeed shipwrecked, despite how we may seem to ourselves to be swimming. Can we say with Paul that the law shined its bright light on our sin so as to produce death in us that we might acknowledge our wretched estate and seek deliverance **“through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 7:24, 25)?**

If the entrance of the law served to highlight the sin of man that we might seek deliverance in Christ, would the law not serve that purpose perennially and universally? Would there come a time, this side of glory, when the law of God would fail to reveal sin? If the publication of the law of God was useful to the entire nation of Israel to expose their corruption and need for grace, should it not continued to be published so that all men and women might recognize their spiritual incapacitation and seek to find rest in the grace of God?

Those who would criticize the heralding of the law of God in the name of the gospel have, perhaps unwittingly, become enemies of the gospel, especially when it so obviously falls within the character of all men to not only to sin but to redefine the very nature of it. This is something we’re beginning to see with regularity and of which the Scriptures prominently speak:

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<sup>42</sup> Calvin, J. (1998). Romans (electronic ed.). Calvin’s Commentaries (Ro 5:20). Albany, OR: Ages Software.



**He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord (Proverbs 17:15).**

**You have wearied the Lord with your words. But you say, “How have we wearied him?” By saying, “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them.” Or by asking, “Where is the God of justice” (Malachi 2:17)?**

**Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness (Luke 11:35).**

**Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter (Isaiah 5:20)!**

## **Abounding Grace**

It is through the law of God that God graciously reveals to us that we are bound by sin. It is like an x-ray, which reveals that our hearts are of stone. But when Paul writes that where **“sin abounded, grace abounded much more”**, he is once again highlighting the superior nature of the last Adam over the first. Years ago there was a television show entitled *The Six Million Dollar Man*. It was about a man who had been in a terrible accident, but because of the technology of bionics they were able to fix him—and not only fix him but make him superior to what he had been. He would be “stronger, faster.”

The destruction and devastation of sin in our lives and in this world pales in comparison to the power, glory and grace accomplished by the person and work of Christ:

**The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound (Isaiah 61:1).**

**...so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 5:21).**

## **Sin or Grace?**

This final verse of the chapter is interesting in that it forms a somewhat unnatural comparison. One might think Paul would contrast the reign of sin with the reign of righteousness or even obedience. He appears to be so focused on the righteousness that comes by grace through faith that he contrasts the reign of sin with the reign of grace.

In chapter 6 Paul will begin to address human behavior, or more specifically the behavior of Christians. But the culmination of chapter 5 is the **“righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”** God had made a promise, a covenant which He fulfilled in sending His own Son to die for sinners.

**For your name’s sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great (Psalm 25:11).**

**Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old (Micah 7:18-20).**

Any study of the history of humanity will readily expose the works of Adam. Destruction and misery are the universal fruit of his rebellion. But since the time of the cross of Christ, we also see sparks of redemption. We see the fruit of grace flowing from those who have called upon His name—those who have been obedient servants. But we must never lose sight of the seed, of the root, of that which is central—that which we see through **“a door standing open in**

heaven” (Revelation 4:1)—perhaps more so what we *hear* when the elders fell down before the Lamb:

**And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9).**

Paul wrote many “**hard to understand**” things (2 Peter 2:16). But some were quite simple:

**The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost (1 Timothy 1:15).**

There certainly is a danger that Christianity be reduced to a political force or a mere lifestyle method—where Jesus is reduced to a super life-coach. As we prepare for the Lord’s Table this morning, let us remember that front-and-center in our minds and hearts is the saying that is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance—that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

## **Questions for Study and Meditation**

1. What are your thoughts about the Moral Majority or Christian Right—Strengths and weaknesses?
2. What does it mean that “the law entered”?
3. In what respect did the “offense...abound”?
4. What is the value of heralding the law of God as it pertains to this passage?
5. What are some examples in our culture where good is called evil and vice-versa?
6. What does it mean that “grace abounded much more”?
7. Why does Paul compare sin to grace rather than to righteousness?
8. What is the primary message of the good news?

# Romans 6:1-4

*Newness of Life*

September 1, 2013

**What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Romans 6:1-4).**

## Introduction

While seeking to unravel and re-stitch the tattered fabric of lives torn asunder by the tentacles of egregious sinful behavior, I was asked a question by the perpetrator. Appearing to be growing impatient with how long the restoration was taking, they (almost rhetorically) asked, “Well, there’s forgiveness, right?” The question was posed as if they were speaking of a warrantee on a broken dishwasher or car insurance for a fender-bender. They seemed to be under the impression, at some level, that Christianity meant they could sin with impunity or that it was some meager bump in the road.

It made me think of a common complaint, or at least confusion, regarding Christianity—that Christians can do whatever they want and just be forgiven. The blood of Christ becomes this limitless debit card that can be continuously swiped through all the ATMs during a debased Spring Break odyssey; it is, after all, woven into human nature, even our regenerate human nature, to be sinful. *There is forgiveness, right?*

Numerous theological trends have contributed to this error. Some Christian systems have consigned the law (since “**sin is lawlessness**” [1 John 3:4]) to a defunct dispensation, so the vast majority of Scripture which defines sin (the Old Testament) no longer applies. Others believe that when Paul says Christ is “**the end of the law**” (Romans 10:4), Paul is seeking to usher in a new system of ethics derived from the Spirit which may or may not be consistent

with the law revealed in Scripture. Still others insist that man, being made in the image of God, has access to a sufficient system of ethics via his observation of the natural world.

The Apostle Paul himself had been accused of being *antinomian* (against the law of God):

**And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just (Romans 3:8).**

It is not very difficult to gather from certain passages in Scripture that people used their freedom in Christ as a backstage pass for licentious behavior:

**For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another (Galatians 5:13).**

**Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God (1 Peter 2:16).**

The passage upon which we meditate this morning begins by addressing a similar issue. Paul had just finished explaining how grace can out-jump sin—“**where sin abounded, grace abounded more**” (Romans 5:20). No matter how deep the hole in which we find ourselves due to our lawlessness, offenses, and sin—grace doesn’t merely bring us back to the surface, but elevates us out of the hole and straight to heaven “**through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord**” (Romans 5:21).

He then begins chapter six with the rhetorical question:

**What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound (Romans 6:1)?**

Perhaps we can best demonstrate this tortured logic with a syllogism:

*Premise one:* God likes to demonstrate His grace.

*Premise two:* God demonstrates His grace when I sin.

*Conclusion:* I should continue to sin so that God can do what He likes to do.

*Another possible conclusion:* **“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).**

It would be like me helping my wife clean the house and she says “thank you” and I say “It’s an honor to help you, honey. I enjoy it!” so she empties the trash can in the middle of the living room so I can help her even more. Paul answers his own question with a very firm “*me genoito*” or...

**Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it (Romans 6:2)?**

## **Dead to Sin**

Unlike many politicians, Paul is not shy about giving the answer right up front with the explanation to follow. Whatever your understanding of grace, if it somehow fosters a liberty from practicing goodness, righteousness and holiness, you’re either misunderstanding it or you’re not in it. Because Paul then asks another question, and the question contains some information about Christians. They are people **“who died to sin.”** It is in the aorist tense (past tense) and the indicative mood (indicating a state of being as opposed to a command or an imperative).

The imperatives will come later in the chapter (verses 11-13 and others), but here Paul appeals to the reasonable expectation of behavior based upon something that has happened to a person. When Jesus said **“rise, pick up your bed, and go home” (Mark 2:11)** to the paralytic, He said it recognizing something significant had transpired (or was at that moment transpiring) in order for the man to obey.

When Paul writes **“How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”** it’s as if he is saying “You’ve been healed of your paralysis; why do you stay in your bed, or continue using a wheel

chair or crutches?” Something significant has happened *for*, and *to*, those who have placed their faith in Christ.

For many chapters we have rejoiced in what has happened *for* us—in short, by the obedience of Christ, we were **“made righteous” (Romans 5:19)** in the eyes of God. But this is something that happened outside of us, on a cross on Calvary. Our hope of peace with God is found outside of ourselves; our eyes are fixed upon Jesus (Hebrews 12:2).

But here Paul writes of something that happened *to* us—we **“died to sin.”** So in Paul’s mind it makes no sense at all that we would continue to **“live any longer in it.”** But what do these phrases mean? What does it mean to be dead to sin? What does it mean to cease living in it? Because sin certainly does appear to continue to be a pesky foe—it’s not as if sin itself died. And what does it mean to no longer live in something that rears its ugly head at every turn in our existence?

In order to explain himself, Paul pushes our thinking with this somewhat difficult passage utilizing something that has happened to everyone who is a member of this church—baptism.

**Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3, 4).**

## **Baptism**

One might ask why Paul uses the example of baptism here. For one, in the sacrament(s) God graciously provides an image for His children to more accurately grasp His covenant (His promise, His grace) and their favored status in His eyes—it would be like a mom painting a picture while holding hands with her toddler so the child can more vividly enjoy their mother’s love for them.

This is not to diminish the sacraments into a child’s project; certainly the sacraments (baptism and the Lord’s Supper) contain the very spiritual presence of Christ and can be the source of great blessings or curses. Nonetheless, they seem to be God’s way of helping us see things more clearly. It should also be noted that for



Paul it would have been quite unheard of for a believer not to have been baptized, so he might have used the terms *convert* and *baptized* synonymously.

One other thing we need to be warned against is the notion that the sacraments are magic and work *ex opere operato* (out of the operation they operate or from the work done). Like the Ark of the Covenant or the splitting of the Red Sea, the sacraments will do something—guidance and deliverance for some, boils and devastation for others. Calvin explains:

**In short, he teaches what is the real character of baptism when rightly received. So he testifies to the Galatians, that all who have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. (Galatians 3:27.) Thus indeed must we speak, as long as the institution of the Lord and the faith of the godly unite together; for we never have naked and empty symbols, except when our ingratitude and wickedness hinder the working of divine beneficence.<sup>43</sup>**

Any participation in any biblical or godly enterprise must be taken in faith, lest it be a source of judgment rather than blessing. **“Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required” (Luke 12:48).**

## **Baptized Into His Death**

The words of Christ above should sink deep while we are considering how Paul uses the idea of baptism here. We generally think of baptism as cleansing, and it certainly includes that. But Paul here says we should, in pondering our baptism, realize that when we were baptized into Christ Jesus, we were baptized into His death. So in what might be called a sacramental sense, we have died to sin. Therefore, when we look to the death of Christ and our participation in it through baptism (or conversion), we are reminded of death to sin.

And again, this is not merely a pep talk to overcome bad habits the way we might speak to anyone who wants to do better in

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<sup>43</sup> Calvin, J. (1998). *Romans* (electronic ed.). Calvin’s Commentaries (Ro 6:4). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

life. Those who trust in Christ have been set free from the shackles of sin—we are **“no longer slaves of sin” (Romans 6:6)**.

Going back to our questions, what does it mean to be **“dead to sin”** in an experiential sense? Because, if we’re honest, we recognize that we’re way more alive to sin than we’d like to admit. It might be helpful here to call upon Paul’s language in chapter five where he wrote of the **“reign” of “sin”** versus the **“reign” of “grace” (Romans 5:21)**. Because if **“dead to sin”** means no longer having any reaction whatsoever to the temptations of the world, flesh and devil, one is hard-pressed to find one candidate in all of Scripture (except Christ Himself) who fits the bill.

It might make more sense for us to recognize that when the regenerating work of the Spirit opens our eyes to the truth of Christ, granting us faith by which we are justified before God (Romans 5:1), that same life-giving work also opens our eyes to a new Master and effectively ignites our resolve to follow Him. Notice below that, what clearly anticipates what baptism represents (cleansing), includes another promise:

**Then I will sprinkle clean water (baptism) on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them* (Ezekiel 36:25-27—parenthesis mine).**

When we are cleansed through the waters of baptism (the blood of Christ), we are not put on the mantle like some inactive, pristine trophy. Schreiner explains it this way:

**The forensic, or legal, dimension (justified by faith) cannot ultimately be separated from the transformative change in the lives of believers (parenthesis mine).<sup>44</sup>**

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<sup>44</sup> Schreiner, T. R. (1998). *Vol. 6: Romans*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (305). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

Elsewhere, Paul says it a little differently:

**For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:8-10).**

Being “**baptized into Christ Jesus...into His death**” takes us beyond the status of mere cleansed artifacts, to the doers of good works. Paul makes the comparison of Jesus being raised from the dead to Christians walking in “**newness of life.**” We are a workmanship with moving parts. There is a behavioral overhaul! When God calls us and puts His name upon us, He shows us the terrain of life from an entirely renewed perspective. Like a child whose new video game just popped onto the screen and they are itching to get started. This is the reasonable disposition of the Christian.

To die to sin does not mean we no longer contend with sin but that sin has lost its dominion over us. Prior to faith in Christ we all were willing slaves to sin (Romans 6:6). But that taskmaster has been slain. There’s a new sheriff in town—a loving, benevolent, life-giving sheriff. The old sheriff was a thief who came only to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10). Paul seems to be addressing a disposition in the church where Christians are living as if that old despotic master is still calling the shots.

So we’re hit with what appears to be dumbfounding to Paul—*if you’re dead to sin, how can you live in it?* We need to make a distinction between contending with sin and living in sin. It is one thing to recognize a sin or fault, repent and seek forgiveness; it is quite another thing to redefine sin, or content ourselves to embrace it as either acceptable behavior or a way of life.

Is there forgiveness? Certainly there is. This goes to the heart of the faith. When we go to the Lord’s Table we are depending on it. But notice how the Apostle John prefaces his reference to the great advocate we have in Christ:

**My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (1 John 2:1).**

He doesn't write, "If you sin, don't worry about it...you have an advocate!" No. **"That you may not sin"** is his exhortation. This is a strong exhortation, so much so, that earlier he wrote, **"If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth" (1 John 1:6).**

So you see the answer to the opening questions. Of course there is forgiveness! There must be, or what hope do we have?! But to have the attitude that I can just sin all I want betrays an unregenerate (unsaved) heart. Those who have been baptized into Christ Jesus are baptized into His death, which means that along with being cleansed from our sins, we will dead to sin and seek to **"walk in newness of life."**

## **Questions for Study and Meditation**

1. What are some common complaints you've heard about how it's okay for Christians to sin and just get forgiveness? How do you respond to that?
2. What are some ways people have redefined sin?
3. What is *antinomianism*?
4. How did some people in the Bible use grace or freedom to endorse antinomianism?
5. Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Explain what was meant by that question and how Paul responded to it.
6. How does Paul use the sacrament of baptism to explain his point?
7. Are Christians dead to sin? Do you feel like you're dead to sin? What does it mean to be dead to sin?



# Romans 6:5-11

*Dead to Sin, Alive to God*

September 8, 2013

**For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:5-11).**

## Introduction

In verses one through four of this chapter, we addressed the practice of some professing Christians and the objections of non-Christians regarding Christian behavior (specifically, sinful behavior) and forgiveness. We certainly shouldn't be seeking to earn heaven through good works but rather by faith in Christ alone. At the same time, we should not view the forgiveness found in the blood of Christ as something that grants facile, diplomatic immunity for the guilt and consequences of sin.

A truly faithful Christian is one who has **“died to sin”** as the reigning master in his/her life. He/she may contend with sin, but having been **“baptized into Christ Jesus...(we) were baptized into His death”** and by this union with Christ, **“just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of Father, even so we should walk in newness of life.”** Christians seek to obey because when they are saved they are changed.

The person who is genuinely saved—who can, with confidence, rejoice in the sure expectation of eternal life—is the person who seeks to walk in holiness.

**Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14).**

It is with great pastoral concern (notice the words in verse six: **“Let no one deceive you”**) that Paul writes:

**For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret (Ephesians 5:5-12).**

John writes of the great love of God, that we might be called His children. Then he writes in verse three of the response of those who have this hope:

**See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure (1 John 3:1-3).**

As we mentioned last week, the promise of cleansing (Ezekiel 36:25) also contains a promise of causation to walk in the statutes of



God (Ezekiel 36:27). It's as if Paul, in this passage, is telling us what has happened to us when we were saved.

Young elephants, I've been told, are held in place by being chained by the leg to a metal stake hammered into the ground. The small elephant seeks freedom, but because the stake holds them they finally quit seeking freedom. When they grow older, even though they can easily pull the stake from the ground, they just don't. They don't know what has happened to them. The Apostle Paul is explaining to us what has happened. We're living as if we are still chained to sin when in reality we have **"died to sin"** and have been **"freed from sin."** And here he is not merely writing of the eternal consequences of sin, but of the power of sin as a master who we must obey (Romans 6:12).

His explanation begins with the conditional conjunction **"If"** ("If" *ei* in Greek is the first word in the sentence); if this, then that.<sup>45</sup>

**For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his (Romans 6:5).**

### **United With Christ**

The word **"united"** *symphytoi* means to be planted together and become formed together. One might think of branches on a tree woven into one another and, therefore, always staying with each other. Simply put, Paul is teaching us that where Jesus goes, we go. Did not Jesus teach the same? How comforting it must have been for the troubled hearts of the apostles to hear this great promise:

**Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also (John 14:1-3).**

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<sup>45</sup> The inference rule *modus tollens*, also known as the **law of contrapositive**. If *p* then *q*.

Paul is using the resurrection of Christ instructively here—having been baptized into Christ, into His death, we shall be in the likeness of His resurrection. Although we will be physically resurrected as Christ was (1 Corinthians 15:50-54), Paul here is using the resurrection of Christ to inform us of a current condition—**“the efficacy of his resurrection, in renewing within us a spiritual nature.”**<sup>46</sup>

Certainly, in the final resurrection our battle with sin will end and we will know the fullness of peace and glory. But we shouldn't live now as if we currently have no part in that. We shouldn't say to ourselves, “Won't that be great? But for now I will resign myself to wallow in an inevitable sinful life.” Paul further illustrates his point by our own crucifixion.

**We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin (Romans 6:6).**

### **Crucified With Christ**

The old man, the man who was in Adam and enslaved to sin, was crucified with Christ. When someone wishes to dramatically emphasize how they are no longer in a relationship, they might say: “I am dead to you.” This is the Christian's current relationship to sin. We are no longer wed to sin, bound to sin, enslaved to sin.

In a recent discussion I asked an old friend about his family members. He said his sister had divorced. I asked what happened. After years of marriage she reconnected with a former boyfriend on Facebook. A romantic relationship—a romantic relationship which should have been counted as dead—was revived.

It is not always easy to determine when lines are crossed; it takes wisdom. But if I might offer an easy example: If you flash an inappropriate magazine in front of a dead person, they will have no reaction to it. They won't look; they're dead to it. In the same way, we were enslaved to sin, but...

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<sup>46</sup> Calvin, J. (1998). *Romans* (electronic ed.). Calvin's Commentaries (Ro 6:5). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

**...being grafted in Christ, we are delivered from this miserable thralldom; not that we immediately cease entirely to sin, but that we become at last victorious in the contest.<sup>47</sup>**

One of the reasons I've always enjoyed wrestling is because there are seldom upsets. The best wrestler almost always wins. It is not uncommon for an exceptional wrestler to have a record of 63-1. They might not always pin their opponent, and it's not as if they are immune to attack; points may be scored against them. But they are winning from the moment they touch the mat. It's just a matter of time. What we learn about ourselves in this passage is that we will no longer be the one dominated by the opponent. Paul continues:

**For one who has died has been set free from sin (Romans 6:7).**

### **Set Free**

It's an interesting translation because **"set free"** *dedikaiotai* is the word elsewhere translated **"justified."** I imagine if Paul were concerned with writing a systematic theology, this might not be the best word since when we think of justification we generally think of what happened *for* us rather than what has happened *in* us or *to* us.

But Paul naturally attaches justification with all the benefits thereof. The judge does not merely acquit us—He loves us. By the blood of Christ He adopts us, He sanctifies us, and He puts His name upon us and makes us His heir. Christians have been set free from sin and all its tentacles.

Paul again begins the next sentence with a conditional conjunction (again the first word in Greek is "if").

**Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him (Romans 6:8).**

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<sup>47</sup> Calvin, J. (1998). *Romans* (electronic ed.). Calvin's Commentaries (Ro 6:6). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

## If Dead, Then Alive

The premise **“we have died”** necessitates the conclusion **“we will also live with Him.”** This seems almost unnecessary to state; yet it is critical. For as the hymn<sup>48</sup> teaches, in the church “there are false sons in her pale.” Peter also gives warning that **“there will be false teachers among you...waterless springs and mists driven by a storm...speaking loud boasts of folly...(who are) themselves slaves of corruption...what the true proverb says has happened to them: ‘The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire (2 Peter 2:1-22).’”** These were people in the church, people who **“knew the way of righteousness,”** but they hadn’t died with Christ because if they had they would also live with him.

Paul will make a statement in verses nine and ten which will be followed by the word **“likewise”** *houtos* (thusly or “in this way” which, in Greek is the first word in verse eleven).

**We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God (Romans 6:9, 10).**

## Dead to Sin, Alive to God

This very profound doctrine we will only touch on in order to stay on point. Jesus submitted Himself to death, but swallowed up death forever (Isaiah 25:8) in His resurrection. When Paul writes that Christ **“died to sin”** he is not suggesting that Jesus Himself finally stopped sinning, but rather that He underwent death on account of sin (our sins) and He ever lives to the glory of God.

**So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:11).**

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<sup>48</sup> The Church’s One Foundation  
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## Reckon Yourselves

Now we see the imperative: **“considers yourselves dead to sin”** or **“reckon yourselves dead to sin.”** Let’s see if we can appreciate the comparison and the charge: Jesus, though sinless, immersed Himself in sin (our sin) and became sin (2 Corinthians 5:21), but in His resurrection sin and death were conquered; they are defeated foes—defeated forever. And now He ever lives to the glory of God. The Christian who has been **“united/engrafted”** into Christ—**“baptized into Christ Jesus...baptized into His death” (Romans 6:4)**—is to reckon himself that way: as one who is dead to sin and alive to God. We are not to flirt with it, play with it or entertain it any more than we might imagine Christ doing such things.

And we are to reckon ourselves thusly not as engaged in wishful thinking against the reality of the case—we are to so reckon ourselves as dead to sin because it is who we are and what we have been granted by Christ...

**...who now vivifies the faithful by his Spirit, or breathes his own life into them by his secret power from heaven, (He) was freed from the dominion of death when he arose, that by virtue of the same dominion he might render free all his people.<sup>49</sup>**

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<sup>49</sup> Calvin, J. (1998). *Romans* (electronic ed.). Calvin’s Commentaries (Ro 6:9). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

## **Questions for Study and Meditation**

1. Review Romans 6:1-4. What are some attributes that are true of the Christian? Why do Christians seek to live holy lives?
2. What is the reasonable and necessary fruit of those who are children of God?
3. What does it mean to be united to Christ? How are these words both comforting and challenging?
4. In what respect is our old man crucified with Christ? What does that look like in your life?
5. Have you been “set free” from sin? How did that happen? What does it mean/not mean?
6. What is the necessary result of having died with Christ? Why is this important to know?
7. How are Christians to consider/reckon themselves? Why is this a realistic appraisal of ourselves?

# **Romans 6:12-14**

*Do Not Let Sin Reign*

September 15, 2013

**Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace (Romans 6:12-14).**

## **Introduction**

I have found that one of the most difficult elements of sound parenting is juridical—the administration of justice. It's not difficult because of a lack of knowledge of right and wrong (although that may be a factor) or because we don't know what the proper penalty should be for a particular infraction (though that may be a factor as well). What I have found difficult is to render an accurate verdict, since I am generally not an eye-witness of the crime.

Children master the art of pleading special, mitigating or extenuating circumstances. There is often a background to the inappropriate behavior that must be considered. In sports they say that it is often the second foul that gets noticed by the referee; he doesn't see the initial elbow to the opponent which instigated the brawl.

In the final analysis, pure justice in the home will never happen. It is a parent's prayer that their children won't need it, that they will seek to do right in the eyes of a God who sees all.

**Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ (Colossians 3:23, 24).**

And it's not merely the home where justice is elusive. It is in the church as well. One of the marks of a true church is its willingness to exercise church discipline when necessary. But this, as well, is fraught with difficulty when seeking to ascertain an accurate assessment of what has actually happened. So, similarly, it is the prayer of pastors and elders that the members of a congregation would take their faith to heart. We live in a Christian culture where the behavior of those who profess Christ is nearly indistinguishable from the surrounding world. Like David, our deeds **"have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme" (2 Samuel 12:14)**. The church has in many ways become an object of ridicule, as God said of Israel,

**...then I will cut off Israel from the land that I have given them, and the house that I have consecrated for my name I will cast out of my sight, and Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples (1 Kings 9:7).**

This is not to say that there is no true church and the promised attending persecution of that true church. But it can become easy to mistake legitimate ridicule for persecution. This kind of embarrassing behavior was present in the church gathering at Rome, to whom Paul wrote this epistle. In light of their stealing, adultery, idolatry and general law breaking (Romans 2:21-23), Paul pens these words:

**For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you" (Romans 2:24).**

Throughout the course of this chapter, Paul is addressing the behavior of those who consider themselves Christians. He has made it clear that it should be unacceptable for the faithful to view the forgiveness found in Christ as a license for continued sin (Romans 6:1). By virtue of our union with Christ (which union is signified by baptism) we died to sin and are to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:2-4).

Paul has offered a list of indicatives (statements of what *is* rather than what *should be*) informing Christians of who they are and



what has happened, not merely for them, but to or in them. Christians are united to Christ (Romans 6:5), our old man is crucified with Christ (Romans 6:6), we've been set free from sin as a master (Romans 6:7), and in the same way Christ has overcome sin (died to sin) and lives to God, we should reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to God (Romans 6:9-11).

How many opportunities did we have this very week to practice being dead to sin? And being dead to sin, by the way, does not merely mean to avoid doing the wrong thing. It also includes the need to do the right thing—a kind word, a helpful gesture, some recognition of a need we can fulfill, the courage to correct and the willingness to be corrected. Our confession accurately teaches:

**Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.<sup>50</sup>**

Now Paul seems to move away from the indicatives and begins to pile on the imperatives. Some suggest that he will now call Christians to “become what you are.” Schreiner views it to be more accurately put by saying: “become what you are becoming.”<sup>51</sup>

**Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts (Romans 6:12).**

### **The King and His Orders**

Sin wants to be king and he is giving his orders. The word “**reign**” *basileueto* can be translated “king.” And the orders which proceed from his dark counsel are that we should obey our “**lusts**” *epithymia*, meaning our desires, longings, cravings. This king wants to plant his throne in our “**mortal body**” (simply meaning “me”) and is directing me to go, simply put, wherever I feel like going.

In light of who we are and what we have become in Christ, our desires (to the extent that they push us to disobey the law of God—to love God and love our neighbors) have become usurpers.

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<sup>50</sup> *The Westminster Shorter Catechism: With Scripture Proofs*. 1996 (3rd edition.). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>51</sup> Schreiner, T. R. (1998). *Vol. 6: Romans*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (321). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

There is an enemy in the camp who is trying to call the shots. We might even call this enemy the “real me” because it is the way I genuinely feel. But it is a boney, skeletal relic of our former self and the “*real real me*,” the one who is baptized in Christ into His death, this new man is called to “**put off...the old self**” (Ephesians 4:22), to send him packing.

The imperative “**do not let sin reign**” is not some flimsy option attached to the indicative of having died to sin (Romans 6:2). The indicative is made manifest in the tangible following through of the imperative. Whether or not we seek to obey is a sure indicator of the path we are on, as Paul will make clear: “**whether sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness**” (Romans 6:16).

It might also be pointed out that without the indicative (union with Christ) the imperative (the call to obey God’s commands) becomes a ministry of death (2 Corinthians 3:7). What we are speaking of here is the necessary fruit of saving faith. Christians are to recognize and resist sin’s desires to rule in our hearts, which inevitably extends to our actions addressed in verse 13.

**And do not present your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God (Romans 6:13).**

## Treason

To “**present**” *paristemi* means to place beside, to put at someone’s disposal. “**Members**” *mele* refers to a part of your body—a limb, an eye (Matthew 5:29)—but can also refer to anything what we say or do. And an “**instrument**” *hoplon* is a tool or weapon (2 Corinthians 6:7; 10:4). The evil king of sin is seeking to set his tent in the ruling post of our camp. He would have us serve him by encouraging us to do as we feel, thus placing at his disposal the weapons of our words and actions.

It’s treason!

And we need to wise up because the victims are often the ones we love, they most certainly include all we should love, and what’s at stake in the very honor and glory of God—not to mention the welfare of our own souls and the souls of our neighbors. Human desire can be

a formidable enemy. It can restructure the ethics of entire civilizations. It can convince us that we are serving the common good when we are in fact serving the adversary. It can convince a wife that she is serving Christ by tearing down her own household because her husband isn't the spiritual leader he should be. It can convince a husband that he is serving Christ by neglecting his family and going to church meetings.

Maybe it's intentional, maybe it's not. Stonewall (Thomas Jonathan) Jackson was recognized as one of the greatest confederate commanders of the Civil War. In May of 1863, during the Battle of Chancellorsville, he was mistakenly, and fatally, shot by his own men. Ignorance of God's word, fear, lust, a neglect of availing oneself of the various means of God's grace (prayer, word, sacraments, accountability, etc.) can all contribute to this act of placing our efforts at the disposal of the enemy—in this case, the enemy is our own cravings. In effect, we're shooting our own men.

## **Present Ourselves**

We must continually identify where we are doing this and continually repent. It is worth noting how Paul writes this. He doesn't address the issue the way we might naturally think. He doesn't say "we should not present our members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but we are to present them as instruments of righteousness to God" (though he'll get there).

He writes that we should not present our members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but we should present **"(y)ourselves to God."** There is a stop to make between our works of unrighteousness and our works of righteousness. We are to present ourselves to God. We come to God in Christ, washed by His blood, confidently **"drawing near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).** It is like the soldier who knows he has failed, entering into the tent of his true, wise and benevolent commander, seeking forgiveness, wisdom and strength to reengage.

Imagine the soldier, reflecting upon his own weakness, informing the captain of his salvation (Hebrews 2:10) of the power of the enemy. He might ask, "What if the enemy proves to be

overwhelming?” The word from above is that this will not be the case.

**For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace (Romans 6:14).**

### **No Dominion for Sin**

Paul graciously goes back to the indicative **“sin shall not be your master.”** It might beat, bruise, lie and otherwise harass, but it will not have dominion over those who are under grace. God will provide the necessary strength to overcome, to bear, or escape that which seeks to be our ruler.

**No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it (1 Corinthians 10:13).**

It may not be quick or easy. It may require humility, the help of the brethren or a season of chastisement from God. As the Westminster Confession teaches:

**5. The most wise, righteous, and gracious God doth oftentimes leave, for a season, His own children to manifold temptations, and the corruption of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled; (2 Chron. 32:25–26, 31, 2 Sam. 24:1) and, to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon Himself, and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for sundry other just**

**and holy ends. (2 Cor. 12:7–9, Ps. 73, Ps. 77:1, 10, 12, Mark 14:66–72, John 21:15–17)<sup>52</sup>**

But sin will not be the master of those under grace. They will ever rebel (if it can be said that way) against the usurper—this false and deceptive king—because of the great grace and sacrificial love of their true Maker and Savior.

## **Under Grace**

This is God’s great promise to those who are under grace. There is much we can say about being under law or under grace. Suffice it to say for now that being under grace does not alter the ethics of God’s immutable law.

It might be best to understand that we are no longer under law in terms of a covenant (obey and live, disobey and die). God’s covenant with us is a gracious covenant. We trust in the One who did obey, the one and only obedient Son. It is by the gracious blood of the covenant that we are reckoned righteous to God.

But Paul goes even further here. For those under grace, the pardon of sin is accompanied by the deliverance of the dominion of sin as a life-controlling force. We are to know who our Savior is; we are to know who our Master is; we are to be wise to His holy counsel; we are to ever present ourselves to Him by the blood of His Son and put our minds and members to use in serving the one true God.

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<sup>52</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. 1996. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

## **Questions for Study and Meditation**

1. Why is it difficult to administer justice in the home, church or state? What should be the hopes of the leaders and actions of family, members and citizens?
2. Are there ways the modern church has become an object of ridicule? How do we distinguish ridicule from persecution?
3. Review the first 11 verses of Romans 6.
4. What are ways you can die to sin in your own life?
5. Who wants to be king of your life and what are his orders?
6. How do you distinguish the “real you” from the “*real* real you”?
7. Is the imperative “do not sin” optional?
8. How can the phrase “do not sin” become a ministry of death?
9. What are the weapons we can use to serve unrighteousness? What should we always do before seeking to present our weapons for righteousness?
10. Does the phrase “sin shall not have dominion over you” mean Christians will never sin? Explain.
11. Contrast the meaning of being under law and under grace. What’s the difference?

## **Romans 6:15-17**

*Sin to Death—Obedience to Righteousness*

September 22, 2013

**What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness? But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered (Romans 6:15-17).**

### **Introduction**

It's been said that we might be surprised by who we see when we get to heaven. Similarly we might be surprised by who is not in heaven. These kinds of determinations, while in this life, are very difficult (if not impossible) to make. It can be heart wrenching when a loved one is lost and you have such limited assurance of where they now are. Someone might say, "Well, it's simply not for us to judge" and, in a certain sense, that's true. I am certainly not the one who decides such eternal things.

At the same time, to fully extract ourselves from boldly but lovingly addressing the beliefs and actions of others is the acme of negligence.

**My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins (James 5:19, 20).**

We are sometimes so afraid of a negative reaction—of being accused of being judgmental—that we are lifting the very guardrails of hell and watching our neighbors slide like an opened pack of grain. One wonders if such pastoral concern was present in the mind and heart of the Apostle Paul as he wrote the words in this morning's passage. Little doubt Paul would have been familiar with Ezekiel:

**If I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand (Ezekiel 3:18).**

There would be no blood on the hands of the Apostle.

## **Review**

In quick review, throughout the course of this chapter, Paul is addressing the behavior of those who consider themselves Christians. He has made it clear that it should be unacceptable for the faithful to view the forgiveness found in Christ as a license for continued sin (Romans 6:1). By virtue of our union with Christ (signified by baptism) we died to sin and are to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:2-4).

Paul has offered a list of indicatives (statements of what is, rather than what should be) informing Christians of who they are and what has happened, not merely *for* them, but *to* or *in* them. Christians are united to Christ (Romans 6:5), our old man is crucified with Christ (Romans 6:6), we’ve been set free from sin as a master (Romans 6:7), and in the same way Christ has overcome sin (died to sin) and lives to God, we should reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to God (Romans 6:9-11).

We are not to let sin reign and obey its lusts (Romans 6:12). Our thoughts, words and deeds are not to be put at the disposal of unrighteousness. We rather should ever present ourselves to God, by the blood of Christ, and we should ever view ourselves as those who would serve Christ in all things (Romans 6:13). The grace of God has fallen upon us. We are no longer under law as a covenant (a covenant of works) but under grace, i.e. a gracious covenant where the righteous requirements of the law were fulfilled in us by God sending His own Son (Romans 8:4). But what is important to our context is that with that grace (included in that grace) is the deliverance of the dominion of sin as a life controlling force.

Paul now continues to address what had become a common misunderstanding of sin and God’s grace.



**What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not (Romans 6:15)!**

## **Under Grace**

Again, there is much we can say about being under law or under grace. Suffice it to say right now that being under grace does not alter the ethics of God's immutable law. The passage calls us to abstain from sin, and so sin must be defined. It seems almost unnecessary, but since there are a variety of systems of Christian ethics proffered which denounce the law of God, let us appeal to the Apostle John, who wrote:

**Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4).**

It might also be of value to stop and ask ourselves if we are under grace. Do we confess that because of our sinfulness we abhor and humble ourselves before God, do we ever repent of our sin, and do we trust for salvation not in ourselves but in Jesus Christ alone? Do we acknowledge Jesus Christ as our sovereign Lord, and do we ever promise that, in reliance on the grace of God, we will serve him with all that is in us, forsake the world, resist the devil, put to death our sinful deeds and desires, and lead a godly life?

If this is true, then Paul has valuable information designed for our continual transformation:

**Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin *leading to death*, or of obedience *leading to righteousness* (Romans 6:16)?**

## **Whose Slave Are You?**

I have heard this passage taught in such a way as to address addictions—being enslaved to certain behaviors. This may be helpful for the Christian life. No doubt, if we flirt with sin it can begin to dominate us as a sort of master. It was to Christians that Paul wrote

not to **“give place to the devil” (Ephesians 4:27)** which involved accommodating our own sinful desires.

But it doesn't seem to me that Paul, here, is addressing the power of a particular sin. It would appear, rather, that Paul would have his readers take inventory of who their actual master is by virtue of the path on which they are walking. If they are a slave to sin, they are on a path leading to death. If they are a slave to obedience, then they are on a path leading to righteousness which can be equated to life and eternal peace with God. We can conclude that,

**Paul wanted to emphasize that life under grace is characterized by obedience, by specific and concrete submission to the will of God.**<sup>53</sup>

**As Schlatter (1995: 152) says, “Life is not for everyone who belongs to the community, every hearer of the word, and every recipient of baptism, but for those who do his will.”**<sup>54</sup>

Sometimes within the Reformed community we wish to so isolate works from justification (being acquitted before God) that we send works straight to the moon. I recall a conversation with a member of a Reformed church who explained to me what, in my opinion, was rude behavior to his neighbor (his neighbor would occasionally walk across his lawn and he would snap at him). Not that it is right to allow the poor behavior of others to go unchecked, but what struck me in this conversation was that he was bereft of any concern for his neighbor's spiritual welfare. And when I addressed that, I found it quite difficult to help him make the connection.

## **A Sure Indicator**

According to Paul we are all slaves and the path we are on is the sure indicator of who our master is. The Apostle John uses the phrase **“walk in darkness”** or **“walk in the light” (1 John 1:6, 7)**. It might be helpful to understand that the walk is not a hill we climb in

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<sup>53</sup> Schreiner, T. R. (1998). *Vol. 6: Romans*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (331). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

order to obtain heaven. It is God's heavenly act of changing the direction of those for whom Christ died.

Years ago I went to a family camp. There was a young family who had a child (I think his name was Ben) with a disorder of some type. He was about four or five years old with thick, thick glasses and tons of energy and a very lovable personality. I recall when picking him up he would rub my chest and say "bear." His disorder involved an absence of fear of danger; he might touch a fire or cut himself with a knife. One day I heard the mother screaming for Ben and for help. Whoever was watching Ben turned away for just a second and he was running full speed toward a side of camp that ended with a cliff. Being younger and faster in those days I took off running and grabbed him before he injured or killed himself. I turned him around and headed him back to his mom.

Ben didn't earn his mother's love by turning around. He was turned around because of his mother's love. God does not save us or love us because we somehow manage to avoid the cliffs of sin and death. It is because He loves us that we've been turned around. And if we are living a life that indicates that we have not been turned around, then we need to ask ourselves if we are truly under grace. This was Paul's collective estimation of the recipients of his letter.

**But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered (Romans 6:17).**

### **God Be Thanked**

It is not by virtue of some thin coat of politeness that Paul thanks God that Christians have been rescued from the slavery of sin. We are to be continually reminded for a variety of reasons (humility, the glory of God, assurance of perseverance, etc.) that if we have faith, if we are seeking to walk in righteousness, if we know we have life eternal, it is all by the grace of God and God alone is to be thanked.

We will speak more on this illustration of slavery next week; for now we will conclude with a short discussion of obedience from the heart and the form of doctrine to which Christians were delivered.

## From The Heart

People will often comfort themselves with the words, “Well God knows my heart.” Of course, in a certain sense, that is the bad news, for **“the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick” (Jeremiah 17:9)**. But this does not mean that the heart is not to be considered at all when it comes to peace with God.

In a few moments we will go to the Lord’s Table and you will be asked to participate in self-examination in order to avoid eating and drinking in an **“unworthy manner” (1 Corinthians 11:27, 28)**. Some of the preconditions for participation are outward and visible: Have you been baptized (since that is the initiatory sacrament), are you a member in good standing of a Christian church (since the responsibility for the sacraments are given to the visible church). These preconditions are put forward because it is the desire of our church that the Lord’s Supper not be a curse to any, taking into consideration Paul’s warning (1 Corinthians 11:29).

But there is a question that only you can answer about yourself from the examination of your own heart: *Do you believe that the body of Christ was broken for you and His blood shed for you to pay for your sins?* Paul does not shy away from using the word **“obey”** in relation to the gospel (see Romans 10:16), since to reject the gospel is an act of rebellion, and to say ‘yes’ to the gospel, albeit a result of God’s grace, is an act of submission—an act of submission granting eternal peace and the riches of heaven.

## A Form of Doctrine

Christians have been delivered to a form of doctrine (to stay with Paul’s metaphor) the way a slave is delivered from one master to the other. It’s as if we have been lovingly and irresistibly drawn into a sacred legal library wherein the documentation of our true and eternal status lies. We are not, by our nature, interested in such things.

I recall receiving a package last year. Rapidly opening it, I saw it was full of books. Not that I am not interested in books, but I just wasn’t in the mood to rifle through them, so there they sat. Finally, I had an idle moment, so I thought I would have a look. I picked up the first and saw that it was in Chinese. I was about to put

it down, but when I turned it over I saw a familiar photo. The author was me! About a half a dozen books, all written in Chinese, and I wrote them all—though I don't speak a word of Chinese! Not to get into what had happened, suffice it to say it caught my attention. Similarly, when the grace of God falls upon a sinner, the gospel irresistibly gets his attention.

But it is the gospel—the word of God—that Paul here refers to as a **“form of doctrine.”** The true message that proceeds from the true church is a pattern of sound words that is not merely cogent (that is, compelling) but coherent (consistent, logically connected). There is no greater quest for humanity than to wrestle through and seek to arrive at a proper understanding of the God who made us, who delivers us and who has revealed Himself in His word.

There is a litany of ungodliness (murderers, sexually immoral, homosexuals, enslavers, liars) that is simply summed up in that which is said to be **“contrary to sound doctrine” (1 Timothy 1:8-11)**. It earmarks an apostate generation **“when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions” (2 Timothy 4:3)**. God's desire to protect His people is demonstrated by His requirement that elders **“must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9)**.

Paul will write to his young protégé in the ministry:

**Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 1:13).**

The means by which God delivers us *from* judgment and slavery to sin is by delivering us *to* His message, wherein is found the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus—a message we are to obey from the heart.

## **Questions for Study and Meditation**

1. To what extent should we concern ourselves with the behavior and beliefs of others?
2. Review Roman 6:1-14. What are some of Paul's main points? How have these affected your behavior or your thoughts about your own faith?
3. What does it mean to be under grace rather than under law? Where do you find yourself?
4. Verse 16 talks about enslavement. Is everybody a slave? Who are our potential masters? Is there any avoiding this? How does this work itself out in terms of our behavior?
5. What is the difference between walking in darkness and walking in the light? Is walking in the light a mountain we climb to heaven? Do we acquire God's love by walking the right way? Explain.
6. Why should we thank God for our deliverance?
7. What does it mean to obey from the heart? What other kind of obedience can there be?
8. What difference does sound doctrine make?

# Romans 6:18-19

*Set Free From Sin*

September 29, 2013

**And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human *terms* because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members *as* slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness *leading to more* lawlessness, so now present your members *as* slaves of righteousness for holiness (Romans 6:18-19).**

## Introduction

Years ago I was engaged in a running dialogue/debate with an elderly gentleman I had befriended at the gym where I exercised. We met one day while standing in line at the water fountain. Emblazoned across his t-shirt were the words BORN AGAIN ATHEIST. His bold and tireless enthusiasm in promoting his life and world view was impressive. I remember telling him, “Neal, if you ever came to faith in Christ, you’d make an amazing Christian!” I thought I had detected a faint smile before he proceeded to tell me how that was never going to happen.

Of course, it might happen. It happened to the Apostle Paul, who had been engaged in unbridled persecution of the church **“breathing threats and murder against the disciple of the Lord” (Acts 9:1)**. He became kind of an amazing Christian. He was zealously running in one direction, causing great harm to the church (Philippians 3:6). When he repented, when he turned around, it wasn’t as if his zeal came to a grinding halt. He would work as hard at being a Christian as he had done at being a Pharisee. But that does not seem to be the way things always unfold.

It does seem at times (especially in the times in which we live) that those who take rank against the **“Lord and His Anointed,”** those who say **“Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us” (Psalm 2:2, 3)** are operating with much more gusto than those who are called to be **“slaves of righteousness for holiness.”** This seems to be, at very least, implied in verse 19. So it

is likely a perennial problem—one that is not unique to any one generation. Why this particular problem?

In answering this, Paul has presented and will continue to present two, and only two, options for humanity: “**slaves of sin**” (**Romans 6:17**), or the option presented in our current verse:

**And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness (Romans 6:18).**

## Slavery

The metaphor of slavery used by Paul was something that most people in that generation would have been very familiar with. It’s possible that half of the congregation at Rome were, or were at one time, slaves. A solid third of the Roman Empire were slaves. There were so many slaves that the suggestion that slaves should wear a type of clothing to mark them out as slaves was rejected because it would make them aware of the power by virtue of their numbers. That being said, Paul’s metaphor was simple. Slaves were owned by someone and did what their master told them to do.

Our modern culture would resist this on many levels. I recall in one of my early college classes an older student rolling his eyes in disgust at the notion of following religion like a “bunch of sheep.” We live under the highly promoted fantasy that we are not slaves at all—that we are autonomous (the word meaning *self-law*).

In the 60s, 70s and 80s, highly popular films promoted this cutting edge type of thinking. I recall a very dynamic scene in a movie entitled *A Man Called Horse* (1970) starring Richard Harris, where he was confronted with the notion of the will of God. He gave a very dramatic and awe-inspiring response: “I never much agreed with the will of God.” *Agnes of God* (1985) starring Jane Fonda took it a step further where Agnes was given what the writers viewed as the great liberty “to hate God.” This type of dialogue in our culture has now moved from edgy to common. But it must be asked, *from what structure does one say such things? Who is whispering this in your ear and what are they offering as an alternative?*

The idea that there is some freedom that can be obtained (or maintained) when our tether to God is severed is more popular than ever. What we seldom see presented is the clear alternative (what



Paul calls *slavery to sin*). Slavery to sin should be a very easy doctrine for anyone to believe. If it weren't so sad it would be humorous when reading the impressive consistency of anti-Christian rhetoric. It's not necessarily rational, but it is consistent, as if they have been well catechized from a singular dark think tank. And all the while they are more than convinced that godless conclusions seize the intellectual high ground and are independent and liberating.

A book I was advised (by a friend who falls into the above category) to read is entitled *When Religion Is an Addiction*. The book describes the Christian (or at least the extreme Christian right-wing) as a "process addiction." The book summary explains,

**Crucial to the addictiveness of such religion is its obsession with human depravity, the ultimate expression of low self-worth. The emotional "high" of righteousness functions to eliminate the addicts' sense of personal responsibility for their teachings, their actions, and their actions' painful toll on other human beings...And the current right-wing obsession with political campaigns and victories is the even stronger fix the addiction demands to cover growing fears of failure. Too often the responses of liberals have been like those of enablers in an addict's family who through their reactions prevent the addict from hitting bottom. Arguing about religion, for example, only promotes the addiction. In the final chapter Dr. Minor reveals a non-enabling way to respond to those people for whom religion functions as an addiction.<sup>55</sup>**

With this astonishingly condescending approach as a backdrop, we can see where it is easy for the world to think this way (that they are actually free—liberated) because the idea is that slavery to sin is a mere psychological disorder from which we can be delivered through a sort of collective/cultural therapy. Add to that the

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<sup>55</sup> Could not another physician make the exact same argument about the extreme (or not so extreme) left if the source of their convictions were clearly placed on an altar for all to see and critique?

basic human experience—that slavery to sin (as Paul has informed us earlier) is not a matter of outward coercion (the way we would think of slavery in the human sense). Slavery to sin involves doing what we feel like doing—as Paul wrote, obeying sin **“in its lusts (cravings or desires)” (Romans 6:12)**. People can tell themselves with all their hearts that they are not slaves because they have not identified why they do the things they do or believe the things they believe, but they are barking from the confines of their own crate. And there is only one exit—that is the grace of God by the blood of Christ.

## **Free yet Enslaved**

Paul is telling Christians that they have been **“set free”** *eleutherothentes* yet they are still slaves. It’s as if Paul recognizes the shortcomings of his metaphor (metaphors always have shortcomings) when he explains that he is using this illustration because of the **“weakness of their flesh”** (or their lack of capacity to grasp the point). Clearly the Scriptures paint the relationship between the believer and God as something superior to slavery. Jesus taught:

**No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you (John 15:15).**

And one can barely read a paragraph in the New Testament without a reference to a believer as a “child of God.” But the context here is not of adoption or even justification but of human conduct. Therefore the illustration of slavery fits well. A leopard’s inability to change his own spots (Jeremiah 13:23) is used in Scripture to illustrate our inability to defy our own natures (or even evaluate if our nature should be defied). Human beings, by the very nature of the case, will be subjects—subjects either to sin leading to death or obedience leading to righteousness.

Our master will either be the vicissitudes of our own carnal instincts (the flesh), the massive pressure of societal norms (the world) or/and the primary source of these things (the devil). It is from these harsh taskmasters that Christians are set free and they have a new, loving, wise and omni-benevolent Master—One who has

expressed His great love in sending His own Son to die to rescue us from both the consequences and expressions of sin.

And neither is this slavery a matter of coercion—as if God is forcing us against our will to be faithful. It is more akin to the opening of eyes or regenerating of hearts.

There is a story of a female slave in 19<sup>th</sup> century America who was owned by a man very unlike other slave owners. He treated his slaves like his own children. He gave them comfortable shelters, good food, and allowed them to stay together and function as families. He made sure they had medical attention and even gave them an education. Their lives were superior to most that were free. But they were slaves. The benevolent slave owner finally came to realize that it was wrong to own people like cattle so began to systematically set them free.

But being a free black man in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in America was no easy affair. Work was difficult to find and employers (though not owners of the free slaves) could be vicious. Freed slaves would often die of exposure and starvation. The time came for this female slave to receive her freedom. Having gone through the legal process of receiving her freedom, she was now confronted with where she would go. The government lawyer informed her of her freedom and asked her, “So where do you want to go?” Very aware of her environment and the cruel nature of the options, it was with great wisdom that she pointed her finger at the man who had owned her—“I want to go with him.”

We live in a world saturated with very willing tyrants—most of them hiding in shadows and unwilling to show their face, to offer their credentials or demonstrate their (apparent) willingness to sacrifice themselves for those over whom they would rule. Paul is teaching us that we have been set free. He himself had been set free by Christ, who taught:

**Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, *but* a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:34-36).**

There are not too many questions in this life more important to ask ourselves than this—*who is my master and from what have I been set free?* In verse 21 Paul will teach that the natural man is free **“in regard to righteousness.”** That is not a desirable freedom; it is rather the ultimate bondage.

**I speak in human *terms* because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members *as* slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness *leading to more* lawlessness, so now present your members *as* slaves of righteousness for holiness (Romans 6:19).**

### **Exponential Lawlessness**

As mentioned, Paul taught in such a way as to accommodate the capacity of his students. We also addressed the call in repentance to exercise the same zeal for righteousness as a Christian as we did for lawlessness prior to our faith. Paul here writes about exponential lawlessness—**“lawlessness leading to more lawlessness.”**

It’s been said that the road to hell is not a cliff. We put our head down and walk into the forest of rebellion, only to look at once, surrounded by darkness, lacking direction or any semblance of theme, and ask ourselves, “what have I done—where have I arrived?”

In the next chapter Paul will extol the law of God—that it is **“just holy and good” (Romans 7:12)**, that the law is **“spiritual” (Romans 7:14)**. And James teaches that it is the very nature of the law to liberate (to free):

**But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does (James 1:25).**

So often, even among Christians, the law of God is viewed as restraining and harsh. But David didn’t understand it that way.

**The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver (Psalm 119:72).**

Certainly the law of God exposes our sin and need for a Savior—and apart from the blood of Christ the law will most certainly condemn. But the law of God is at the same time the great framework by which all human conduct should be directed and by which we, as a people, will most properly function in joy, peace and true freedom.

Woodrow Wilson was the 28<sup>th</sup> President of the United States (1913-1921) and was also, at one time, the President of Princeton University. He was a Presbyterian (although there were directions he took that I might not entirely embrace). Nonetheless, he had a definition of freedom or liberty I found to be very thoughtful and profound:

**I have long had an image in my mind of what constitutes liberty. Suppose that I were building a great piece of powerful machinery, and suppose that I should so awkwardly and unskillfully assemble the parts of it that every time one part tried to move it would be interfered with by the others, and the whole thing would buckle up and be checked. Liberty for the several parts would consist in the best possible assembling and adjustment of them all, would it not? If you want the great piston of the engine to run with absolute freedom, give it absolutely perfect alignment and adjustment with the other parts of the machine, so that it is free, not because it is let alone or isolated, but because it has been associated most skillfully and carefully with the other parts of the great structure.**

**What is liberty? You say of the locomotive that it runs free. What do you mean? You mean that its parts are so assembled and adjusted that friction is reduced to a minimum, and that it has perfect adjustment. We say of a boat skimming the water with light foot, “How free she runs,” when we meant, how perfectly she is adjusted to the force of the wind, how perfectly she obeys the great breath out of the heavens that fills her sails. Throw her**

**head up into the wind and see how she will halt and stagger, how every sheet will shiver and her whole frame be shaken, how instantly she is “in irons,” in the expressive phrase of the sea. She is free only when you have let her fall off again and have recovered once more her nice adjustment to the forces she must obey and cannot defy.”<sup>56</sup>**

Human liberty consists in nothing less than the skillful adjustment of humanity to the perfect law of God. The more we are perfectly aligned with the law of God the more our freedom. When we obey the breath out of heaven our sails are full. When we throw our heads back and stiffen our necks to the law of God, we too shall halt and stagger until we repent to the force that we must obey and cannot defy.

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<sup>56</sup> Essie Chamberlain, *Essays, Old and New* (Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, Chicago, 1926), pp. 112,113.

## **Questions for Study and Meditation**

1. In what ways have you observed zeal in those who oppose the Christian faith?
2. How does Paul use the zeal of lawlessness as a lesson for Christians?
3. What are some characteristics of slavery?
4. How would our current culture resist the idea that they are slaves at all? Have you observed a trend toward freedom via godlessness? Explain.
5. How would slavery to sin, at least at first, feel like freedom?
6. What are some of the shortcomings of the slave metaphor?
7. Is spiritual slavery a matter of outward coercion? Explain.
8. Explain *exponential lawlessness*. What is the danger here?
9. How is the law of God liberating?





# Romans 6:20-23

*Wages or Gift?*

October 13, 2013

**For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:20-23).<sup>57</sup>**

## Introduction

As is commonly known, the second section of the Declaration of Independence reads:

**We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.**

There is, apparently, some disagreement as to what Jefferson had in mind when he wrote these words. Some think Jefferson was influenced by John Locke who believed that the primary purpose of a political system was to protect property; the way Locke stated it: “life, liberty, and estate.” So the second section of the Declaration could have read, “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Property.” Whether or not that would have been a superior phrase is a matter of some debate; suffice it to say for now that ‘happiness’ is a very abstract word.

What does it mean to be happy? People ask me if I’m happy and the very question makes me uncomfortable. I feel kind of awkward when I say ‘yes.’ There might even be a pressure to feel happy when I’m not in the mood. Of course I want to be happy. I want my children to be happy. I want everyone to be happy! But,

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<sup>57</sup> *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Ro 6:20–23). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

again, what does it mean? Some suggest, and I would tend to agree, that happiness today has a significantly different meaning than it did to Jefferson and his contemporaries. Happiness, today, falls akin to hedonism—that which is pleasurable.

When it gets right down to it, I can think of a number of attributes that I would place higher on my list of desires for those I love than happiness—things like faithfulness, goodness, integrity and character—these are higher up on my prayer list than happiness. Happiness, I must say, has become a bit of a golden calf in the modern west. It is the rally cry of those who would supplant the goodness and wisdom of the loving Triune God as the source of that which is best.

Francis Hutcheson was an Irish reverend and philosopher in the 18<sup>th</sup> century who offered his explanation as to why political systems exist. I have seen his words used many times by those who have a very calculated system by which they would extract the word of God from the playing field of collective human conduct. Hutcheson said:

**That Action is *best* which accomplishes the *greatest Happiness* for the *greatest Numbers*; and that worst, which in like manner occasions Misery.**

The words resonate powerfully in a debate to those who don't care to examine the implications. For example, if the "Action" which accomplishes the greatest happiness for the greatest number is the action of annihilating the smaller number and viciously and illegally seizing their property, that action, according to Hutcheson, is by his definition "best." In light of these things, the wisdom of the Apostle Paul by the Spirit of God becomes crisp in its focus.

**For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness (Romans 6:20).**

### **Free of Righteousness**

Thomas Schreiner makes the obvious observation found in this verse:

**But those who are free of righteousness are inevitably slaves of sin. We confront again the idea that no middle ground is possible.<sup>58</sup>**

I was recently watching an athletic contest, when I observed one of the players in his frustration blurt out the Lord's name in vain. An observer commented, "The third commandment says not to take the name of the Lord in vain." It may not have been the best timing to address the issue. Nonetheless, I found the player's response to be of interest: "It's not my command!" He felt himself to be free of the constraints of God's law, and thus declared his independence.

Paul calls this *being free in regard to righteousness*. It almost has an insulting feel to it, like being free of intellect or talent. Someone might say, "It must be nice to be liberated from the shackles of clear thinking." Although I don't think Paul is using this in a pejorative sense. He is merely making the statement.

It's no stretch to understand Paul's words to mean "**entirely free in regard to righteousness.**" This is not to say that, in a certain sense, there isn't human conduct that "**slaves of sin**" engage in that is preferable to other conduct—I would prefer my neighbor be an engineer than a meth dealer. But every un-tethered boat, regardless of its current location, will end up on the rocks of ruin.

**There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death. Even in laughter the heart may ache, and the end of joy may be grief (Proverbs 14:12, 13).**

We may be able to temporarily assuage our guilt by preferring engineering to drug dealing, but the bungee of our natures is pulling us rapidly to the end of those things which Paul calls "**death.**"

**What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death (Romans 6:21).**

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<sup>58</sup> Schreiner, T. R. (1998). *Vol. 6: Romans*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (338). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

## Ashamed

Perhaps it has been a tactic to remove shame from the vocabulary of valuable experiences. We often hear shame in the context of a judgmental socially-imposed disgrace which should be ignored. But shame, like pain, has its purpose, not the least of which is to enter into a time of self-examination to find if the pain or shame is legitimate and in need of treatment or repentance. To ignore pain can be fatal. To ignore shame can be even worse.

When Paul writes of the things **“of which you are now ashamed”** he is appealing to the reasonable response of those who recognized what they have been delivered from. He is not merely addressing the normal feeling of guilt that any person might have when they’ve done something they feel is wrong. What would Paul look back on that would now be a matter of shame?

**And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him’ (Acts 22:19, 20).**

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown comment that Paul is writing of...

**...that ingenuous feeling of self-reproach, which pierces and weighs down the children of God, as they think of the dishonor which their past life did to His name, the ingratitude it displayed, the violence it did to their own conscience, its deadening and degrading effects, and the death—“the second death”—to which it was dragging them down, when mere Grace arrested them.<sup>59</sup>**

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<sup>59</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Ro 6:21). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

**“What fruit?”** What true good was produced by a life governed by sin? Independence from righteousness is independence from life, or as Paul would put it, **“the end of those things is death.”**

These things are not brought to our attention as mere indications of a morbid nostalgia, but to preface the awareness of a current condition and a current direction.

**But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life (Romans 6:22).**

## **Set Free**

For weeks we’ve discussed what it means to be set free from sin, so I won’t labor the point here. Suffice it to say that deliverance from death as an eternal destiny includes deliverance from sin as a life-controlling master. The true believer will ever pit himself against the world, the flesh and the devil—and the fight does not end until glory. What should be obvious in a passage like this is how we should not continue in or imitate those fruitless behaviors that are a source of shame.

We’ve also addressed the metaphor of slavery to God (synonymous with slavery to righteousness—vs 19), so I will only briefly repeat that autonomy is a fantasy and the only true freedom is found in the willful submission to the One, the only One, who is “holy, just and good.” Not knowing who your master is does not mean you don’t have one.

## **Fruit to Holiness**

The passage under our consideration this morning offers two directions of behavior and two destinations: slavery to sin which brings shame and death, or slavery to God which yields good fruit toward our holiness or sanctification (being formed into the image of Christ). These are things Paul will elsewhere identify:

**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22, 23).**

Schreiner again states the obvious:

**Slavery to righteousness is greatly preferable to slavery to sin, since the former yields good fruit and leads to sanctification and eternal life, whereas the latter produces shame and has as its consequence eternal punishment.<sup>60</sup>**

It might be healthy from time to time to take inventory, to ask ourselves which direction we're going. John Calvin, in his passionate, perhaps tactless but keenly sharp and poignant, style wrote of this passage:

**As he had before mentioned a twofold end of sin, so he does now as to righteousness. Sin in this life brings the torments of an accusing conscience, and in the next eternal death. We now gather the fruit of righteousness, even holiness; we hope in future to gain eternal life. These things, unless we are beyond measure stupid, ought to generate in our minds a hatred and horror of sin, and also a love and desire for righteousness.<sup>61</sup>**

Two directions and two destinations, but Paul here will make an ever important distinction:

**For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).**

### **Wages or Gift?**

What would you prefer, wages or a gift? I guess it all depends on what the wages are for and/or who is giving the gift. The last thing on earth or heaven we want from God is justice—for us to receive our due—for death is a merited wage, it is what we have earned and

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<sup>60</sup> Schreiner, T. R. (1998). *Vol. 6: Romans*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (338). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

<sup>61</sup> Calvin, J. (1998). *Romans* (electronic ed.). Calvin's Commentaries (Ro 6:22). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

deserve. But eternal life is a gift of God and it is found in Christ Jesus our Lord. It has been written:

**This concluding verse—as pointed as it is brief—contains the marrow, the most fine gold, of the Gospel. As the laborer is worthy of his hire, and feels it to be his due—his own of right—so is death the due of sin, the wages the sinner has well wrought for, his own. But “eternal life” is in no sense or degree the wages of our righteousness; we do nothing whatever to earn or become entitled to it, and never can: it is therefore, in the most absolute sense, “the gift of God.”<sup>62</sup>**

**In view of this, who that hath tasted that the Lord is gracious can refrain from saying, “Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father, to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen!” (Rev 1:5, 6)<sup>63</sup>**

**Death and life are before all men who hear the Gospel: the one, the natural issue and proper reward of sin; the other, the absolutely free “gift of God” to sinners, “in Jesus Christ our Lord...” Ye that read or hear these words, “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing, therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live!” (De 30:19)<sup>64</sup>**

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<sup>62</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Ro 6:23). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

## **Questions for Study and Meditation**

1. How would you define *happiness*? How important is it to be happy? What is more important? How has the pursuit of happiness been used in a destructive way and what does that tell us about the nature of man?
2. Can you give some examples of how people are “free in regard to righteousness”?
3. What is the inevitable destiny of those who are “free in regard to righteousness”?
4. Is shame always bad? Explain your answer.
5. What two slaveries are man’s only options? To whom are you enslaved and why?
6. What does being a slave to God produce?
7. The Apostle Paul wrote of two directions and two destinations, but made a very important distinction between them. What distinction did he make and why is it important? Which would you prefer?





