

## God and Sinners Reconciled

Romans 5:1-11

June 4, 2023

After a two-week pause, this morning we're returning to our walk-through of the book of Romans. We're jumping back in with chapter 5 today, which means we're also beginning a new section of Paul's letter. It might be helpful for you to think about Romans like a play that is performed in four acts. We can think of this next section, chapters 5- 8 as Act II of this story about the gospel.

In Act I, Romans 1-4 we heard the announcement of the gospel, that God has done something among sinful men and women to set things right with him. We discovered that although it's universally true that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23, NIV), the good news of the gospel is that all who place their faith in Jesus Christ "are justified freely by [God's] grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ" (Rom. 3:24, NIV).

Now we come to Act II, chapters 5-8. In this section, Paul writes to provide his readers with assurance and hope. Romans 8:28-30, which comes at the very end of this section, sums up the message of Act II nicely:

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified" (Rom. 8:28-30, NIV).

Paul says something similar in his letter to the Philippian church:

"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" (Phil. 1:6, ESV).

So, if Act I was all about justification, then Act II is all about hope. God's people can be assured that what God has started, God will finish. Take a look at how Paul begins chapter 5 and this new section of his letter.

"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:1-2, NIV).

Paul established in the first four chapters of this letter that those who place their faith in Christ are justified freely by God's grace. Therefore, as those who are now in a right relationship with God, we can be confident that God will see his saving work in us

through to the end. We can be confident of this, first of all, because we know there has been a change in our relationship with God.

Unfortunately, many times when we talk about a change in a relationship, it's often not for the better but for the worse. A change in a relationship may have been brought about by a falling out between two people. A change in relationship might be the result of a breakup or a divorce. Sometimes relationships change because people simply grow apart.

But for those who have been justified by faith in Christ, the once-broken relationship with God has now been restored. In this case, the change in the relationship is a positive change. Paul describes this in verse 1 as now having "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1, NIV).

You may remember from the first few chapters of Romans that our broken relationship with God was not described in positive ways. In the sinful pursuit of our own way of behaving and thinking, we had a falling out with our Creator. Because of our sin, we were alienated from God. As a result of our rebellion, we sinners became objects of God's righteous wrath.

But the gospel changes everything, and that includes our relationship with a holy God. Another way of saying that we have peace with God as believers in Jesus Christ is that we have been reconciled to him. The broken relationship has been repaired. We are no longer alienated from our Creator, rather reconciliation has occurred between us.

When I think of that word *reconciled*, I can't help but think of one of my favorite Christmas hymns which declares,

Hark! the herald angels sing,  
"Glory to the newborn King:  
peace on earth, and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled!"<sup>1</sup>

I should have asked our musicians to lead us in singing this Christmas carol today, even though we would be a few months early. When we do sing these words next December, I hope we will think about these words of assurance found in Romans 5.

Paul expands on this idea of peace with God at the end of this passage in verses 9-11.

"Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having

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<sup>1</sup> *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*. Words by Charles Wesley; Music by Felix Mendelssohn.

been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation” (Rom. 5:9-11, NIV).

How do we know that God will see our salvation in Christ through to the end? How do we know that at the end of all things when God judges the world we will still be justified in his sight and declared not guilty? We can be confident because we know that God has brought us into a new relationship with him. We are no longer God’s enemies. No, we have been “reconciled to him through the death of his Son” (Rom. 5:10, NIV). And if we have been reconciled, then we should have every confidence that we shall indeed “be saved through his life!” (Rom. 5:10, NIV).

In addition to this new relationship, this passage also teaches us that those who have been justified by faith in Christ have been given a new status. In verse 2 we see that through Christ, “we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand” (Rom. 5:2, NIV).

Apart from Christ, we were once outsiders. Not only were we not in a right relationship with God but we were also separated from all the blessings of a right relationship with him. But now, Paul says that because we are justified, “We have gained access by faith into this grace” (Rom. 5:2, NIV). By trusting in Christ, we have been brought *inside*. We have been brought *into* God’s grace, and as a result, our status has changed. And we can be confident that our new status will never change. Paul says that this grace is the place “in which we now stand” (Rom. 5:2, NIV). Once you’re inside, you’ll never again be on the outside of God’s grace.

Our new relationship and our new status lead us to a new confidence. Paul goes on in verse 2 to say that those who have been justified by faith in Jesus Christ now “boast in the hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:2, NIV).

To be clear, this boasting, this confidence is in no way self-confidence. We did nothing to bring about our new relationship or our change in status. Another way to describe this confidence is by saying that we “*rejoice* in the hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:2, ESV).

Remember, our universal human condition is that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23, NIV). Apart from Christ, we were once hopeless. Our share in the glory of God was lost. We fell short.

But once again, the announcement of the gospel is that everything changes for those who place their faith in Christ. Those who have been justified can now hold fast with joyful confidence that the glory once lost is now being restored.

Since we have been justified through faith, we have a new relationship with God, a new status in grace, and a new confidence and joy. And all of that confirms for us that we have a new hope. And what is our hope? That for those who have been justified by faith, what God has started, God will finish.

God's people can be so confident in this truth that even in the face of suffering, our hope will not only hold out, Paul indicates that it will even grow and increase. Look at how this works as described in verses 3-4.

“Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Rom. 5:3-4, NIV).

How can Paul say that we “glory in our sufferings,” or as the ESV translates it, “rejoice in our sufferings”? Certainly, Paul can't mean that we are to take *pleasure* in suffering. Nor is Paul simply saying that Christians have hope *despite* their experience of suffering. No, Paul is counterintuitively saying that suffering *leads to*, and even brings about an *increase* in the believer's hope. How is this possible?

Human beings experience suffering in a variety of forms in this broken world. Christians are by no means immune to suffering. But what is unique to Christians is that only Christians will experience the kind of suffering that comes with obedience and faithfulness to Christ. For some, suffering will lead to a greater sense of not feeling at home in a fallen world. For others, suffering will take the form of persecution and even violence.

Paul says that for believers suffering produces perseverance. As God continues to bring to completion what he started in us, through suffering our endurance increases. That endurance or perseverance in turn produces in the believer proven Christ-like character. As Paul will later emphasize in Romans 8:28-29, God sovereignly works in all things to bring about his purpose to conform us to the image of his Son.

As we become more like Jesus in our character, we should be able to see greater evidence that God is indeed restoring us toward glory. And as we perceive this growth and change, that should lead us to greater hope. God is actively finishing what he started in us when he called us to faith in Christ.

But have you ever wondered whether or not you were really growing as a Christian? Have you ever questioned whether you were in fact becoming a deeply devoted follower of Jesus? As you've gotten older and (hopefully) wiser, have you ever felt like your spiritual maturity hasn't kept up at the same rate?

Maybe you don't question the genuineness of your faith. When you think about your story, you know there was a time when you grasped the message of the gospel. You understood that Christ died in your place, that he took your sin, and lavished you with his grace. There's no doubt in your mind that you are a Christian and, as the old Kansas tune goes, "Surely heaven waits for you."<sup>2</sup>

Things started well for your faith, but how will it end? One day when we reach the finish line, will we come up short? Will God be disappointed with our progress? How do we *know* that God will finish what he started? What hope do we have?

For those who have been justified by faith in Jesus Christ, Paul says in verse 5 that "hope does not put us to shame" (Rom. 5:5, NIV). Paul was assuring these Christians that when it's all said and done, they can be confident that they won't come up short. One day when we stand before God, if we are truly in Christ, our hope will be vindicated.

Our confidence that God will finish what he started rests not on how much we love God, but on how much God loves us. Paul goes on to say in verse 5 that,

"And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5, NIV).

Our hope for future glory is grounded in God's great love for us. Our confidence that God will finish what he started rests not on how much we love God, but on how much God loves us. And God assures us of how much he loves us in two very special ways.

The first way is mentioned there in verse 5. At the very moment that you became a Christian, God gave you a very special gift. The instant you were converted and came to faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit came to live within you. We'll learn more about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8, but for now, take note of the specific work mentioned here in verse 5. Paul says that "God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5, NIV).

I've been reflecting on these words this past week as I've been working through this passage. The picture that keeps coming to mind is that of the rain barrel that I recently installed at our house. This rain barrel receives the water flowing from our gutters as the rain falls on our house. And with all the rain we've had lately, this barrel has been filled to overflowing.

One of the ministries of the Holy Spirit is to channel God's love for us into our hearts. Our hearts are like that rain barrel, filled to overflowing with the love of God. The Holy

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<sup>2</sup> *Carry on Wayward Son* by Kansas

Spirit keeps on channeling more and more of the flow our way. God grounds our hope in an overabundant inward sense of his love for us, poured out through the Holy Spirit.

This week, I've been coming back to this verse and I've been asking God to give me a greater sense of his love for me. I know this is a prayer God enjoys answering. Intellectually, I know that God loves me. But I've been asking God to speak to my heart and assure me of his love through the work of the Holy Spirit just as this verse promises he will do.

But there is a second way that Paul mentions that God assures us of his love. It's fitting as we come to verses 6-8 that in a few moments, we'll share together in the Lord's Supper.

When Paul wrote a different letter to the church in Corinth about the institution of the Lord's Supper, he reminded them of why they were to regularly eat and drink in remembrance of Christ. He said,

“For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26, NIV).

Proclaiming that someone has died feels a bit taboo. Any time we talk about death it can feel like a topic we should tiptoe around. But when we come to Romans 5:6-8, Paul considers the death of Jesus not to be a taboo topic to avoid. Rather, the death of Jesus is a vivid demonstration of God's amazing love. Look with me at verses 6-8.

“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:6-8, NIV).

Every culture has stories of acts of self-sacrifice where one person voluntarily lays down their life for another. These stories are not unheard of, but they are rare enough that we take notice when they occur. When humanity is at its best, we're capable of great acts of sacrifice for a worthy cause. What we never really hear about are accounts of costly sacrifice given on behalf of the most wicked of men.

Notice that Paul describes us in our pre-Christian state as having been powerless, ungodly, sinners. The word *powerless* (also translated as *weak*) in verse 6 brings us back to Romans 3 where we were told that apart from Christ we had no desire or ability to do anything that pleased God. The word *ungodly* brings us back to the argument of Romans 1 that without Christ our natural inclination is to suppress what we know to be true of God and give our worship to the created world rather than to our Creator.

And the word *sinner* in verse 8 brings us back to the charge leveled in Romans 2 that our sin is an act of lawless rebellion against what we know to be right.

How many people do you know would sacrifice what was most precious to them for the life of a powerless, ungodly sinner? The examples must be few if any.

Our confidence that God will finish what he started rests not on how much we love God, but on how much God loves us. And how much does God love us?

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8, NIV).