

The Epistle to the Romans

Dan Snaddon

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Studies in Romans 5

“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 Holy Spirit who was given to us has poured out the love of God in our hearts. 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. 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 5:1-11

In Romans 5, Paul brings us face-to-face with the great doctrine of justification. Being justified means that we are declared righteous and acquitted before God. Paul wants us to know that salvation in the Lord can't be procured by keeping God's commands perfectly or being the best we can be. When a person is justified in the sight of God, it is only because of pure grace. This spiritual blessing can only be had through faith.

In Romans 5:1, Paul brings to our notice another great blessing as a result of our justification: “peace with God.” This “justification” and “peace with God” is brought to us through the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. The peace with God that is mentioned here does not mean “the peace of God,” which is a subjective feeling of peacefulness that as a believer we might experience in our walk with the Lord. Rather, peace with God connotes an actual reality believers have in their legal and right standing with God, a positive blessing from God expressing that all is well between Him and us.

In Romans 5:2, Paul continues on to say, “By whom we also have access into this grace.” For this right standing before God, as believers, we owe everything to our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by Him only that we are given grace and spiritual blessings. What a glorious thing to have acceptance with God - to know that the war is over and that peace prevails! It is far better to have access into God’s presence, and to be taken there in the pierced hand of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul has established our justification, our peace with God, and our free access into the presence of God here at the beginning of Romans 5.

In Romans 5:3-5 Paul claims, “we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope.” Here Paul is urging the believer on to spiritual maturity. He shows us how maturity is developed in us through a process of melting, then mellowing, followed by molding, and then a maturing process. When believers have been given tribulation, they are forced to grow in

patience, and this experience helps to show us the hope we have eternally through these experiences of trials.

One example we might look at is the maturing pain of tribulation well illustrated in the case of Job. First, we see him suffering in the hands of Satan, then in the hands of men, and finally, redeemed in the hands of God. At the hands of Satan, Job received tribulation that wrought in him “patience.” At the hand of man his patience was sorely tried, but through it all he gained “experience.” Ultimately, in the hands of God, Job came triumphantly through at last to that “hope which maketh not ashamed.” (Romans 5:5) The Job that we meet at the end of the book is far more righteous than the one we meet at the beginning as a result of his tribulation.

In Romans 5:5, Paul declares, “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.” We see here that the Holy Spirit who is given unto us makes this maturity good to us. It is the Holy Spirit who assures us of our justification, peace with God, and access to God. It is He who brings us to complete maturity and makes us more like Christ.

This first chapter of Romans also contains some of the most comprehensive statements in the Bible about the love and grace of God. In Romans 5:6-9, Paul proclaims, “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. Much more then, having now been

justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.”

Paul wants to convince us that God’s love guarantees our eternal security because we are indeed “saved from wrath.” God’s love also planned our redemption in an eternity past, when “we were still without strength.” Then God’s love yielded up Christ to the death of the Cross “when we were still sinners.” Lastly, we see here that we will be saved from God’s wrath through God’s love, which ultimately opens wide the gates of heaven to welcome sinners.

Let us examine in other scriptures where we see proof of God’s love in this gift of His Son: First, in John 3:16, we see that “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.” Secondly, in Ephesians 5:25 Paul says, “Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body...Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.” Lastly, in Galatians 2:20, Paul declares, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

Let us consider the nature of God’s love for us in the absolute exceeding sinfulness in our nature. In Mark 7 we see that this depravity of man is inherent. Jesus says, “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.” In our human nature, because of the Fall from the beginning in the Garden of

Eden, humanity is from within and from the heart fallen. In our fallen humanity, therefore, proceed these evil things. Despite such vile wickedness God loved mankind! He “so” loved them that He “gave His only begotten Son” to save them from a lost eternity.

Once we recognize how deep this love of Christ is for us, we must also never separate the love of Christ from that of the Father, for “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.” The nails that were hammered into the Savior’s hands were driven into the Father’s heart too. The spear that pierced the Savior’s side plunged into the Father’s bosom too. Our Father God also suffered with the Son; in the breadth, length, depth, and height of the love of Christ we see the infinite, measureless dimension of the Father’s love for us. God’s love is perfect, not wrought with human fallenness as are our own attempts at love.

Paul’s view of God’s love was that it was unsurpassed by human thought. His love is also unconditional, meaning there are no conditions to or limitations of His love for His people. For example, In Romans 5:6, Paul says, “For when we were without strength, Christ died for the ungodly.” Despite the fact that we were unable to obey him, without the ability to help ourselves, God unconditionally loves us through His son Christ dying for us! The Lord’s love was indeed for the ungodly. While Jesus’ death on the cross could have become an Armageddon, where the twelve legions of shining angels with flaming swords were called and the last days were initiated, instead, when demons and men were doing their worst, Jesus said, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do” and died there for us on the

cross. (Luke 23:34) God's love truly is unconditional and knows no bounds!

We also see that God's love is incomparable. As sinners and ungodly we deserved the undiluted and unmitigated wrath of God. Instead, "while we were sinners, Christ died for us." The comparison in Romans 5:7-8 is between divine love and human love. Paul brings to our attention two types of men. First, there are righteous men and then there are good men; these are both definitions and pictures of human love. A righteous man is a just man, and is approved by others. A good man is a kind, benevolent man and is loved by others. As Paul says, "scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die."

When Jesus is telling his disciples to love one another, He also tells them, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13) In contrast to this, Paul says that when we were ungodly, without strength, sinners, and enemies, "Christ died for us." God did not love us because there was reciprocal love in us. He sent forth His Son regardless, and kept on loving men even though they spat in His face, plowed His back with a scourge, nailed Him naked and thorn-crowned to a cross, sneered and mocked Him in His anguish, until the sun hid His blushing face, the earth quaked in terror and the rocks split open in protest. As Paul claims in Colossians 1:20, God has "made peace through the blood of His Cross."

Paul finally goes on in Romans 5:10-11 to describe some of the benefits or products of God's love. He says, "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.” First, we are “reconciled to God.” Secondly, we are “saved from wrath” through Christ. Lastly, Christ gives His life to us and we are “saved by His life.” (Romans 5:9-10) Christ giving His life for us saves us from the penalty of sin, and Christ giving His life to us saves us from the power of sin. Finally, Christ giving His life will save us from the presence of sin. God still loves the unlovable, the ungodly, sinners, and enemies—He loves you. In the beautiful words of the hymn, The Wonder of It All, let us ponder the wonder of God’s love for us: “But the wonder of wonders that thrills my soul, is the wonder that God loves me. O, the wonder of it all! The wonder of it all! Just to think that God loves me.”

Judgment

In Romans 14:11-12, Paul records, "As I live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then each of us shall give account of himself to God." One day everyone on Earth will face the Lord in judgment and will give an account of their lives to our eternal Master, the Lord Jesus. Several scriptural passages refer to the surety and unavoidable reality of the judgment to come in the future. In Hebrews 9:27, the author says, "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment." We are also convinced that the Lord, the only one who is truly holy and just, will be the Judge, not any mere mortal man. In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul tells us, "Let a man examine himself...many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world." Believers will be judged by their Lord in respect to their stewardship of the spiritual gifts given to them. The kind, sort or quality of the gift will predetermine the reward in eternity for the believer, rather than the amount, or quantity of the gift they are given and employ.

In light of this impending judgment and our desire to live for Christ, we need to be watchful, vigilant, and proactive to guard ourselves against the evil one who tries to pull us away from our Savior and away from our promises of eternal life. In 1 Peter 5:8, Peter commends us to "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary, the devil, walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he

may devour.” Paul also tells us of the need for defending ourselves against deception by false teachers and Satan, reminding us that we are all accountable for our works. He says in 2 Corinthians 11:14-15, “For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.”

In 1 Corinthians 3:9-15, Paul uses an image of workers and building to illustrate the judgment we should expect for the kinds of lives we live and the way we “build” them. He says:

“For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

This passage expresses the difference between the Lord’s servants and what kind of ministries they engage in on Earth; for while there are no differences between all the Lord’s sheep who are saved in and through Jesus alone, there are indeed differences among the Lord’s servants in how they live their lives out for the glory of

the Lord! All of these things will be accounted for and examined by the Lord on the final day.

When Paul uses the phrase, “saved so as through fire,” the idea is of someone rushing through the fire to safety as the building crumbles around him, or snatched as a burning stick is saved from a fire to escape. The gold, silver and costly stones for building materials refer to the enduring quality of a builders’ work, while the wood, hay, and stubble suggest what is temporary or valueless. The three expensive materials suggest the builder’s worthy motives and sound doctrine that the builder “builds” into people’s lives as a solid foundation. The valueless materials are false or negative things, his invaluable motives that are temporary or worthless in eternity.

The words of Galatians 6:7-8 remind us that what we use to build and sow in our lives will be that which we reap: “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.” What a great reminder to us as we think about judgment and know that we have no need to fear if we are sowing the Spirit in our lives. We will reap the reward of the Spirit in our lives, in eternity with our Lord.

Studies in Romans 12

Romans 12:2 says, “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.”

This part of Romans teaches us not to let the world around us squeeze us into its mold and not to live according to the fashions of the times. The term “world” here means the society or system that man has built to make himself happy without God. When we come into the kingdom of God, however, we should abandon the thought pattern and lifestyles of the world and adopt a new worldview that places Christ as Lord reigning over the earth. We can understand this as the believer not being ruined for God by living in the world, but ruined for God by the world living in Him. As believers, we should never feel fully at home here on earth, rather, we should be storing up treasures in heaven where our eternal home will be.

This “world” can be described in two ways. The first is what we see in John’s writings, as an evil world. This is easy to detect and avoid in our current society in the world. John says, “If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in Him.” He also describes the world as the “lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” (1 John 2:16) Secondly, there are other aspects of the world which are not necessarily evil, but if over-indulged will bring spiritual leanness to the soul. In Hebrews 12:1-2 it instructs us to “Lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us.” Some common examples of these “weights” or idols in our own

lives might be our work, our hobbies, our sports, or other conformities that are not in and of themselves bad things, yet when overindulged create idols for ourselves, replacing our worship of the Lord.

In 2 Timothy 1:10 we see how Demas apparently forsook Paul's missionary zeal, leaving him behind: Paul says, "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world." Paul also criticizes John Mark for loving the world of comfort and security more than the hardships of missionary work. (See Acts 15:36-40) In Genesis 13, 14, and 19, we see that Lot chose to pitch his tent toward Sodom, a city at that time. However, he was ultimately swallowed up by the life of the cities, his own prosperity in them, and the temptations of the world, leaving them reluctantly despite threatening judgment from the angels. Lot was spiritually bankrupt and did not grasp the seriousness of his sin and temptations. In spite of his training in Abraham's household, he still hankered after the world while financially prospering in the city. Yet despite Lot's poor decision-making and deteriorating faith, even Peter still names Lot as "Righteous Lot." (See 2 Peter 2:7-8) He is still spared from the city's destruction and named as one righteous there. As believers, we are all capable of being called righteous before the Lord while simultaneously sinning and being tempted by the world. This story should be a warning to us that lying latent in each of us is the same desire to prosper with worldly things. Yet these examples all show us that it does not pay to be pressed into the world's mold.

Separation from the world is absolutely essential to please God. It is necessary also for spiritual progress and prosperity. Several scriptures can attest to this fact

of separation and bring to light our devotion to Him once we become believers. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "If any man be in Christ Jesus he is a new creature." Paul also teaches us in 2 Corinthians 6:14-17, "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers...Come out from among them and be separate." Mention of the unequal yoke reminds us of Deuteronomy 22:10: "You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together." When the people of Israel were wandering in the desert with God leading them through Moses, the ox was considered a clean animal and the donkey unclean. Their step and their pull were distinct and unequal. God forbade their relationship because they were unmatched for accomplishing tasks effectively. By contrast, when believers are yoked to the Lord Jesus they find that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. (See Matthew 29:30) Yet when matched with unbelievers, they are ineffective and unable to do what they were created to do, which is bring glory to the Lord! So then, the teaching of this passage is that the believer should separate himself from unbelievers, and additionally from iniquity, darkness, Belial, and idols in our lives. We should not be separated from believers unless they are living in sin or teaching false doctrine and causing us to stumble. Another example of an unequal yoke would be a believer marrying an unbeliever. A believer should not go into partnership with an unbeliever. In fact, our love for God should surpass any of our relationships here on this earth. Jesus says in Luke 14:26-27, "If any man comes after me he must love me more than he does his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yea and his own life also, otherwise he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, he cannot be my disciple. Our

love for Christ should indeed far exceed our love for anything else, yet most of us need to put our priorities straight in our lives. Again, in Matthew 10:37-39, Jesus says, “He who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. He who does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me.” The consecrated person of Romans 12:1 who “presents their bodies a living sacrifice” will be detached from the world and wholly surrendered to the Lord.

Our passage in Romans reads, “Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” The way to transformation is through a renewed mind or a replacing of the natural mind. In Philippians 4:8-9 Paul reminds us, “whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.” Just as Ralph Waldo Emerson wisely said, “Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an action and you reap a habit; sow a habit, and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap your destiny.”

Look at Acts 6 and 7. Stephen was an example of a mind that was renewed. He was a consecrated man, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and transformed through his faith. During his trial, his accusers hurled their false accusations at him; Luke says that his face was transformed and his accusers saw the face of an angel. Others threw stones that killed him, and those who looked on actually saw a transformation, something of the glory of Christ reflected in His servant. This image

in Acts should also remind us of Moses in Exodus 34:30, whose face shines with the glory of the Lord after being in His presence. Yet another example of this is during the transfiguration of Christ on the mountain in Matthew 17:2-9, where “His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.” Many of the martyrs had the same experience as Christ did here, their faces shining with the glory of the Lord God.

The word “transformed” is interesting and noteworthy in the scriptures, as it only occurs three other times in the Word of God aside from our passage in Romans 12. In Matthew 17:2-9 and Mark 9:2, as we have just examined, it is used while talking about Jesus transfiguration: “He was transformed before them.” The other occurrence is in 2 Corinthians 3:18 where we see it as describing our own transformation: “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” As we behold the glory of the Lord, we are changed more like His own likeness! The word used in the original Greek text is the word “metamorphoo” from which we get our word “metamorphosis.” This process involves the somewhat loathsome caterpillar spinning an unattractive cocoon for himself, producing after some time a gorgeous, transformed being: the butterfly. For the believer to accomplish this metamorphosis he must renew his mind. This means that we replace the natural mind with the mind of Christ, feeding on and hungering for the written and living Word, and absolutely surrendering to the claims of Christ, resulting in our complete transformation.

Hudson Taylor, the great missionary to China, knew of the transforming power of God as he toiled among the Chinese for many years before seeing lives transformed by the gospel. Isaiah also knew this power as one of the men in scripture who met God and heard His word spoken to him. When Isaiah is called to be a prophet for the Lord, recorded in Isaiah 6, Isaiah says, "In the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple...So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts." We see here that Isaiah is profoundly impacted by his own appearance when faced with the glory and holiness of the Lord. God's power was evident in him and through Isaiah by this transformation. When we, as believers, reach the state of having a renewed mind and a transformed life, we will know what is the good, acceptable and perfect will of God as our desires become more and more like His.

Paul is urging us in Romans 12 to a complete surrender, to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. Jesus Christ is standing at your heart's door awaiting your response. Will you refuse to conform to the world? Will you renew your mind and be transformed? Will you present your body as a living sacrifice? A heart opened to Him will cause Him to rejoice. A closed and unresponsive heart will drive another nail into His loving heart. Let us consider Revelation 3:20: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with me on my throne, as I also overcame and sat down

with my Father on His throne.” Paul is now beseeching each of you, by God’s mercy, to present your entire lives and bodies to Him as a living sacrifice for His glory. The Lord is saying to each one of you: “Son, give me your heart.”