

# Free From Slavery

Message 5

## *The Source of Righteousness*

Romans 5:1-21

### ***Introduction***

Occasionally you read of a prisoner being released because he was innocent all along. The press often seeks a quote from the newly freed inmate, and sometimes poses an inane question such as, “How does it feel to be free?” Well, how *would* it feel to be free after years of unjust imprisonment? You’d feel relieved to be out of the wretched prison. You’d be rejoicing to be freed to do whatever you want. You’d be gratified that your name was finally cleared. You’d be angry at the people who locked you up. You would be a whole confused mixture of emotions. So if you were asked how you feel, you would probably sputter something about how good it is to be out – but there is no way you could put into words all the thoughts rushing through your heart. It’s like stepping outside on a bright, sunny day when you have been in a dark theater. You appreciate the warmth of this sun, but you are momentarily blinded by its brilliance. It’s a bit like that when we think of our salvation. Our sin is so awful and God’s anger is so terrifying, when we escape the slavery of sin we are awash with relief and joy at our salvation. Now in this chapter Paul causes us to reflect more deeply on the wonder of the salvation God has given us.

### ***Peace With God***

Paul began his treatise on salvation by asserting that “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...” (Rom. 1:18) and went on in chapter two to show that every person who ever walked the earth is irredeemably wicked. He quoted Psalm 14:3, “There is none who seeks after God...There is none who does good, no, not one.” (Rom. 3:11-12) On our own, we can not please God, because there is no goodness in us. Then last week we saw in chapters three and four that God does what we cannot do for ourselves – He erases our guilt of sin. We *were* guilty of sin and deserved to die. If God just forgave us, He would be unjust. He *could* have sent us to hell. But instead He died and went to hell for us, and He cleared our name. We are now innocent before Him. We are now justified. So what is the result of being justified, of being innocent before God?

The “therefore” at the beginning of chapter 5 indicates that Paul is drawing a conclusion from the previous passage. He spent the past chapter and a half showing that we are justified by faith in Christ, and now he will spend this chapter showing us the consequences of the new reality that we are innocent before God.

The fundamental reality for us now is that we have peace with God. Formerly there was hostility between God and us. Verse 10 says we were enemies, and that’s not just we humans – we were hostile toward God, and He was hostile toward us. “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...” (Rom. 1:18) It was a mutual hostility, but different in nature. God’s anger was a holy wrath against sin, but ours was wicked rebellion against a holy God. On both sides, there was no peace and no hope of peace. But in Christ that has all been changed. When we come to God in faith, He clears our record of sin, and His anger disappears forever. In the words of the hymn we quoted last week,

Jehovah lifted up His rod, O Christ is fell on thee!  
Thou wast sore stricken of Thy God, There’s not one stroke for me.

Have you ever heard a more wonderful word? “There’s not one stroke for me!” God was poised to destroy you in hell for your awful sins. You deserved it. Many others are there now, in eternal torment for

their implacable hatred of God. You hated God, too – but He took the blow which you deserved. He took *all* the punishment you deserved. There's none left for you who believe in Christ. All God's anger is used up. He is totally spent, and all that's left is peace.

Do you grasp the implications of this? God is no longer angry with you. He will never be angry with you. Even when you sin, He will not become angry with you. This peace with God is not a future possibility, but a present reality. You may disappoint God by your sin. God will discipline you to cull sin from your life. But God will never be angry with you.

This is a truth which is clearly stated and simply grasped, but there are many people who fail to believe it. I don't mean they deny it. Many people will quote this verse and affirm its truth, but then turn around and refuse to live by it. They go through life afraid of God. They go to church because they are afraid God will punish them if they don't. They read their Bible and pray for a set time every day in fear that God will make their day go poorly if they neglect Him. When some evil happens to them, they torment themselves (and often their friends) with recriminations about their lives. "If only I had done this or had not done that, this horrible thing would never have happened." Now, I understand that it is a common human impulse to think this way, but it is wrong – dead wrong. Yes, if you refuse to trust Jesus, if you reject His word and refuse to follow Him – if you don't believe in Christ, God's anger remains on you. But if you have trusted Him, all anger is gone forever. Evil may come, but not as punishment for your sin.

You see, this sort of thinking is really a denial that Jesus paid the full price for your sin. In essence you are saying, "Thanks, Jesus, for helping out. Now I'll finish the job." No! Concerning punishment for sin, there is no job to finish. Jesus took it all, and all that's left is complete peace between you and God. Is this the way you live? Or are you afraid that God will punish you? If you have lived in fear of God's punishment, repent of thinking so little of Jesus' salvation, and ask God to enable you to remember there is peace between you.

Paul elaborates on our peace with God in the verses following. The faith which gives us peace with God also places us securely within His grace. Grace is a word which means undeserved favor. It's getting something we didn't earn and don't deserve. Our salvation is by grace. We didn't earn peace with God, and we don't deserve it. But now Paul says that grace is not only our entrance into God's peace – it is the fundamental reality in our lives. Grace is the condition in which we now live. All that happens to us is from God's undeserved love. We stand in grace – i.e. we never step outside it. We never wander into living by law, by requirements. All our lives we have peace with God because He gives us what we don't deserve.

We also "rejoice in the hope of the glory of God". Who wouldn't rejoice to be freed from the guilt of sin and the anger of God? Joy is a basic condition of the Christian life. But specifically we rejoice in hope. Biblical hope is entirely different from hope as we use the word in everyday life. When I say, "I hope it snows tonight," I am expressing a wish which may or may not happen. In the Bible, the word "hope" is always used for things which are certain, but not true yet. So I may have eager anticipation for snow tonight, but there is always the possibility of disappointment. With God there is no possibility you will be disappointed. The things we hope for are absolutely certain – as sure as that I am here speaking to you. So what do we hope for? The glory of God. In this life we strive for success in relationships, in school, on the job – and we succeed in varying degrees. Some of us get glory and others receive shame in this life. But all those in Christ will receive divine glory someday. It's absolutely certain. You can stake your life on it. So Christians are people who are characterized by joy because they are sure they will someday have God's glory.

Did you notice that Paul takes all of time onto account here? In the past we were justified by Christ, in the present we live by grace, and in the future we will receive God's glory. The salvation Christ secured for us has eternal results.

Are you short of joy? Do these verse describe your life, or does it dull by comparison? No worry, God will rejuvenate your joy by reviving and strengthening your hope. How does God build hope? Through tribulation. Paul explains that tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance produces character, and character produces hope. Tribulation is painful. No one finds tribulation pleasant. But we are encouraged to welcome tribulation because it is a necessary step in Christian growth, and it develops the hope that makes us joyful.

### ***God's Love for Sinners***

It's wonderful news that we have peace with God, but God does much more than stop being angry with us. In the verses coming up Paul shows us that God actively loves us.

First Paul tells us how we experience God's love. God pours out His love for us by His Holy Spirit. God's love is not an abstract virtue, but a real experience shared between two persons. All human beings crave love, and we look for love in many places – in parents, siblings, friends, and in the opposite sex. Mom's warm embrace, the listening ear of a friend, and the electricity of a romance seem very real compared to an invisible God and a Christ who walked the earth 2,000 years ago. But verse 5 tells us that God reaches into your heart, convinces you of His love, and comforts you by His love. Sometimes we sense this more than at others, but it is a reality for all believers. Occasionally you may encounter Christians who will tell you that the Holy Spirit is a gift that you may receive sometime after you believe in Christ, but that is not true. You can see here that He is promised to all those who believe in Christ.

Second, Paul tells us the depth of God's love – it originated while we still hated Him. Who is the most troublesome, irritating person you know? Who exasperates you almost to the point of insanity? Who can make you so angry you almost lose your rationality? Suppose someone on your hall was so hateful to you, you could almost wish him dead. Perhaps he lied about you to you to your professor, destroyed your stereo system, ruined your car, stole your computer, and made your other friends hate you. He hates you and wishes you were dead. Would you do something nice for you? After he lied about you to your professor, would you help him with his assignments? After he destroyed your stereo system would you lend him your CDs? After he turned your friends against you, would you be his friend? If he were in mortal danger, would you die for him?

This is the depth of God's love. Anyone will love someone who loves him. You might love someone who is admirable – smart, or beautiful, or strong, or good. But would you love a worthless person? Would you love someone who is a mixture of good and bad? But no one would ever love a wicked person, your mortal enemy. God did, though. God loved you when you were evil and hateful. God loved you to the max – He died for you. He paid the ultimate price for your friendship. There is nothing in the universe more valuable than God's Son, and He was sacrificed for you.

Now here's the key point. If God loved you this much when you hated Him, how much do you think He loves you now? If God would die for you when you hated Him, don't you realize He will do anything for you now that you have believed in His Son? Can you see that He is fanatically devoted to you? Have you ever saved up a lot of money over a long time to buy something? Then when you get it, don't you lavish a lot of attention on it? You see, everyday God is lavishing His love on you. What does He do for you? He gives you life, health, food, friends, and gifts beyond these basic necessities. He is present with you in His

Holy Spirit, He speaks to you in scripture, and He visits you in the sacraments. At the end of Matthews gospel Jesus said, "I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:20) Where else would He be? You are God's pride and joy. There is nothing He wants to do more than love and enjoy you forever.

Do you know the love of God? Does this sound like an impossible dream – the experience of mystics, but not everyday Christians? Then you are the one living in a dream. And perhaps you are living dreams of your own making that have crowded God out of your life. If you are unconvinced of God's love for you, perhaps it's because your attention is elsewhere. Perhaps you are so in love with some other person or thing or goal, that you can't sense God's presence. If God's love seems remote to you, I suggest you get reconnected to God. Read His word, talk to Him, go to worship on Sunday. This chapter is a good place to start. Some of you may need to read Romans 5:1-11 thoughtfully and prayerfully every day this week.

### ***The Righteous Race***

We mentioned last week that Christ did much more for us than pay for our sins. He gives us His goodness. Although He was perfect in every way, He was credited with our sins and we were credited with His good deeds. In the second half of chapter five Paul explains this in much greater detail. The following passage is extremely dense. Many very profound concepts are packed into 10 verses. We will cover the main ideas, but please see me later if you would like to discuss this further.

First, not that Paul starts to make a point in verse 12, but – like many a preacher – he gets sidetracked. Some of your Bibles have verses 13 to 17 in parentheses to indicate that these verses are a sub-point. So we can take verse 18 as essentially the theme of this passage.

*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.*

Let me try to paraphrase that. "One man sinned and brought guilt to all men. In a similar way one man did a good deed and made everyone innocent." Now we have gone over the last point before, and most Christians have little trouble accepting that the guilt of our sin is removed by Christ. What we have more trouble with is the first part, that we were guilty because of Adam's sin.

The core concept here is that God did not create people individuals only – He created us a race. Human beings do not exist alone. They come only from other human beings, and they live in societies. Aristotle even defined a human being as a creature that lives in a polis – a city state. Mankind is inextricably linked together in a race. This is offensive to westerners, who have drunk for centuries at the fountain of individual independence – but other cultures understand this truth more easily. And it's a clear Biblical truth. All through the Bible you find God's blessings and curses coming upon societies as a whole – in addition to people individually. To take just one example, think of the third commandment.

*You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.*

*Exodus 20:4-6*

If your father sins, you, your children, and your grandchildren will suffer for it. But if your father lives a righteous life, thousands of descendants will benefit. Is this fair? Who shall decide? Are you wise

enough and good enough to decide what is fair? Isn't God the one who should decide what is fair?

But now coming back to Romans 5, many Christians can accept that we are linked to Adam and inherit a sin nature as a result. After all, we do sin. We know it, and can't pretend otherwise – so we can accept that we inherit a basic tendency toward sin from our ancient ancestor. But this passage says more than that we inherit Adam's sinful nature. It says we inherit the *guilt* of Adam's sin – and that seems *extremely* unfair! How could I be guilty for something I didn't do? How could this ever be just? But you see, the fundamental perspective that gives rise to such questions is the assumption that there is no essential connection between me and other human beings. Furthermore, we cry foul when God says we are guilty because of Adam's sin, but we are relieved when He declares us guilt-free because of Christ's sacrifice. Well, you can't have it both ways! If it's right to get innocence from Christ, then it's right to get guilt from Adam.

But we want to keep our focus here in the central idea. All mankind is descended from Adam

### ***Conclusion***

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