

Romans 5:1-11

When the Apostle Paul arrived in Corinth he found a Christian couple, Aquila and Priscilla, whom the Emperor had just expelled from Rome. They were soon very firm friends. Paul was especially interested in asking them about the church in Rome. It was a church he had wished to visit so that he and that Gentile church could be mutually encouraged.

One conversation led to another and Paul decided he would ask Rome to be a launching pad for a ministry in Spain. And what better way for him to introduce himself than by laying out the gospel he preached in a letter to them.

Today we look at a key passage in that letter, Romans 5:1-11. It speaks of God's blessings upon the Christian.

Blessing from our Past: v1

Paul writes for every Christian. Prior to our conversion we were bound to admit that we were weak, ungodly (v6), sinners (v8) and God's enemies (v10). God is holy and holiness is absolute. Only people who live without any sin in deed, word or thought can stand before him with confidence. We were without hope before the Judge of all the earth. We were in a terrible place as we awaited death and the judgement to come.

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However while we were unable to do anything to save ourselves, while we were in that terrible place, God showed mercy upon us through his Son. God so loved us that in that time of our past rebellion he provided not only forgiveness but righteousness for us through the death of his Son. What we could not gain by ourselves, righteousness before the Holy God, God provided for us, and for everyone who would believe in his Son. This forgiveness and righteousness was ours the moment we believed.

Some preachers have tried to illustrate this good news in this way. Before we believe in Christ we stand in our own deeds before God like a person dressed in soiled and dirty clothes. When we turn to Christ in faith it is as if Christ removes our dirty clothing and we are forgiven. But He does more! He takes off his righteousness as a pure white robe and wraps it around us who believe. God then sees us clothed in the righteousness of Christ. We are declared right before God by the work of Christ. We are justified.

Since we were declared right before God we had peace with God. We were no longer viewed as weak, ungodly, sinners or God's enemies but forgiven and having the righteousness of Christ. God's righteous anger was no longer against us. From that moment of faith we had peace with God.

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Blessing in the Future: v2, 5-10

Since we now are under God's grace, his mercy, his favour - we are certain of sharing in God's glory. When we were enemies of God, he showed us his love with Christ dying for us. This truly is a remarkable love. From time to time we hear of people being prepared to die for good people but God goes far beyond that in Christ dying for us while we were his enemies. Now if that is the way he shows his love toward his enemies how much more will he love us now that we are reconciled to him and are his friends.

This means we need have no fear of death nor of the judgement to come. In fact the very reverse is true. Since we are absolutely certain we are forgiven, have the righteousness of Christ and are the friends of God then we can rejoice in the certain hope of glory, which is ours in Christ.

Sometimes we hear church goers say they hope they will go to heaven when they die. If asked why they are uncertain they will frequently say they hope they are good enough. The apostle Paul would say to such people that they are not good enough. They have to be absolutely perfect if they wish to get to heaven by their being good. If on the other hand they are trusting in Christ alone they have the perfect righteousness of Christ so they can not only be confident of going to heaven but rejoice in their certainty because they have the perfection of Christ. One Christian man who was facing certain death was asked how he was travelling. He replied, "The future has never looked better".

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Blessing in the Present: v2-5

Since from the moment we have faith in Christ we are declared right with God and since our future is to enter the glory of God then it is no surprise that now we enjoy God's grace. He loves to bestow his blessings upon us.

Now someone might say to the apostle, "It is pretty tough being a Christian. We find that we have to suffer because of our faith." The apostle would say that even suffering for Christ takes on a new dimension. Lessons of life come by experience. If we wish to be strong in hope then that can only come by our character being tested. Character in turn can only come by being put to the test for a long period of time and our patiently enduring that test. Endurance can only come by the school of hard knocks. This is how life operates.

This being so we therefore welcome the process, which produces hope. That is why when we suffer for Christ's sake we rejoice in the suffering not because we like suffering but because this is the way hope is produced. The champion football player doesn't lounge around all week. He pushes himself by running up hills and wearing himself out in the gym. He knows that match fitness requires that sort of punishment. So it is for the Christian! He knows that strong hope demands his experience of hard times and the more he understands that the more he embraces the hardships of being a Christian. In fact he rejoices in them.

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But there is another factor here. When we heard Christ died for us it was the Holy Spirit who taught us, who moved us, who caused us to believe that God loved us. It was he who poured God's love into our heart. The Spirit's teaching us, moving us and causing us to believe does not stop there. When we go through the disciplining process of suffering affliction for Christ's sake the Holy Spirit is still powerfully acting in convincing us that this is God the Father's loving hand upon us. He is conforming us to the image of Christ who also suffered affliction. We are not alone in this difficulty. The Spirit is with us to assure us that all of this is occurring under God's grace, God's kindness, God's love.

So we look back on our conversion and thank God for the peace we have, we look forward to Christ's coming and rejoice that we will share in God's eternal glory and we exult in the present tough times because this prepares us for that glory.