

The Joy and Power of Forgiveness

Romans 5-6

In these two chapters, Paul celebrates the joy and power of justification in a believer's life. 'Peace,' 'joy,' 'hope' are now new powers that are at work in the hearts of believers, whatever their circumstances may be. A believer now has access by faith into the Kingdom where Grace rules. Our hope is founded on the strong, sure love of God who sent his Son to die for his enemies. The state of humankind can be described in two ways: of us two stories can be told. There is the story of Adam, whose sin corrupted our natures and brought death to us all. Then there is the story of Christ, the second Adam. His righteous life brings justification to all and opens the way to eternal life. "In him the tribes of Adam boast more blessings than their father lost." In Baptism, Christ's story became our story: his death became our death; his life, our life. We died to sin with him. Now we also live to God in him. Sin will not be my master, because I do not live under the law's control, but under the power of grace!

1. Read Romans 5:1-11

The Joy of Forgiveness:

- ✓ "Since we have been justified..."—a fact we can live by, build on, be certain of!
- ✓ "We have peace with God..."—more than an absence of war; a Psalm 46 kind of tranquility!
- ✓ Note that grace is more than an attitude on God's part: it is a space in which we live, move, and have our being.
- ✓ "hope of the glory of God"—the hope of sharing God's glory in heaven (see Ro 8:18, 21).
- ✓ Justification—beginning, middle, and end—is by faith alone (vv. 2-3).
- ✓ What surprising spirit do Christians display in trial and trouble? How is this possible?
- ✓ Verses 6-8 explain ("You see...") the nature of the love that God "has poured out" into our hearts. What is it that makes God's love so completely "out of this world"? This passage is sometimes called "Paul's 'John 3:16'" —what similarities do you see?
- ✓ Verses 9-11 give another reason why we can be sure of our ultimate destination. Paul's argument is called "an argument from the greater to the lesser." Example, "If I was willing to build a house for you, why should you be surprised that I cooked you supper?"

i. The greater wonder is that...

ii. The lesser wonder is that...

- ✓ Verses 10-11 "reconciled...reconciliation" means essentially the same thing as justification. The only distinction is a somewhat different underlying picture.
 - i. Justification comes from the world of law: God declares the sinner not guilty.
 - ii. Reconciliation comes from the world of personal relationships: God declares his enemy a friend.

2. Study Romans 5:12-21

The Two Stories of Humankind: Adam and Christ

- ✓ Note the teaching of original sin in verse 12 and 18. It includes both guilt and depravity.
- ✓ Note that both of these stories are universally true. Adam brought sin and death upon us all (v. 12); Christ brought life-giving justification upon us all (v. 18). Christ's work is of course received by faith alone. For the impenitent and unbelieving, Adam's story will remain the truth that determines their lives.
- ✓ Note that while both stories are universal, there's always a plus side to grace. It "overflows" (v.15) is "abundant" (v.17), so that whatever Adam did, there's a "how much more" quality to God's gracious action (v.17,

20). "In him the tribes of Adam boast more blessings than their father lost."

- i. God starts over with a new creation in Christ, but not out of nothing as in the first creation, but right in the middle of the "anti-creation," the place where sin and death rule.
- ii. It makes sense that the offense should lead God to condemn. The amazing plus side of grace is that after many offenses, God still pronounces the verdict of "not guilty."
- iii. In Christ God restores us not merely to a state of innocence, the state in which Adam was before his fall. In that state Adam could either sin or not sin. In Christ God restores us to a sure hope of confirmed bliss.

- ✓ Note the clear teaching of universal justification in verses 18-19. It's not just that, in God's eyes, our sins are forgiven and we're in some kind of morally neutral state, still having to prove ourselves to him. In Christ, he considers us righteous, well-pleasing to him, just as if we were Christ himself (see also 4:3).
- ✓ Finally in vv.:20-21, note how law keeps company with sin and death. Sin and death are personified as "ruling powers" in peoples' lives. They determine and drive human existence. In chapter 6, Paul will speak of how we are freed from sin's power.

3. Study Romans 6:1-14

Buried with Christ by Baptism to Walk With Him in a New Life

- ✓ The two sections of this chapter are each introduced by a similar question (v. 1; v. 15): what false notion of grace does Paul intend to speak against here?
- ✓ vv.1-4: In baptism, God joined us with Christ. His death to sin became our death. His life is our life. The point is: when you die, a clean break has been made with the past.

- ✓ v.4-7: God freed us from our sins for a purpose: to live a new life of faith. It is a new life beyond death, a resurrection kind of life, a life free from sin's absolute mastery over us.
- ✓ Notice how God is the active agent here. God is at work with Baptism, burying us with Christ, raising us up to a new life.

The point is: our life of sanctification is part of the gospel gift. Along with justification by faith alone, God gives us the power to live the new life of faith. The first imperative really comes in verse 11. Paul starts out with the indicative: here's who you are. Now be who you are.

- ✓ Christians do have a choice now. We are not ruled by sin any more. Sin is not our master. We can say, "No!" to sin and "Yes!" to God.
- ✓ Why can sin no longer be our master (v. 14)?

4. Study Romans 6:15-23:

Set Free—To Serve a New Master

- ✓ Paul is "playing" with a paradox here. Christ has set us free. But not to a self-run life, or to a morally neutral state. There is no such thing. "You have been set free... to be a slave to a new master."
- ✓ Comment on the "before" and "after" Paul places before our eyes here.
- ✓ How is being a slave to God better than being a slave to sin?
- ✓ v. 23 Sin pays its wage. Salvation is a free gift. Let no believer think God owes him. Let no unbeliever complain God's not being fair.

For next time: read Romans 7 "The Struggle with Sin"