

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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A Look at Romans: Romans 3:21 - 5:11

Hundreds of years before Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans, Job asked the question, "How should man be just with God?" In the section of this epistle that we are now considering we shall see how that tremendous question is answered. Previously we have considered man's dreadful ruin because of what sin has done; we now begin to see God's remedy for that ruin. It is important that we see the difference between sins, that is those things that we have done and are therefore guilty of, and sin, which is the root cause of the matter. Today we will be looking at God's remedy for man's guilt.

Having concluded that the whole world is guilty before God and that it is impossible for man to be justified before God by keeping the law, we read in 3:21, "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested," and in verses 22, 23 and 24, "even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

Having concluded that it is impossible for man to be justified before God by human efforts, the law witnessing to this failure, Paul proceeds to reveal how that righteousness apart from the law is manifested. This righteousness, which is essentially, God's own, has been revealed in all the activities of Jesus Christ. It is in the Lord Jesus that all the issues of right and wrong have been settled to God's glory, and faith in Him brings all who believe into the scope of blessing. So not only has God's righteousness been set forth, but also a new principle of faith on our part as being the means of receiving it. God is acting in grace on His part. He is no longer demanding something from man as He did under the ten commandments, but He is seen as a giving God in the power of grace, who gave Jesus to die for us on the cross. The believer is also justified as the result of the free and unhindered exercise of God's grace. This blessing is available to all, none are excluded in its scope, but we must understand that it is only upon those that believe.

But God must be seen as righteous in whatever He does. If you and I are brought into God's righteousness, it must be on a righteous basis. Does God pass over, or overlook sins as if they do not matter? Certainly not! How could I have peace with God if there is any doubt as to whether God is righteous in blessing me? So verses 25 and 26 say, "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

The apostle uses language that is taken from the Old Testament concerning the Day of Atonement. The word 'propitiation' really is 'a mercy seat.' Once a year the high priest had to enter into the Holiest of all with the blood of the sin offering and to sprinkle it on the mercy seat on the ark. It was there God said He would meet with His people. The blood was the righteous basis for God dwelling amongst His people. The Lord Jesus is the true mercy seat, He has become this through His death, and it is through His blood, the blood of redemption, that a righteous basis is laid so that God can be just and the justifier of the believer.

So we have the answer to Job's question, "How can man be just with God?" God has set forth the Lord Jesus as the only way that man can be brought into righteousness before Him. So we see that grace has superseded law and faith has superseded works. Paul asks the question, "Where is boasting then? It is excluded." God is now free to come out in all the energy of His own goodness.

But some may say, "But what about Abraham, what has he gained if righteousness can be obtained without keeping the law?" This question is answered by the fact that he was justified before God by his faith. If in chapter 3 we read of the righteousness of God then in chapter 4 we read of the righteousness of faith. The apostle here is showing that the faith of the Gospel was anticipated long ago when Abraham was justified by faith before either the law or circumcision was given, as was David after they were given. So we read in verses 4 and 5, "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."

A further question is asked in verse 9, "Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also?" Is it for the Jew only or also for the Gentiles who believe? Abraham was justified before he was

circumcised. Circumcision was only a sign, or a seal, of the faith that had justified him. So his justification was clean outside of the law. So we read in verse 16, "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all." The 'all' in this verse refers to all believers. So this blessedness of knowing, as David, did that his iniquities were forgiven and that his sins were covered so that God would not impute sin to him, is made available to all on the principle of faith.

This being established, the last 9 verses of chapter 4 apply the principles of Abraham's justification to the believer today. Abraham's faith was remarkable because it was centred in God as one who could raise the dead. If we turn to Genesis 15 we find that he believed God when He promised Abraham a son even though both he and Sarah were as good as dead as far as natural reproduction was concerned. He believed in hope when it was against all natural hope that such a thing should be. If he had considered all the circumstances, which were against the promise, he might well have staggered at it. Instead we read in verses 19 to 21, "And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform." He believed that God would do what He said He would do. This here is called 'strong in faith'. It was not the faith that can perform miracles but that which simply trusts God to do what He says He will do.

Verse 23 says, "Now it was not written for his sake alone" because exactly the same principles apply today. Everything depends upon believing on God, who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead. Abraham believed in a God who would do what He said. We believe in a God who has done what He said. But it is important for us to understand what was involved in God raising Jesus our Lord from the dead. Verse 25 says, "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification."

The Lord Jesus did not die for Himself, but for us. He was our substitute and assumed all the liabilities that our sins incurred and so was delivered up to death to bear the judgement of God against them. But God has raised Him from the dead. Not only was He raised because of His own personal perfection, and that God was satisfied with His work, but also He was raised as our representative. God raised Him with our justification in view. In His death everything that stood out against us has been discharged, and His resurrection is the receipt that all is paid. Justification means, simply, a complete clearance from all that once lay against us has been made. So being justified by faith we have peace with God.

We read in Romans 5:1, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." We are told in Colossians 1:20, "And, having made peace through the blood of His cross." It was through the death and blood shedding of our Lord Jesus Christ that every disturbing element that our sins had caused has been removed. This He did once and once for all, and because that work is done peace can be enjoyed by each one who is justified by faith. Before we believed, we had no peace when we thought of God and His righteousness. Instead we had many doubts and fears. But the moment we believed on the finished work of the Lord Jesus, we had peace with God.

While peace may be the first blessing of the Gospel, it is not all that we receive. Faith not only gives us peace but also brings us into the favour of God. Verse 2 says, "By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand." Not only has everything that was against us been dealt with righteously before God, but also all the favour and grace of God now shines upon us. Ephesians 1:6 tells us, "He hath made us accepted in the Beloved." Or as it could read, "taken into favour in the Beloved." Just as the Lord Jesus is precious to God and stands in all the love and favour that God has placed upon Him, so it is true of every believer. As near to God as He is and as dear to God as He is!

We will never be more in God's favour than we are now, although we are not yet in heaven where we shall know it perfectly. But we do have a wonderful hope! We 'rejoice in hope of the glory of God.' Not just that we hope for glory, but nothing short of the glory of God. So as to the guilt of our past we are justified and at peace with God. As to the present we stand in divine favour and as to the future we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. What a marvellous change the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus has brought about for the believer!

But what about all the problems and difficulties that we are in? The Christian can even rejoice in these because he knows what God is using them for. There is no circumstance that God cannot use for our blessing. Many truths we have to learn experimentally for ourselves. It is one thing to read of these marvellous blessings and even to believe in them, but it is another matter to be in the good of them. Verse 3 says, "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience." The word 'glory' here is the same as 'rejoice' in verse 2. One of the greatest blessings that the Gospel gives us now is to be able to rejoice in circumstances that normally would cause us much alarm and sorrow.

The origin of the word 'tribulation' is the Latin word '*tribulum*', that is the bottom stone of the grinding mill. There are many things in our lives that God wants to change. Just as the corn goes through the mill to get rid of the chaff, so God uses circumstances to get rid of those things in our lives and we are the better after it. So Paul speaks of the process, "knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." While we pass through these tribulations, indwelling our hearts there is a divine Person, who would ever remind us of God's unchanging love. This is the first mention of the Holy Spirit in this epistle. How wonderful that it is in the context of assuring us of God's love during those moments when we might well have forgotten it because of distress or sorrow. It is not our love for God that keeps us going on, but the Holy Spirit within us maintaining the knowledge of God's love in our hearts.

The apostle then goes into detail about the character of God's love to us. We read in verse 6, "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." We saw in 1:24 how that sin had ruined men's bodies through their lust and uncleanness, but in verse 7 we see how God through the death of Christ has remedied that. When sin had made it impossible for us by our own strength to do anything about our hopeless condition, God did it all for us in the death of Christ. When I think of this expression 'without strength', I am reminded of the poor man in the parable of the Good Samaritan lying by the roadside, wounded and half dead. He could do nothing to remedy his condition but one came by who did everything for him. We read in Luke 10:33-34, "But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him."

In Romans 5:7-8, Paul compares human love with divine love. "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Sadly, human love thinks more of goodness than righteousness, but the love of God looks for nothing good or lovely in us but gave His beloved Son to die when we were sinful and unlovely in His sight. I am reminded again of Luke 7, when a sinful woman came into the house where Jesus was and wept over His feet, bringing refreshment to His heart. His words about her in verse 47, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." And then His words to her are found in verse 50, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." Despite all her sinful life, her repentance brought her face to face with her Saviour and such was His love that He would give Himself to pay the awful debt she owed. Such is God's love.

The next verse adds a further blessing to those we have considered. Not only are we justified and have peace with God, a hope of glory and the love of God in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, but here we read, "we shall be saved from wrath through Him." Part of the Gospel of the grace of God is that God's wrath will be poured out on this world after every believer has been taken out of it by the rapture. This verse assures us that God's wrath will never be known by those who have trusted Jesus as Saviour because He will call His own away before ever that wrath descends.

But we read of yet another blessing in verse 10, "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." What an expression of the love of God is contained in this verse! Not only were we 'without strength', not only were we sinners but this verse tells us we were enemies, and yet God's love was greater. I think again of Luke's account of the crucifixion in Luke 23:34, "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Colossians 1:21 tells us, "And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled." Was there ever such a wicked work as when men crucified God's beloved Son? This was man at his worst but it only proved that God's love was greater than man's wickedness for Jesus prayed for those very men who crucified Him that they might be forgiven. His death was the righteous basis for God to do that very thing.

Not only has the death of Christ saved our souls eternally but this verse 10 also tells us that through His life now at God's right hand above we shall be saved from every foe that is against us in this world. Then finally in verse 11 we reach the high point of this epistle. We not only rejoice in all the blessings that have come to us through believing, but we also joy in the Blessor Himself. "And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation".

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