

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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<b>Series:</b>	<b>Scripture Memory</b>		Pastor/Teacher
<b>Number:</b>	<b>20</b>		Gary L.W. Johnson
<b>Text:</b>	<b>Ephesians 2:1-10; Romans 5:1-11</b>		
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### SAVING GRACE

**Grace** – there is no greater word in the Bible, nor do I think there is a word so sorely misunderstood – even by most Christians. Strange as this may sound, it is not all that surprising. People are by nature “merit-mongers.” It is ingrained in our thinking that we either deserve what we get or we earn it. People do not like to be put into a helpless situation, nor will they admit to such a situation even when confronted with it. “We CAN do something about this!” has always been the protest of mankind. Foolishly, many Christians have agreed – at least in principle. Christians who read their Bible will realize that salvation is not by works and will definitely say so. But they will turn right around and proclaim a Gospel of “free-will” that in essence makes faith a work. It is something that man DOES apart from God, and apart from His Grace, in order to receive Grace. That, my friends, is NOT the Gospel of the Apostle Paul. Salvation must be by Grace from the beginning to the end or it is not Grace. Until Grace is seen in all of its glory and in ALL of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it is not Grace, but a hybrid manmade substitution that robs God of His glory and gives the creature grounds for boasting before His Creator and Redeemer. Paul has set forth in 2:1-3 the terrible situation that all men, whether Jew or Gentile, are in by nature. Humanity is not on trial before God; the verdict is in and the sentence has been passed – GUILTY, one and all. No one deserves salvation; all need it, but none deserve it nor even seek it! (cf. Rom. 3:11) Our condition is such that we surely cannot earn salvation. Sinners, living in sin and being controlled by “the ruler of the kingdom of this age” (and willing subjects at that), were by nature (*phusei*, lit. “innate disposition,” comp. Gal. 2:15; 4:8) “objects of God’s wrath.” Sinners therefore need mercy. But if the standard by which mercy is given is merit, we are doomed.

#### I. THE GRACE OF JUSTIFICATION (Romans 5:1-11)

- A. *What we have* (Rom. 5:1-2). In the opening of the fifth chapter the apostle writes, “Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” It is possible that he is implicitly answering a question that might have arisen from the conclusion of the preceding chapter. It would have been a natural thing for a doubter, or questioner, to ask in objecting to the faith way of salvation, “Is this method safe? Will it enable us to hold out to the end? After all, faith is a very tenuous thing. Can it stand up when the trials of life come to us?” In setting forth what we have, Paul mentions peace, which was obtained in the past; access, which is our present possession; and hope, which stretches out into the future (cf. Col. 3:4). The expression “peace with God” in Romans 5 is not to be confused with “the peace of God” (Phil. 4:6-7). “The idea here,” writes Boice, “is not that we are upset and therefore need to become trusting and more tranquil, but rather that we have been at war with God and He with us because of our sin, and that peace has nevertheless been provided for us by God – if we have been justified through faith in Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup>
- B. *What we should do* (Rom. 5:1, 3). The apostle has said that we should go on enjoying the peace we have, and he adds in verse 3 that we should also glory in tribulations. That seems a rather strange thing to say, does it not? It fairly cries out for explanation, and that is what Paul gives in the following verses.

- C. ***Why we should do it*** (Rom. 5:3-5). The word “knowing” introduces the ground upon which we should boast in our tribulations. Knowledge is the ground of faith in Paul’s mind, and in this case it is the knowledge of a spiritual process. Tribulation introduces a pattern of growth in the believer’s life that concludes with the possession of what we had before it began and an approved character. Tribulations really strengthen us, contrary to what one might think. The first thing Paul says is that tribulations work patience. Trials come from Him (cf. 8:35-39), and they give occasion for the exhibition of His power and grace (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9). The apostle says that patience does its work, too. It produces experience, a word that means something like *an approved character*. Cf. Phil. 2:22; 2 Cor. 2:9; 8:2; 9:13; 12:3. And finally, experience works hope. As Cranfield says, “To have one’s faith proved by God in the fires of tribulation and sustained by Him so as to stand the test is to have one’s hope in Him and in the fulfillment of His promises, one’s hope of His glory (v. 2), strengthened and confirmed.”<sup>2</sup> The final step in the process is expressed in verse 5, “And hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us.” We have what we began with when the tribulations came, that is, hope, plus the approved character given through the trials. And this hope does not disappoint us by proving to be a false and illusory thing. The reason is given in the words that follow. The love of God for us is the pledge that the hope it promises is valid through the indwelling Spirit (cf. 8:16). The verb “shed abroad” expresses the unstinting lavishness of the giving of the Third Person of the Trinity. The lavish nature of the giving will be spelled out in verses 6 through 8.

## II. THE CERTAINTY OF OUR JUSTIFICATION

- A. ***What we were*** (Rom. 5:6, 8, 10). The following three verses, verses 6 through 8, describe the nature of the divine love referred to in verse 5. And if one were to ask, “Paul, how do we know His love?,” the answer would come, “by His death.” That is the theme that the apostle expounds in these verses. Four descriptions of the sinner are given in these verses. In verse 6 he is said to be “without strength” and “ungodly.” In verse 8 he is referred to by the word “sinners.” While in verse 10 he is described by the term “enemies.” To sum up what Paul says about the terms, we could say, the helpless He died for, the ungodly He justified, the sinner He saved, and the enemy He reconciled to Himself.
- B. ***What He did*** (Rom. 5:8). What He did is expressed in the eighth verse, one of the most touching and beautiful the apostle ever wrote, “But God commendeth His love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” The apostle’s use of the present tense in “commendeth” should be noted. While the act of dying on the cross is an event of the past, the fact that it did occur remains as a present proof and encouragement of the love of God for His saints. That the apostle has believers in mind is clear from the use of the first person plural pronoun, “us.” Paul makes much of the fact that He died for us when we were yet “sinners.” Note the apostle’s emphasis. It is the reality of our lost condition and nature of our sinfulness that is underscored (and not, as N. T. Wright and the New Perspective crowd would have us believe, that we lacked membership in the covenant community).

## III. THE ENJOYMENT OF OUR JUSTIFICATION

- A. ***It guarantees our future salvation*** (Rom. 5:9-10). Cranfield comments, “Having described in vv. 6-8 the nature of God’s love for us, to the reality of which (brought home to our hearts by the Holy Spirit) he had appealed in v. 5 as proof that our hope will not disappoint us, he now returns to the subject of our hope’s not disappointing and affirms the certainty of our hope’s fulfillment, of our final salvation, in two parallel statements (vv. 9 and 10), both in the form of the *argumentum a minori ad maius* (called by the Rabbis *kal wahomer*, i.e., ‘light and heavy’).”<sup>3</sup> It is a marvelous *a fortiori*, and it contains one of the most convincing arguments for the security of the believer, and for the definiteness of the

atonement also. It is a brilliant climax to the section as Paul reasons from the death of Christ to the certainty of final salvation. The “then” introduces the inference from the preceding statement concerning His death. The key verse is the tenth verse, which contains the second of the *argumenta a minori ad maius*. This type of argument is one that contains a conclusion that follows with even greater logical necessity than another already accepted in the argument. In this case the argument already accepted is the reconciliation of enemies to God by the death of His Son, Jesus Christ. If that is accepted, then with even greater logical necessity it follows that the former enemies will be saved by the sharing of His life. In the verse there is a triple antithesis, with an advance in the last phrase, rendered by the KJV, “by His life.” The first antithesis is that of “enemies” and “reconciled.” The second is that of “were reconciled” and “shall be saved.” The third is that of “through the death of His Son” and “by His life.” The advance in the last clause is seen with one note that the proposition translated by “by” in the KJV is the proposition *en*, which means *in*. One would have expected another “by,” or another *dia* in the original, for the phrase rendered “by the death of His Son” contains a *dia*. The apostle advances from *through His life* to *in His life*, because he wants to stress the union that now obtains by virtue of the representative death of the Son. What, then, is the resulting sense of the apostle’s argument? Simply stated, it is this: If He has done the most for us, giving us a crucified Savior for our reconciliation when we were enemies, He surely will give us the least, save us through to the end, now that we have become friends, reconciled to Him. Or, surely if He has done the best for us, He will do the rest. As Sanday and Headlam put it, “If the first intervention cost the death of His Son, the second costs nothing, but follows naturally from the share which we have in His life.”<sup>4</sup> They in their comment refer to the Pauline use of *en* in the last phrase of the verse when they speak of “from the share, which we have in His life.”<sup>5</sup> The reference of the *en* may be to 8:34 and the intercession of the Son for us now. It is surely not a reference to deliverance from the dominion of sin, as some Higher Life Bible teachers have thought. The salvation is defined by the statement of verse 9, “saved from wrath.” Paul is thinking of the deliverance of the believer from the wrath and condemnation of sin, not from its dominion in the believer’s life, except insofar as the latter follows from the former. The argument, thus, is the *ne plus ultra* of the doctrine of the security of the believer. If, when we were enemies, He reconciled us to Himself by giving His Son as a penal, substitutionary sacrifice for sin, He will surely do that which is less now that we are friends, reconciled, deliver us from the wrath to come, and especially since we now share in the life of our Representative through the union consummated with Him. It is the kind of argument that cannot be refuted. The logic is inescapable. Cf. Jude 13:23. From the verse, therefore, we derive the greatest assurance of the certainty of the salvation that is given by grace through faith.

- B. ***It guarantees our future exultation*** (Rom. 5:11). Verse 11 is the climax of the section. There are several things to note. In the first place, the rendering of the KJV of the Greek word *katallagen*, “atonement,” is surely wrong. The word means *reconciliation*. The word *atonement* is an Old Testament word, referring to the covering of sin. It is not found at all in the New Testament, for sin is there not simply covered by the death of Christ, but paid for and removed. In the second place, there exists a question over the rendering of the participle *kauchomenoi*, rendered in the KJV by “we joy.” It may be taken in this way, construed as an indicative, and many commentators take it that way. It may also be taken as an imperative, being translated, then, “And not only so, but joy in God,” etc. That is less likely, since the construction is not frequent in the New Testament. In the third place, the most obvious way to take the participle is to take it as modifying the subject of the last finite verb. In this case it would modify the subject of the last finite verb. In this case it would modify the subject of the verb rendered, “we shall be saved.” That is the most common force of a participle, and the sense is excellent here. The antithetical “now,”

opposed to the future sense of the verb, “we shall be saved,” supports the taking of the participle as modifying the subject “we.” We would then render the last verse, “And not only so, but we shall be saved” boasting in our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have simply this: “We shall be not only saved in our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation.” The meaning of Paul, then, would be simply this: We shall be not only saved by sharing in His life, but we shall be saved, or carried right on through to heaven, boasting in our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, a triumphant, abundant entrance into glory is assured the saints for whom He has died. If, however, the traditional Reformational understanding of *sola fide* is jettisoned, then all that is stated here is mute. Justification according to the advocates of the New Perspective(s) tell us that justification has nothing to do with the gospel or with salvation. In N. T. Wright’s scheme, the Gospel centers around the Lordship of Christ, particularly in the incarnation, and as such the focus is on the Person of Christ and not the work of Christ in His active and passive obedience. Justification, according to Wright, does *not* have to do with traditional Reformed categories (Wright ends up admitting that the forgiveness of sins is really a secondary feature of covenant membership!).<sup>7</sup>

**CONCLUSION:** Luther declared that if the article of justification (*sola fide*) stands, the church stands, but if it falls, the church falls. Calvin called the doctrine “the main hinge on which religion turns” (*Institutes*, III, XI.1), while one of his successors at Geneva, Francis Turretin, declared that it is “of the greatest importance . . . the principle rampart of the Christian religion. . . . This being adulterated or subverted it is impossible to retain purity of doctrine in other places.”<sup>8</sup> More recently, Reformed theologian Robert Reymond has written of justification that it is “the heart and core of the gospel” and that consequently, “great care must be taken in teaching this doctrine lest one wind up declaring ‘another gospel’ which actually is not a gospel at all.”<sup>9</sup> Noted Scottish theologian Donald MacLeod has recently written, “According to Wright, justification means *God’s declaration that we are members of the covenant community*. He accepts that in making this declaration God’s only requirement is faith, but rejects old Protestant views that the value of faith lies in the fact that it unites us to Christ and thus makes us partakers of His righteousness. Instead, according to Wright, God takes faith as a sign that the Spirit is already at work in us and that we are already members of the covenant people. It demonstrates that we have a new, penitent heart; and God, seeing saving grace already at work, justifies us . . . For all its labored originality, this theory completely fails to escape the gravitational pull of the religion of self-justification. Wright’s basic thrust is that justification is no legal fiction: the believer *is* righteous. This righteousness may be the result of grace and of the Spirit’s work within us, but when all is said and done, it is our own personal righteousness. It is inherent, not imputed. We are asked to stand on the rock of our own covenant keeping. Could that have given Martin Luther peace? Could it give any of us peace? On the contrary, our hope would ebb and flow with every rise and fall in the tide of our personal spirituality.”<sup>10</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>J. M. Boice, *Romans: An Expository Commentary II* (Baker, 1992), p. 507.

<sup>2</sup>C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to The Romans I* (T&T Clark, 1975), p. 261.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. P. 265.

<sup>4</sup>S. Sanday and A.C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to The Romans I* (T&T Clark, 1902), p. 119.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. B. B. Warfield’s critical analysis of the Higher Life teachings in his two-volume “Perfectionism” *Works VII and VIII* (rpt. Baker, 1982).

<sup>6</sup>The exegetical observations are those of my late prof. of Theology, Dr. S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., and are from his unpublished lectures on Romans. I served as Dr. Johnson’s teaching assistant at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1984-85.

<sup>7</sup>Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Eerdmans, 1997), p. 129.

<sup>8</sup>F. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology II* (rpt. P&R, 1994), p. 633.

<sup>9</sup>R. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of The Christian Faith* (Thomas Nelson, 1998), p. 740.

<sup>10</sup>D. MacLeod *A Faith to Live By* (Mentor Books, 2002), p. 166-67.