

Romans 4:13-18 by Brian Bill

PREVIOUS

SERMONS BY
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ROMANS SERIES

(Note: Exposition not available on some passages)

NEXT

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Missing Romans 4:1-12

Romans 4:13-17 Receiving Rewards Not Wrath - 8/6/06

We had a great time on the other side of the cheddar curtain but it's also good to be back. We spent time with my family the first part of the week and with Beth's family during the second part. My parents have always lived in Wisconsin and now Beth's parents have seen the light and reside in Lombardi Land during the summer months.

There are many things that stand out from our time in the land of promise, but I was particularly struck by the caliber of our dads during this trip (our moms are great, too). My dad took us fishing until we could fish no more and the next day he took us swimming off his boat until we were waterlogged. He skipped a weekly commitment just so he could make us waffles one morning. He then showed me how to set up his camping trailer and allowed us to take it up north. On top of all that, he took care of our dog Charlie while we were gone, giving him a hair cut and lots of love, and maybe even some behavior modification. I watched as my dad served each of us and then went along as he helped a neighbor move some furniture. One afternoon I couldn't find him and learned that he was fixing someone's air conditioning. When I think of John Bill, I think of a servant, and those of you who went to Biloxi with him can attest to his work ethic.

When we arrived at Beth's parents' house, all of Beth's sisters and their families joined us for a celebration of her dad's 70th birthday. There were 23 of us for the weekend (that's why we needed the trailer). Beth's dad took everyone skiing and tubing and served each of us all weekend. On Saturday night, we had a celebration for him at a restaurant, where his daughters and grandchildren gave tribute to him and to his faith. On Sunday, he played his trumpet in church, giving all the glory to God. On Sunday afternoon, I had the privilege, along with another brother-in-law who is a pastor, of baptizing two of our nephews. It was a sacred moment. As we stood in a circle I thanked my father-in-law for being faithful and told him that he reminded me of Abraham because he has passed his faith along to his family. In fact, I called him "Father Frank." I then asked him to pray, and when he placed one hand on Jesse's head and the other on Jacob's and started interceding for them, we all started weeping.

When I asked permission from both of the patriarchs in our families to talk about them in this introduction, each of them told me that it was OK but they didn't want any undue attention. They are humble men who are just living out their responsibilities. I recognize that not everyone has a good father figure in their life and perhaps some of you would give anything to have a different dad. But this morning, I don't want us to just think about our dads, I want us to learn from the faith of Father Abraham so that we fall more deeply in love with our heavenly Father.

The fourth chapter of Romans shows how Abraham is an example of faith in action. Specifically, Paul points out that if the patriarch of the Jewish people was justified by faith, and not by works or by circumcision, then no one can be saved by just trying to be good. This morning we'll learn that Abraham was justified by faith and not by keeping the law.

Please turn to Romans 4:13-17 and follow along as I read:

It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring-not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: 'I have made you a father of many nations.' He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed-the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

Pastor Jeff did a great job last week demonstrating that no one can hop high enough to get to God's holiness. Our passage today is not easy to comprehend because Paul's presentation is complex. But if we understand verse 13 we'll see that Paul is utilizing an either/or argument. The contrast is really between law and faith, and between inheriting the world and inheriting wrath: ***"It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith."***

Paul is actually changing his strategy here. When he argued against circumcision in verses 9-12 as the way to salvation, he used a chronological or historical argument to show that Abraham was justified 14 years *before* the rite of circumcision was given. Paul could have continued this line of reasoning here in Romans when he turns to the Law, which is precisely what he does in Galatians 3:17 to show that Abraham was justified 430 years *before* the Law was given.

But instead of arguing from history, in our text today he shows the holes in law living and the inevitable result, which is receiving God's righteous wrath. The promise did not come through performance for Abraham but through faith. Let's review briefly what it means to be ***"heir of the world."*** Abraham was to receive four parts to this promise:

- People (Genesis 13:16; 15:5)
- Land (Genesis 15:18-21)
- Blessing (Genesis 12:3)
- Redeemer (Galatians 3:8,16)

It's interesting to note that in the original there is no definite article before the word law. It's not "the" Law but law in general, which for many of us includes those things that we think we must do to earn God's acceptance. Our focus should not be on our performance *for* God but on our faith *in* the promises of God. Once again Paul hammers home the truth that ***"righteousness comes by faith."*** Here's the sermon in one sentence: *When we focus on faith we will inherit the world, if we focus on performing we'll inherit wrath.*

Why Law Living Loses

Verses 14-15 show us why we lose if we try to live by the law. Whenever we're wrapped up in trying to work for God by keeping a set of standards, we will be wiped out in three ways.

1. Faith is forfeited (Ro 4:14a).

Look at the first part of verse 14: ***"For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value..."*** Faith is neutralized or empty when we try to just get by with our performance. The Amplified Bible uses the word "useless." Faith and law are opposites; when you choose one you are inevitably rejecting the other. A right relationship with God is either a gift to be received or a prize to be earned. I wonder, do you trust in your own abilities or in God's accomplishments? It can't be both.

2. God's promises are punctured (Ro 4:14b).

His argument continues in verse 14: ***"...and the promise is worthless."*** The word "worthless" means permanently idle. A couple weeks ago one of the tires on my car developed a leak. I went to fill it up with air but the next morning it was completely flat. I later learned that it had a big puncture in it and I couldn't go anywhere until I got it fixed. Friends, God's promises are punctured when we try to perform in our own strength. And we won't go anywhere until we trust in Him alone. The only way the promises of God are fulfilled in our life is through faith.

3. Wrath is awakened (Ro 4:15).

Ro 4:15 adds that if we are determined to live by law, we will be in trouble because no one can keep God's standards perfectly: ***"Because law brings wrath."*** We've been introduced to the idea of God's righteous wrath in each of the first three chapters of Romans (Ro 1:18; 2:5; 2:8; 3:5) and we see it again here. The word actually means a "violent vengeance" and carries with it the idea of a swelling which eventually bursts. It's no small matter to think we can meet God's standards on our own. If we stay on that path, we will end up facing wrath. John 3:36: ***"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."*** *When we focus on faith we will inherit the world, if we focus on performing we'll inherit wrath.*

Why Faith Living Wins

We are not declared righteous by law living but by faith living. Abraham's trust was not in what he possessed but in what had been promised. The word "faith" is used four times in our text and the word "believe" is used once. One of the Greek words behind this concept is the word "drink." This is helpful because when we drink something we don't just look at it or admire it or even just swirl it

around. We actually put it up to our lips and into our mouths and then down our throats so that it becomes part of us. It's like that Gatorade commercial that asks, "Is it in you?" That's exactly what Jesus meant in John 7:37-38 when He said, "**If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.**"

If living by the law doesn't work, what happens when we drink in God's truth by faith? I see at least five results from Ro 4:16-17.

1. God's promises are personalized (Ro 4:16).

Look at the first part of verse 16: "**Therefore the promise comes by faith...**" When we claim them by faith, God's promises become personally activated in our lives. God is the ultimate promise-keeper as Psalm 145:13 says: "**The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made.**" I like how 2 Corinthians 1:20 puts it: "**For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ.**"

2. Grace is given (Ro 4:16).

Let's keep going in Ro 4:16: "**...so that it may be by grace...**"

Living by the law leads to condemnation; living by grace leads to commendation.

The story is told about an elderly woman who trusted Christ for salvation and was being teased and tormented by her friends. They threw questions at her that she tried to answer to the best of her ability. When she was asked what being saved by grace meant, she thought for a minute and then replied: "*Jesus stood in my shoes at Calvary, and now I'm standing in His.*" This simple chart, suggested by Ray Pritchard, helps us see the difference between grace and law.

| <u>Grace</u> | <u>Law</u> |
|--------------|--------------|
| Faith | Works |
| Gift | Earned |
| Salvation | Condemnation |
| Certainty | Uncertainty |
| Forgiveness | Guilt |
| Rewards | Punishment |
| World | Wrath |

Here's the recurring refrain from the Book of Romans: "*Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.*" John MacArthur writes: "*Were it not for God's sovereign grace providing a way for salvation, even a person's faith could not save him.*"

3. Salvation is certain (Ro 4:16).

Ro 4:16 continues by saying the promise is "**guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring – not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.**" If you think salvation is by works you can never be sure that you are truly saved because you will never know if you've done enough. Do you know for certain that grace is guaranteed to you and that because of your faith in Jesus Christ that you would go to heaven if you were to die tonight? Friend, you can be sure! It's all been done for you. I love the last words from David in 2 Samuel 23:5: "**Has he not made with me an everlasting covenant, arranged and secured in every part?**" God has arranged it all and because He has, salvation is secure in every part. God's promises are personalized by faith and are guaranteed by grace.

4. God's offer is for everyone (Ro 4:17a).

God never intended for His people to keep the message to themselves. He is a global God as evidenced by the first part of verse 17: "**I have made you the father of many nations...**" Paul is quoting Genesis 17:5 to point out that salvation is for everyone. God blessed Abraham *so that* he would bless the nations. He was made a father *so that* he would be the spiritual father of all who believe in Christ. That's why we focus so much on reaching children for Christ through 5-Day Clubs and our strategic Sunday morning ministry. And we have a sacred obligation to be involved in missions because it's at the very heart of what we're called to do. I've been praying this week for the Doolittle's who are ministering in Israel.

Friends, God's offer of salvation is for everyone. It's for the Israeli and the Palestinian, for the Jew and the Arab, for the sons of Isaac and the sons of Ishmael, for Iraqis and Iranians, for flatlanders from Illinois and cheeseheads from Wisconsin. I like how John

Piper puts it: *"Gentiles become true Jews by faith in Jesus and Jews forfeit their final inheritance as Jews if they reject faith in Jesus as the Messiah."*

5. The impossible becomes possible (Ro 4:17b).

With God there is no such thing as impossible. We see this in the last half of Ro 4:17: **"...The God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were."** Abraham certainly experienced this when he was able to father Isaac at such an old age, when according to Hebrews 11:11-12, he considered his body as "good as dead."

Before my nephews were baptized my brother-in-law said something I'll never forget. He looked right at them and said, *"Everyone I have baptized has died."* Their eyes got big and then Marty explained that baptism is a picture of the death of Jesus, and our death with him. When we come up out of the water baptism symbolizes the resurrection of Jesus and our new life with him.

There is no greater miracle in the world than the fact that God made us alive through Christ! Jesus said in Luke 18:27: **"What is impossible with men is possible with God."** God calls Abraham a father when he wasn't and calls us righteous even when we aren't. By the way, if you are a born again believer and you have never been baptized; may I challenge you to take the plunge? Contact the church office and we'll arrange a service this fall.

Implications and Applications

When we focus on faith we will inherit the world, if we focus on performing we'll inherit wrath. If we are justified by faith and not by keeping the law, does that mean that we can just sit back and passively believe? No. The act of believing is active and always involves an act of leaving. We see this in Hebrews 11:8: **"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going."** We must leave that which we've been trusting and then lean on the One who is fully trustworthy. Here are some ways that we can put feet to our faith.

1. Stop trying and start trusting.

In what one area do you need to trust God? Is there something that you've given up on, that just seems dead? It's time to trust that God can bring life out of that which is lifeless. Maybe it's your marriage. Perhaps it's a ruptured relationship or a financial situation or a health crisis. If you've stopped praying for someone, it's time to start trusting that God will do His work in His time and in His way. Give it to God right now and let Him **"give life to the dead and call things that are not as though they were."**

Ray Stedman puts it well:

If I have a God who can raise things from the dead and who can call into existence the things that do not exist, I am going to be a very exciting person to live with. ([The Faith of our Father - Romans 4:13-25](#))

2. Start living as an heir right now. Too many of us are living like paupers and we forget that we are children of the King! We ask God to bless us and He says in Ephesians 2:3 that He's blessed us **"in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."** We live defeated lives and God says in 2 Peter 1:3 that He's given us **"everything we need for life and godliness."**

Ephesians 3:6 says: **"This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus."**

The young ladies in our Student Ministry learned on Friday night from the Book of Esther that they are princesses and queens and that God has given each of them a position for **"such a time as this"** so that they can serve the King of Kings. As the bride of Christ they were taught to get themselves ready. Friend, you have been given an inheritance that is literally out of this world. It's time to start living with some joy. Claim what has been promised to you. You are accepted by the Almighty, you are secure because of the Savior's work and you are significant to the Holy Spirit who wants to use you.

A young man from a wealthy family was about to graduate from high school and as was the custom in his affluent neighborhood, he expected to receive a new car from his parents. On the eve of his graduation, the father handed his son a gift-wrapped Bible. The son was so angry that he threw the Bible down and stormed out of the house, never talking to his father again. When his father eventually died, the son went through his dad's possessions and came across the Bible he had been given. Brushing away the dust he opened it to find a cashier's check dated the day of his graduation in the exact amount of the car he had so desperately wanted.

Friend, have you tossed aside any of God's promises? Don't overlook your inheritance and don't wait until it's too late to recognize what could have been yours.

3. Settle the assurance of salvation issue.

As Ro 4:16 states, grace is **"guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring."** Friends, once you become a son or daughter of Abraham

by faith, Jesus promises to never leave you or forsake you in Hebrews 13:5. Listen to these words from 1 John 5:13: ***“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”*** If you have placed your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, God’s grace provides a guarantee that you have eternal life. Just as you did nothing to earn it; God’s grace keeps you from losing it.

Related to this, if you know Jesus Christ as your Savior, then even as the world situation continues to unravel, you can have the confidence that you are ready for the return of Christ. If your faith is in Jesus you don’t have to freak out. I believe that we are either in the end-times or getting closer and closer each day. While I’m certainly not going to make any prophetic predictions or resort to political punditry, I will say that as you read your Bible the Middle East is the crucible for end-time events and that you better be ready for the return of Jesus.

4. Take a risk for Jesus.

Someone once said, *“Attempt something so great for God that if He is not in it, it will fail.”* Do you expect great things from God? If so, then attempt great things for Him. Are you living a boring and predictable Christian life? It’s time to go a bit crazy for Christ. In his book called *“The Slumber of Christianity,”* Tedd Decker argues that too many believers have settled for a bland spirituality when our expectation of receiving an inheritance that will not fade should awaken within us a passion for heaven while we live here on earth. It was G. K. Chesterton who said,

The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried.

When **D. L. Moody** made his first trip to Britain he heard some words that set him hungering and thirsting for a deeper Christian experience. As he sat on a bench with Henry Varley, he was challenged with this statement:

The world has yet to see what God will do with, and for, and through, and in, and by, the man who is fully consecrated to Him.” Moody thought to himself, “He said ‘a man,’ not a great man, nor a learned man, nor a smart man, but simply ‘a man.’ I am a man...I will try my utmost to be that man.”

This transformed his life and his ministry and from this point on he pushed ahead, believing God for great things. Later, someone asked Moody if he was “O and O,” which means, “Out and out for Christ.” He was determined to be “O and O” for Christ until God called him home.

As I look at this next year of ministry, I see God calling us to be “O and O” for Christ in at least four areas:

Gaining more disciples. Let’s ramp up our commitment to share Jesus with those in our network of relationships. We’re planning to have a float in the Thresherman’s Parade and while the praise band plays and sings, we’re in need of people who would be willing to hand out flyers to people. Contact the church office or Maxine Williams if you’re interested.

Growing in depth. We’re challenging every ministry to go deeper with Christ. In addition, Pastor Dick will be launching a new discipleship ministry and will explain more about this in two weeks.

Getting out of debt. I’ve been pleased with the personal commitment that the leadership has made to reduce our Family Life Center debt this coming year. Thank you for your response to our challenge to give to the Building Fund. May I encourage you to continue giving so that we can pay off our Family Life Center note by this time next year?

Glimpsing the dream. As we gain more disciples, grow in depth, and get out of debt, we will be positioned for ministry expansion. God will reveal the next steps as we continue to seek Him.

5. Become a child of Abraham right now. No matter if you have a good father or not, it’s time to make God your Father by becoming His child. John Piper summarizes our situation well: *“You have two possible futures in front of you. One is to inherit the world; the other is to inherit wrath. Whether you inherit the one or the other hangs on one fundamental thing: the righteousness of God. Has it been credited to your account or does it stand as a witness against you?”* Incidentally, we are praying for several people to step up to the plate in our AWANA ministry. Perhaps you’ve served in the past and God is tugging at you to get involved again or maybe you’ve never been part of AWANA before. Whatever the case, if you’re willing to go a bit crazy for Christ, we could use you.

Someone told me recently that the word “righteous” in Chinese has two parts. The top part means “lamb” and the bottom part is “I” or “me.” I wanted to verify this so I emailed former PBC member Stella Wong in California. Stella confirmed that this is exactly what it means. Friend, if you are a born-again believer the Lamb is over you. When God looks at you he sees Jesus the Lamb and declares you righteous in His eyes. As a result you will receive rewards, not wrath. Are you under the Lamb? Father Abraham has many sons and daughters and you can become one as well. *When we focus on faith we will inherit the world, if we focus on performing we’ll inherit wrath.*

Communion

Many years ago an English evangelist had just concluded his service in the village square. The crowd had dispersed and he was busily engaged in loading up his equipment. Just then a young man came up to him and said, *“What must I DO to be saved?”* Sensing that he was trusting in his performance, the preacher answered in a nonchalant way: *“I’m sorry, it’s too late!”* The inquirer was startled and became frantic: *“Please don’t say that. I’ll do anything.”* But the evangelist insisted, *“It’s too late!”* The man was dejected and started to walk away. The preacher called out after him and said, *“If you want to know what you need to do to be saved, it’s too late now or any other time. The work of salvation is done, finished, and completed on the cross. All you need to do is believe and receive the free gift of forgiveness”* (adapted from “Our Daily Bread,” RBC Ministries).

Romans 4:18-25 Finding Hope in a Hopeless World - 8/13/06

Good morning. My name is Abraham. I thought it was time for me to speak to you since the Apostle Paul has been using me as an example in Romans 4 and your pastor dropped the ball by only alluding to me last week. I think he needs to do a better job so that’s why I’m here today. Sometimes he gets so fixated on the Promised Land that he forgets that the promise of a luscious land flowing with milk and cheese (I mean, honey) was given first to me.

Another reason I thought you needed to hear from me today is that while am honored by Jews, Muslims and Christians it seems that Christians know less about me than the sons of Isaac and the sons of Ishmael do. Another reason why I wanted to speak to you is because I come from the part of the world that has grabbed headlines today. I grew up in Iraq and eventually settled in what you know as Israel. Finally, I wanted to speak to you because many of you are having a hard time with hope. Some of you feel hopeless in your heart. I’d like to share my story so that you can find hope in a hopeless world.

I should say at the beginning that I’m embarrassed at the thought that the Apostle Paul and other writers hold me up as an example. If you’re going to copy anything about me, please don’t mimic my conduct or follow my compromises. I am simply a simple man who strived to take God at His Word.

When God promised something I tried to believe Him, even though I bombed on many occasions. I told some big lies at least twice (that you know about), which put my wife in danger and I tried to make things happen according to my timetable many times. But, by God’s grace, I was always drawn back to believing in the promises and power of God. As you’ve been learning through your study of Romans, I was not justified by my behavior, but by my belief in God. Moses captured it simply and succinctly when he wrote this summary statement in Genesis 15:6: **“Abraham believed the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness.”**

Your pastor didn’t give me much time this morning so if you want to learn more about my life you should read Genesis 12-25. I had been pretty comfortable living in Iraq when God appeared to me, giving me a command and a promise. Incidentally, this is always how God works. When we obey Him, we experience His promises and we end up being blessed, but I’m getting ahead of myself.

God called me to leave my country, my people and my family and go to a land that He would show me. I was told that God would make me into a great nation, that He would bless me and through me all peoples on earth would be blessed. I didn’t really understand this, and certainly wondered why God would make that kind of promise to a pagan like me, but I obeyed, taking my wife Sarai and my nephew Lot with me. I was 75 years old at the time. I should say that some of you are getting up in years yourself. Don’t think that God is done with you. If you’ve been on the sidelines, it’s time to get back in the game.

I should also mention that while I obeyed and went to the land God directed me, at the first sign of trouble; I resorted to my own resources. Faced with a famine, instead of going to the Lord for help, I decided to go to Egypt. The very first words from my mouth recorded in Scripture involved deceit, as I told my wife to lie when the Egyptians asked who she was. I was horrified by what happened next and realized how sinister and selfish I can be. I was struck by how quickly I headed south when things got tough – not just geographically, but also spiritually. I suspect the same kind of horrible stuff has taken harbor in your hearts as well.

God’s promise that Sarai and I were going to have a child was both puzzling and maddening. I was way past my prime and my sweet Sarai had never been able to have children. The only thing she had given birth to was hopelessness and despair. In our culture childlessness was considered a curse. When I told my wife that we were going to have a child, she thought I was just playing a cruel joke on her.

I remember negotiating with God and asking him if this promise could just be poured out on my servant Eliezer. God patiently redirected me, telling me to look up at the heavens and count the stars, telling me that that I would have a son from my own body and that my offspring would outnumber the stars in the sky. God even entered into a covenant of blood with me to show how serious He was.

After ten years of living with no heir, Sarai’s hopelessness led her to ask me to have a child with her servant Hagar. This was a surrogate solution but it wasn’t what God had wanted. When she got pregnant, Sarai was even more devastated and forced Hagar

to flee into the wilderness. She gave birth to a son named Ishmael, who though he was my boy, was not the son of promise. I was 86 years old at the time.

When I was 99 years old, God confirmed his covenant with me and gave circumcision as the sign of it. I was learning to trust the Lord, even as I faced the facts about my own situation. I tried to not doubt.

God told me again that Sarai and I would have a son. I wanted to believe but I also was really struck with how funny all this was. I remember falling facedown and laughing out loud as I considered how hilarious it would be for a 100-year-old man to father a child with a 90-year-old wife! But then God got real specific in Genesis 17:21: ***“But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.”***

When Sarah overheard that we were going to have a baby boy, she couldn't contain herself and laughed like crazy. God didn't really appreciate her guffaw because it revealed her lack of faith. But God was so gracious to her when he declared in Genesis 18:14: ***“Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son.”*** Having faith is pretty funny, because it often flies in the face of facts.

What's even funnier is that we did have a boy and we named him Isaac, which means “he laughs.” Sarah has such a sweet spirit because after Isaac was born I remember her saying, ***“God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.”***

That's enough about me and my experience for now. With that as background, let's listen to how Paul applies my experience in Romans 4:18-21:

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

There was no human way that Abraham and Sarah could have a son. All hope was lost, and yet Abraham hung on with some hope. That's the challenge isn't it? How do we have hope when we feel hopeless? How can stay strong when we feel like giving up? Abraham held on to hope only because he kept going back to what God had said, ***“So shall your offspring be.”*** Likewise, if we want to see hope grow again in our hearts, we must go back to God's Word. The seed of hope will only grow in the soil of Scripture.

I'd like to draw some biblical principles from this passage that God can use to give you and I hope in the midst of whatever hopelessness we might be experiencing right now. In order for this preaching time to become practical, I'd like you to think of a hopeless situation right now and as we go through these timeless truths I'd like you to apply God's Word to whatever you are facing. As I mentioned last week, it could be a relational rupture, some family friction, a hopeless health situation, a career crisis, financial fears, or something else. As we walk through God's Word, draw some encouragement from the words of Clare Boothe Luce: *“There are no hopeless situations; there are only people who have grown hopeless about them.”*

1. Face the facts (Ro 4:19).

This first step may surprise you. Before you and I can find hope we must first face the facts of our situation. Look at Ro 4:19: ***“...he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead -- since he was about a hundred years old -- and that Sarah’s womb was also dead.”*** To “face the fact” literally means to consider carefully by fixing one's eyes on something. This seems simple enough but many people today either live in denial or with a sense that it's somehow not spiritual to assess the mess we're in. Abraham knew how absurd it was for him to be able to father a child and for his wife to be able to get pregnant. The word “dead” here is in the perfect tense, meaning it was a permanent condition. All of his reproductive abilities had died and Sarah's womb was like a tomb. He was in need of a double miracle. Hebrews 11:12 confirms that Abraham was ***“as good as dead.”***

Friend, let me state the obvious. Whenever you have faith or are called to have faith, there will always be obstacles and difficulties. Circumstances will always seem overwhelming. What's the truth about the situation you're in? Face the facts. Don't go into denial. Jettison trite spiritual jargon. You may need some help from another person who can do some truth telling with you. Whatever you need to do, the first step is to face the facts.

2. Deal with your doubts (Ro 4:20a).

It's natural to experience some doubts, especially when you're discouraged and dismayed. Listen carefully. Doubts don't disqualify you but they can certainly derail you if they're not dealt with. Look at the first part of Ro 4:20: ***“Yet he did not waver through***

unbelief...” The work “waver” means to be divided or to separate. This is similar in meaning to James 1:8 when we’re told to not allow doubt to have the final word: “...**he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.**” For Abraham the doubts were there and they were real but he didn’t allow them to take control. Specifically, he knew that he was an old goat and his wife was infertile, but he didn’t allow his mind to stay on these things. He didn’t dwell on his doubts.

I’m reminded of the situation in the Book of Nehemiah when God’s people were working on the wall with all their might and then they suddenly stopped because they allowed doubts to creep in. Specifically, when they took their eyes off of God and instead started looking at all the rubble and rubbish around them, they wanted to give up.

Listen to Nehemiah 4:10: “...**there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall.**” Here’s a question. Wasn’t the rubble there in the beginning? Of course it was. The difference was that when they started the project they were focused on God and His character. Now, they had become rubble-gazers. Friend, if you focus on all the junk in your life, and in the lives of others, you *will* doubt and become discouraged. Let’s determine to be God-gazers instead of rubble-gazers, OK?

What doubts do you need to deal with related to the specific situation you are facing right now? Do battle with unbelief or it will win and you will unravel. Tell God about your doubts. Be like the father who was struggling with issues related to his son when he said in Mark 9:24: “**I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!**”

3. Ponder the promises of God (Ro 4:20b).

After facing the facts and dealing with your doubts, then focus on the faithfulness of God. The only way I know to find hope is to lock into the Lord’s promises. Notice the next phrase of verse 20: “...**regarding the promise of God.**” We must always come back to these questions: *What has God said about this? What promises has He made?*

I like what D. Martin Lloyd-Jones once said about faith: “*It must be anchored to the bare Word of God and on nothing else whatsoever.*” If you think about it, Abraham had no one to talk to about this and certainly no precedent to follow. All he had was the promise of God, and that was more than enough.

It’s very interesting that if you go back to Genesis, God repeats His promise five times – in Genesis 12, 13, 15, 17, and 21. It’s as if He knows that Abraham is going to struggle to believe and so he repeats the promise until He believes it. Interestingly, the word “promise” or “promised” appears five times in Romans 4 as well.

Think about your impossible situation once again. You’ve now faced the facts and you’ve started to deal with your doubts. Now it’s time to claim God’s promises. Numbers 23:19 says,

God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

Here’s where God’s Word must become very dear to you. Whatever you’re struggling with, God has a promise for you. Pull out your concordance, which is in the back of many of your Bibles and simply look up verses that deal with your situation.

As an example, here are four promises just from Romans 8:

I am forever free from condemnation (Romans 8:1-2)

I am assured that everything works together for good (Romans 8:28)

I am free from any charge against me (Romans 8:31-34)

I cannot be separated from the love of God (Romans 8:35-39)

4. Allow God to fortify your faith (Ro 4:20c).

I find this next step very encouraging. When we face the facts, deal with our doubts and ponder the promises of God, God Himself will fortify our faith. Look at the next phrase: “...**but was strengthened in his faith...**” The word “strengthened” means to “put power in,” like when we put gas in our cars. Aren’t you glad that God doesn’t expect faith the size of a mountain? Actually, when we have faith the size of a mustard seed, God can move mountains. And, when we exhibit even a little faith in a big God, God grows our faith. The question is not how little or how big your faith is, it’s a question of how big your God is.

I’m encouraged that God doesn’t count Abraham’s waffling and sin against him. Sometimes we think that because of how we’ve acted in the past that there is no way God can use us now. What one thing can you trust God with right now? Maybe your faith is small but that’s OK. God will grow it. Go back to that hopeless situation you identified at the beginning. As you ponder God’s promises, tell Him that you’re going to take Him at His Word and believe what He says.

5. Give glory to God (Ro 4:20d).

Part of our problem when we feel hopeless is that we become consumed with ourselves. The way out of this selfish spiral is to begin giving all glory and honor to God. Instead of looking within, it's time to look above. Abraham did this as we see in the last part of Ro 4:20: **"...and gave glory to God."** George Mueller says, *"There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins where man's power ends."*

This is similar in thought to Ken Sande's approach to biblical peacemaking when he states that conflict is an opportunity for us to give glory to God. It's when we're in those tough and tense times that we can give glory to God when we do what's right and fight for peace. John Stott says that we glorify God when we let God be God! We give Him glory when we give Him credit and when we put His promises into practice.

In what ways can you give glory to God right now? How can you thank Him? What one thing can you do that you know you need to do? The best way to give Him glory is by obeying Him. Behave according to what you believe. That will bring Him glory.

Hebrews 11:6: **"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."**

6. Commit yourself to the character of God (Ro 4:21).

The only way to find hope is to find safe harbor in God and His character. Verse 21 teaches us that because God is all-powerful and that He keeps His promises, we can be fully persuaded that He will do what He says He will do: **"Being fully persuaded that God has power to do what He had promised."** It took 25 long years, but Abraham was completely convinced that God had the power to do what He had promised. He considered everything carefully and because of God's character, He chose to believe.

Have you been waiting a long time for God to act? Settle the fact that it's not because God is impotent. He is powerful enough to do anything. The issue is ultimately whether something is His will or not, and if it is, then it becomes a matter of His timing.

I really like how a good friend of mine explains the process of faith development:

Faith is belief plus unbelief and acting on the belief part. Faith is not 100% certainty. Faith means seeing the promise and the problems, and then deciding to act on the promise even before you see it fulfilled. Faith doesn't wait. Faith acts. It takes the proverbial leap into the dark. If God's not there, you're in for a fast ride to the rocks below. If he is there, then you'll be okay. But you'll never know till you jump.

This happened in to Abraham when God changed his name from Abram, which means "father of many" to Abraham, "father of a vast, vast multitude." If the first name was a stretch, this second name seems preposterous. Really at that particular time his name should have been something like Abechad, "father of one" because his only child was Ishmael. Here's the amazing thing. God changed his name when he was 99 years old, before Isaac was even conceived. His friends thought he was crazy before, now they think he's nuts!

Incidentally, I think Abraham's faith was fortified in large part because God progressively revealed His character to Him by using seven of His names or titles. For more on the names of God, see **Name of the LORD is a Strong Tower: Summary**

We must fight for faith by not dwelling on our doubts. God will grow our faith and reveal more of Himself to us when we step out in faith and commit to His character. My favorite definition of faith comes from Philip Yancey who said, *"Faith means believing in advance what will only make sense in reverse."* If we wait until all the circumstances are in our favor, we'll wait forever.

David didn't wait for Goliath to go away. He went down into the valley with his slingshot, making this declaration of faith in 1 Samuel 17:45: We must fight for faith by not dwelling on our doubts. God will grow our faith and reveal more of Himself to us when we step out in faith and commit to His character. My favorite definition of faith comes from Philip Yancey who said, *"Faith means believing in advance what will only make sense in reverse."* If we wait until all the circumstances are in our favor, we'll wait forever.

You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.

Everyone else had allowed their fears and doubts to take control. Their problems had paralyzed them. But David relied on the name of the Lord Almighty and ran into battle. Likewise, if we wait for our doubts to disappear, we'll have to wait a long time. Sooner or later, we have to act on the belief part.

An Illustration of Restored Hope

Allow me to illustrate these six principles from the third chapter of Lamentations. Jeremiah is lamenting all that he has lost. The city

of Jerusalem lies in ruins and his hope has almost vanished.

Faced the Facts. Listen to Lam 3:18: ***“My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the Lord.”***

Dealt with Doubts. In Lam 3:21 he forces himself to remember what is true: ***“Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope.”***

Pondered the Promise of God. The only way out of hopelessness is through the promises of God. We hear these familiar words in Lam 3:22-23: ***“Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”***

Allowed God to Fortify his Faith. Jeremiah is now able to trust again as he makes this statement of faith in the first part of Lam 3:24: ***“The Lord is my portion...”***

Gave Glory to God. Jeremiah honors God and gives him glory when he states that He ***“wait for Him”*** in the second part of Lam 3:24.

Commits to the Character of God. Finally, Jeremiah seeks safe harbor in the very character of God in verse 25: ***“The Lord is good to those whose hope is in Him, to the one who seeks Him.”***

Friend, is the Lord your portion this morning? Is He your everything? If He is, you can have hope for the future! Hope is always built on trust *and* the truth.

Let’s go back to Romans 4 and pick up the truth from Lam 3:22-25: Friend, is the Lord your portion this morning? Is He your everything? If He is, you can have hope for the future! Hope is always built on trust *and* the truth.

This is why ‘it was credited to him as righteousness.’ The words ‘it was credited to him’ were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness -- for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness. But he’s much more than just an historical figure, or even just an example of hope for us. Abraham’s faith development shows us that we will never be justified by our own efforts, but only by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus was delivered to death so our sins can be forgiven. The cost was paid at the cross and His resurrection is like a receipt that we have received His righteousness. But this is available only for those who have accessed it by faith. It’s been accomplished for you but it must be applied in order for this amazing transaction to be activated in your life.

You don’t have to wait to get to heaven to enjoy the hope God wants to give you today. 1 Peter 1:3

In His great mercy, He’s given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Christ Jesus from the dead.

In the New Testament, the word “hope” occurs one time before the resurrection of Jesus – but it occurs 70 times after Jesus was raised from the dead! Clearly, hope comes from the resurrection.

Christianity rests ultimately on the reality of two events – the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The first paid for our sins; the second guaranteed our right standing before God.

I like how **Chuck Swindoll** explains Ro 4:25:

Man owed God a debt for his transgressions that he could not repay. However the Lord, who is both just and merciful, sent His Son to pay man’s debt. Jesus Christ took the bill in His hand and paid it in full on Calvary. The payment was made by His own blood. Three days after He was buried in a tomb, Jesus rose from the dead and presented the bill as paid to His Father. The Lord stamped it Paid in Full and gave His Son the receipt. Thus, any person who believes that Jesus died for his sin and rose from the dead for his justification is secure forever. The Son has the receipt to prove it!

The only question that remains is this: *Have you accepted what Jesus Christ has done for you?* The answer to that question is the difference between Heaven and Hell, salvation and condemnation, eternal life and eternal death, hope and hopelessness.

What impossible situation are you facing? What mountain is looming over you? It’s possible to find hope in a hopeless world. God has made a way for you but you must first submit to Him as Savior and then live under His Lordship. He was delivered over to death for ***“your sins.”*** That’s why He came. The key phrase is found in Ro 4:24: ***“who believe in Him.”***

Are you ready to receive what only He can give you? When you commit to Him by faith, His righteousness will be credited to your

account, and you will become a son or daughter of Abraham.

If you're ready to receive Jesus as your redeemer, you could pray something like this:

Lord Jesus, I admit that I am hopeless without you. My sins are eating me up inside and I don't want to live like this any longer. I repent of the way I've been living and receive what you accomplished on the cross when you died in my place. You died for my sins and right now I believe you and I receive you. Thank you for rising from the dead for that gives me certainty that you can save me and that you can breathe hope into my hopeless life. It's my sincere desire to live under your leadership for the rest of my life. Do your work now in my life so that which is impossible will become possible and help me to hold onto hope for the rest of my days. Amen.

It's so easy for us to become arrogant and argumentative when we speak with people who do not yet know Christ. When I was first saved I was often confrontative with people, arguing points of doctrine and emphasizing points of difference. Have you ever tried to argue someone into the kingdom of heaven? It doesn't work, does it? Arguing just makes people angry.

Instead, let's start by loving and respecting people. Make sure your friends know that you have a broken heart for them. Listen. If Hell is real, and it is, then it ought to tear us up. We better have some tears for those who are headed to Hell. If we can laugh about someone going there, or just not care about them, then we don't have the heart of Paul...or of Jesus.

I return to the Barna survey. Young non-Christians frequently mentioned that their negative views of Christians were confounded by someone who provided an entirely different, vibrant picture of what it means to be a Christian. Here's a comment made by one insightful agnostic: *"I know all you Christians are not bad because I've had a few conversations with Christians I respect. Basically, I respect them because they respect me."*

Let's begin with a focus on areas of agreement and then move the conversation to a discussion about Christ, which is what really matters anyway.

2. Focus on Christ.

After finding connecting points, then we're to focus on Christ. Look at how Paul does this in the last part of verse 5: **"...and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen."** The greatest privilege the nation of Israel had was that the Messiah was born as the son of David, the ultimate promise...and yet they didn't receive God's provision. Jesus was Jewish, of the tribe of Judah, born according to the law, the fulfillment of prophecy. If Jesus were not Jewish he would not qualify as the promised Messiah and believing Gentiles (like us) would remain strangers and aliens without hope and without God (Ephesians 2:12).

Jesus is both God and man. According to His human nature, He came from the line of the Jews (see the genealogy in Matthew 1:1-18). According to His divine nature, He is from eternity (John 1:1-3). And He is Lord: **"God over all."**

It's Time to Try Tears

The founder of the Salvation Army was General William Booth. Some of his salvation soldiers were sent into the ghettos of Los Angeles in the 1920s and after three years of no results, they sent Booth a telegram: *"It just won't work. We have tried everything. The gospel is just not being received here."* A couple days later they received a two-word telegram from General Booth that said, *"Try tears."*

It's time for us to try tears! When's the last time you had great sorrow for someone's soul? Do you have unceasing anguish for your closest friends and family members? While it's important for non-Christians to know "where we stand" we can sometimes come across as rigid and judgmental. Wouldn't it be better if along with knowing where we stand that lost people know that we love them and that we fall to our knees and cry for their conversion? Has it been awhile since you tried tears?

As a way to help us try tears, we've put some packets of Kleenex under each row. I'd like the person sitting closest to the center aisle to pick up a packet and take out a Kleenex and then pass the packet down the row. As we prepare for communion today, I'd like you to think of one person who doesn't know Jesus and now imagine them in the agonizing fires of Hell. Picture them crying out...forever. Out of love and respect for them, it's time for us to try some tears and then tell them about Jesus so that they can be connected to Him.

It doesn't really matter *how* we do it – with a tract, a book, an invitation, or an explanation. What really matters is whether we love and respect people.

I've spent a lot of time talking to believers today. There are actually three groups of people here today – believers, non-believers

and make-believers. Which group are you in? What about your own soul? Are you saved? If you were to die this afternoon, are you certain that you'd go to heaven? You may be religious like Paul's relatives, but do you have a saving relationship with Jesus? Jesus is "God over all." Is He Lord of your life?

Romans 5:1-2 Making Peace With God - 9/24/06

Our world is whacked out and the lack of peace is pervasive. First we hear that spinach is no longer safe and then the Pope got in trouble with some Muslims for quoting an old emperor, inflaming the Islamic world. The leaders of Venezuela and Iran bashed the United States at the U.N., with one of them calling President Bush "the devil." I heard this week that NBC is considering airing a Madonna concert which shows her performing a song during a mock crucifixion while she hangs suspended from a cross. I also learned that while NBC is now airing *Veggie Tales* on Saturday mornings, the producers were ordered to edit out all Bible references just two weeks before the first episode was due to air.

And then there were those charming comments from Rosie O'Donnell when she compared "radical Christianity" to those who killed 3,000 people on 9/11. This is what she said: "*Radical Christianity is just as threatening as radical Islam in a country like America.*" (See www.breakpoint.org for more information).

How do we respond to all of this and more? I see at least three options.

1. **Protest in love.** There's a place for protest because people need to hear from Christians, provided we do so with grace. I sent an email to WEEK-TV in Peoria this week, expressing my concerns about the Madonna Concert. I tried to do it politely and with love. I did get a response almost immediately that said in part: "*We frankly agree that Madonna's music and stylistic approach is clearly not for everyone... If the Madonna special, or any program on NBC for that matter, appears inappropriate viewing for you and your family, I would strongly encourage you not to watch...thanks for your thoughts and we will be happy to pass them along to NBC on your behalf.*" I did hear later in the week that this concert may not be aired after all.
2. **Political involvement.** In a democracy like ours, it behooves people to vote their conscience, and to be involved in the political process. Incidentally, even Nancy Pelosi, one of Bush's strongest critics, has come to his defense, calling Hugo Chavez a "thug" for disrespecting our commander-in-chief.
3. **Permeate our culture with peace.** While it's good to protest at times, and to be involved politically, I'd like to suggest that the most important thing Christians can do is to live out what they say they believe and proclaim the gospel of peace. In fact, a case could be made that we protest too much and turn to politics too quickly. As I mentioned last week, since the end is near, we must bend our ears and hear what God is saying to the church. It's time to wake up and worship, to stop sleeping and start serving, and to live in light of who we really are so that we can permeate our culture.

In other words, we do need to become *radical* in our faith. I looked up this word and found out that it has a number of definitions that apply to us. I'm quite sure this is not how Rosie O'Donnell is using the term

"Getting to the root or source." As we've been emphasizing these past weeks, part of our vision this year is to grow deeper with Christ. I hope you're planning to take one of the "Dive Deep" classes that will begin next month. Someone defined "radical" this way: "*Radical simply means grasping things at the root.*" We're praying as we return to our roots, that according to Ephesians 3:18 we "*may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.*"

"Departing from the usual or customary." When we go deeper, we'll depart from customary Christianity and benign belief. Unfortunately, too many of us have settled for a soft spirituality. What we might consider "radical" today is simply normal Christianity. Arthur Wallis, in his book called "The Radical Christian," says: "*If any man professes to call himself a child of God, a disciple of Christ, or a citizen of the kingdom, and yet is bereft of this radicalism, he would be well advised to take a long hard look at his Christian profession...The radical Christian is not a special Christian. He simply qualifies for New Testament normality.*" The Bible knows of no other Christian than a "radical" one.

One of our students was recently asked why she talked about God all the time. I love her answer: "*Because He is my life.*" In the early church, radical Christians were not called radical, they were just called Christians. On Sunday nights our students are learning how to rescue themselves from ordinary lives in order to have extraordinary lives that thrive and not just survive. Ordinary living is safe, comfortable and boring but makes no impact. Extraordinary living on the other hand is risky, uncomfortable and adventurous, but makes a high impact.

"Favoring fundamental changes in current practices." This third definition gets to the heart of how we respond to the changing cultural climate around us. When we go back and cultivate the root, we need to get ready for some fruit. And we need

to be willing to change our practices.

In order to depart from the usual or customary we need to stay connected to our spiritual source. If we want to be “radical” believers, then we must return to our roots as taught in the Book of Romans. I don’t want to take a lot of time to summarize the first four chapters because we took fifteen sermons to deal with the fundamental facts of our condition apart from Christ and how we can be declared righteous through faith in Christ.

Today we’re beginning a six-part series on Romans 5 that we’re calling “The Grace Awakening.” If you’ve been with us for awhile you’ve suffered through the incessant emphasis on sin but now we’re turning a corner in this amazing manifesto. The mood has changed and now we’re going to drink deeply from the rivers of God’s amazing grace. Please turn in your Bibles to Romans 5:1-2 and follow along as I read:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

These two verses are one extended sentence in the original and serve as a bridge to what has been written previously. Paul’s use of pronouns changes from “you” and “they” to “us,” “our,” and “we.” He’s writing to the new community of Christians who have been radically transformed by God’s grace. The word “**therefore**” ties us back the early chapters in the book where he has established that “**we have been justified through faith.**” Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the means by which we have been declared righteous. My standing before God is eternally secure because of what Christ has done.

All charges against you have been dropped and all that Christ has done has been credited to your account. Ray Pritchard points out that there are two rock-solid truths related to this:

1. **Justification by faith is universal for all believers.** There’s no such thing as an “unjustified Christian.” If you’re not justified by faith, you aren’t a Christian at all.
2. **Justification by faith is the permanent possession of every believer.** When God saves, He saves forever. When God justifies, He justifies forever. We’re forgiven by His grace and we’re kept by His grace. If you’re saved, you’re secure. 1 John 5:13: “***I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.***”

I was moved by the words of Charles Spurgeon this week: “...*Through Jesus’ blood, we are clean. Now I do not say that this is this is the privilege of a few eminent saints, but here I look around these pews and see my brethren and sisters...all of whom are tonight just before God—perfectly so; completely so; so just that they never can be otherwise than just; so just that even in heaven they will be no more acceptable to God than they are here tonight...*”

As repulsive and repugnant as Madonna’s mock crucifixion is, even if she were to be crucified, her death would save no one. When Jesus died, He died as our sinless substitute, perfectly propitiating God’s righteous wrath, redeeming us from the marketplace of sin, and justifying us by granting His righteousness to us. It’s our permanent possession.

Radical Results of Being Declared Righteous

Because we have been justified, there are some beautiful benefits that come with our belief. In these two short verses, we will learn that there are four radical results of being declared righteous. These are definite declarations or sure assurances, that when fully grasped, will turn us into radically obedient followers of Christ.

1. We have peace with God.

Look at the second half of Ro 5:1: “...***We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.***” According to Ephesians 2:3, before we came to Christ, we were “***objects of God’s wrath***” because our relationship with Him ruptured through our rebellion. Romans 1:18 says that the “***wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men...***” We recoil at this thought because it doesn’t feel politically correct that God would be at war with the wicked. Listen to these strong words in Psalm 7:11: “***God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day.***”

In his classic book called, “Peace With God,” written over 50 years ago, Billy Graham hits it on the head: “*The greatest warfare going on in the world today is between mankind and God. People may not realize that they are at war with God, but if they don’t know Jesus Christ as their Savior...God considers them to be at war with Him.*”

Peace only sounds wonderful when we recognize that we’ve been at war. It’s a radical thought that God’s anger is satisfied because of the sacrifice of His Son. God’s fury is fully absorbed by the death of Jesus. Once we are justified by faith, peace is a

primary reality for the believer. The word **“with”** God points to a person’s relationship with God. There’s a face-to-face aspect that indicates a relational reconciliation has taken place. Isolation has been replaced with intimacy.

This comes about only through **“our Lord Jesus Christ”** because Immanuel is our intermediary. Colossians 1:20: **“And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”** Ephesians 2:14: **“For He Himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.”** Our present peace with God rests on the past act of justification. That means that our peace is permanent and unchangeable.

Before we can be at peace in the world we need to be at peace with God. I love Isaiah 32:17-18: **“The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever. My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest.”** Once we have peace *with* God, we can then experience the peace *of* God and then be at peace with others. This chart from John Hamby may help explain the difference:

Peace with God Peace of God

Romans 5:1 Philippians 4:6-7

Relationship Fellowship

Need of the sinner Need of the saint

Takes us to heaven Brings heaven to us

Comes at conversion Moment-by-moment

This past Wednesday, the Pontiac Area Ministerial Association had its monthly meeting and heard from Steve Graham, superintendent of School District 429. He shared with us that the Pontiac public schools could use some help from churches to help combat the rise of bullying, the use of heroin and the prevalence of self-mutilation. I thought it was neat how he was enlisting churches in this effort. When he was done, I raised my hand and said that most people are struggling with these issues because they are not at peace with God. I mentioned that we will do what we can to support what they are doing and also encouraged him to call on churches to help students find peace with God.

Because relational conflict is rampant in our world, our workplaces, our homes, our campuses, and our churches, we’re going to focus on the theme, **“Making Peace is Possible”** during a special four-part sermon series in November. Our student ministry and small groups will be studying this as well in an effort to teach students and adults in multiple contexts to become biblical peacemakers.

2. We have access to God.

The first radical result is that we have peace with God. The second result is that we now enjoy access to Him in Ro 5:2: **“Through whom we have gained access by faith...”** This word literally means to “bring to” as when ushered into the presence of royalty. I’m reminded of the beautiful picture in the Old Testament Book of Esther. Our Tuesday morning women’s Bible Study is studying this book and they’d be glad to have more women join them. Esther is Jewish, and through a set of God’s circumstances, ends up becoming the queen. A plot is then hatched to annihilate the Jews and the king unwittingly signs a decree guaranteeing their demise. Mordecai, Esther’s godly uncle, pleads with her to go into the king and appeal to him to not go through with this holocaust. Esther was frightened because no one, including the queen, could just march in the king’s presence unannounced. She could literally be put to death for doing this. Unless the king extended his golden scepter to the person, there was no way to approach him.

Esther fasted for three days and three nights and finally comes to the point of saying in Esther 4:16: **“...I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.”** She then put on her royal robes so she would be dressed in beauty and glory and stood in the inner court of the palace, holding her breath. He was so moved by her beauty and her boldness that he stretched forth his scepter and granted her access. Friend, you and I could never stand before the King of the Universe in our own merits. Dressed in the righteous robes of Christ, we have access to the King, to receive from Him all that we need. He accepts us completely and grants us continual access. We have an introduction into God’s presence but it is also a lasting privilege. Because of what Christ has done we can walk right into the presence of God. The word “access” is used in only two other places in the New Testament. Ephesians 2:18: **“For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit”** and Ephesians 3:12: **“In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.”**

To those from a Jewish background, these would indeed be radical words and a revolutionary thought. The very design of the temple of God communicated that there was limited access. Gentiles could only go into the Court of Gentiles but then they faced a

fence and could go no further. If they crossed this line they could face death. Women could only go into the court of women but no further. A Jewish man could go a bit further but then was met with a barrier. Priests could go in a little more but they too were kept at a distance. Only the High Priest could go through the thick curtain into the innermost sanctuary, and then only once a year after very careful preparation. He went in and sprinkled the blood and then got out of there as fast as he could. The message was clear: "Keep your distance!"

Nadab and Abihu were extinguished when they made an unauthorized offering to God in Numbers 3:4. In Numbers 16:27-32, we read that the ground opened up and swallowed Korah, Dathan and Abiram for disregarding God's holiness by offering strange incense before Him. People in the Old Testament were petrified of God; with good reason. When Jesus died, Mark 15:38 tells us that **"The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom."**

We can now come right into the very presence of God. Hebrews 10:19-22:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.

Hebrews 4:16 says that we can come **"with confidence"** to the throne of grace.

The Elders have been working the past couple months on putting our mission as a church into one statement. We're still working on the last part of it but we've finished the front half. Here's what it says so far: *"Connect people to Jesus and equip them..."* One of the initial words we used was "introduce" but we knew it needed to say more than that. We desire to help lost people come to saving faith but we want to do what we can to not just introduce but to also connect them to Christ. The way has already been made because God has now made peace with those who put their faith in Him. Amazingly, He allows us full access to Him at all times when we're connected to His Son.

3. We have grace from God.

The first radical result of being declared righteous is that we have peace with God. The second is that we have unlimited access to Him. The third result is that we have grace from Him. Notice the middle phrase in Ro 5:2: **"...into this grace in which we now stand..."** This phrase is in the perfect tense, meaning that the action has been completed in the past and never needs to be repeated. What happened in the past has a present and continuing result. Believers stand solid in God's grace. To stand connotes a posture of triumph and immovability; our footing is firm. We don't have to cower before Him, crawl on our knees, or run away.

Ephesians 6:13: ***Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.***

Listen to these words from the hymn, "Grace Greater Than Our Sin."

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,

Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt!

Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured,

There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.

Grace, grace, God's grace,

Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;

Grace, grace, God's grace,

Grace that is greater than all our sin!

4. We have hope in the glory of God.

Ro 5:2 concludes with a future focus as we discover the fourth radical truth: **"...And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."** The word "rejoice" literally means "to shout with joy" and has to do with unashamed confidence. Did you know that the Hebrew language, which is what the Old Testament is written in, has more words for joy and rejoicing than any other language? In contrast to the rituals of other faiths, worship for the Israelite was filled with joyful jubilation. We could stand to be more joyful in our worship, couldn't we?

Psalm 16:11: ***"You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."***

Eugene Petersen paraphrases this passage in a beautiful way: *"We find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand—out in the wide open spaces of God's grace—standing tall and shouting our praises to God."*

It's radical to rejoice. Since our hope rests upon His promise and His power, we can be happy. Hope, as used in the Bible is not a wish; it's a confident expectation that something will happen because God has said it will happen. J.B. Phillips translates it this way: *"The happy certainty of the glory of God."*

Many of you know that PBC member Dave Schultz is in hospice care and is struggling physically. From the very first time I met him about three years ago and continuing up to the last time I talked to him on Thursday, Dave continually speaks about "going to glory." When I asked Dave if I could share this, he said, "absolutely." His joy in the midst of his struggles is remarkable but the key is clear: He's rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God. He can't wait to get to heaven. At the end of our conversation he said: *"When babies are born, they cry and everyone else smiles; when I die, I'll smile and everyone else will cry."* I then shared this quote with him: *"Life without Christ is a hopeless end; life with Christ is an endless hope."* He responded by saying, *"Amen. That's true."*

We who have come "short of His glory" in Romans 3:23 are now able to **"rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."** Quite simply, the hope of the glory of God is the assurance that believers will go to heaven when they die. Even though life will end here; it's not the end of the story. Do you have that assurance right now?

Too many of us fail to 'posses our possessions.' As children of the King, we must stop living like paupers. Some radical results flow from being declared righteous:

1. **We have peace with God**
2. **We have access to God**
3. **We have grace from God**
4. **We have hope in the glory of God**

How can we not live radical lives when we possess these four promises? What's keeping us from living full-throttle for Jesus? Are you ready to run the race?

I'm not sure how God is going to apply this message to your life, but I want to challenge those of you who have been born again but have not yet been baptized. If you've never demonstrated your faith publicly through baptism, it's time to do so. I think we've minimized the importance of this ordinance, even implying that it's somehow optional. It's not. Its part and parcel of the final commission Jesus gave to His followers in Matthew 28:19: ***"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..."*** How can we not live radical lives when we possess these four promises? What's keeping us from living full-throttle for Jesus? Are you ready to run the race?

It's a way to say, *"I really mean this and I'm going to live a radical life for Jesus."* When the early Christians were baptized, they counted the cost because to stand up publicly for Christ often put them at great personal risk. In some countries today, it's the equivalent of signing one's own death sentence. And in a way that's true here as well. When you're baptized you're saying, *"I'm dead to self and alive to Christ. I will never be the same again. I can never return, I've closed the door. I will walk apart; I'll run the race...whatever you need to do, Lord, do in me."*

Pastor Jeff passed along these words to a song by Starfield:

Take me and invade me
Make me someone new
Wake me from the dead
And break me with the truth
Move me and disturb me
Interrupt my peace
Tear open my heart
And pull me to my knees
I won't survive
To live this ordinary life
I'm not alive

To live this ordinary life

We're going to close this morning by watching this video clip of people being baptized. If you're ready to take the plunge on Sunday, October 8th, come up and tell me after the service or contact the church office this week. And, if it would be helpful for you to come up front during this song as way to cement your spiritual commitment to live out your radical relationship with Christ, I invite you to just slip out of your row and come on up. It's time to stop living ordinary lives.

Baptism Video: "I Will Never Be The Same Again."

I will never be the same again,

I can never return, I've closed the door.

I will walk apart, I'll run the race

And I will never be the same again.

Fall like fire, soak like rain,

Flow like mighty waters, again and again.

Sweep away the darkness, burn away the chaff,

And let a flame burn to glorify Your name.

There are higher heights, there are deeper seas,

Whatever you need to do, Lord do in me.

The Glory of God fills my life,

And I will never be the same again.

I will never be the same again,

I can never return, I've closed the door.

I will walk the path, I will run the race

And I will never be the same again.

And I will never be the same again.

And I will never be the same again.

Benediction: I love these words from Jude 24-25:

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy--to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Romans 5:3-5 Finding Joy in the Junk of Life - 10/1/06

Have you ever noticed how often the Bible is misquoted in everyday conversations?

"Cleanliness is next to godliness." Sorry, moms, but this verse is not in the Bible.

"God helps those who help themselves." That didn't make into Scripture either. In fact, this is the exact opposite of what the Bible teaches. God helps the helpless.

"God wants you to be healthy and wealthy." This certainly sounds good to us Americans and is propagated from many pulpits and popularized by TV preachers but it is not found in the Bible. *Time* magazine did a cover story on this topic recently, pointing out that of the four largest churches in America, three of them teach the "prosperity gospel" or follow "name it and claim it" theology. Thankfully, Rick Warren, pastor of the fourth mega church was also interviewed: *"This idea that God wants everybody to be wealthy...there's a word for that: baloney. It's creating a false idol. You don't measure your self-worth by your net worth. I can*

show you millions of faithful followers of Christ who live in poverty.”

“God won’t give you more than you can handle.” I hear this saying a lot but I can’t find chapter and verse for this one either. God does promise that He will provide a way out when we’re tempted in 1 Corinthians 10:13, but He never says that He’ll shield us from struggles. In fact, sometimes we can’t bear things on our own, precisely because God wants us to run to Him. Paul often was overwhelmed according to 2 Corinthians 1:8-9: ***“We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.”*** Watchman Nee once said that *“God’s great purpose is to reduce us.”*

In the event you need some more convincing that Paul did not preach the prosperity gospel, listen to his personal experience in 2 Corinthians 11:24-28. He actually advocated the adversity gospel:

Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked; I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.”

When reflecting on some of the hits he had taken, King David wrote these words in Psalm 6:2-3, 6:

Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am faint; O Lord, heal me for my bones are in agony. My soul is in anguish. How long, O Lord, how long... I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears.

Some of you are in anguish right now. In this congregation I’m aware of...

- several people living with unbearable stress
- some living with the uncertainty of not having a diagnosis
- many people flooded with financial distress
- a woman living with cancer
- parents grieving the loss of a daughter
- a woman who is struggling to recover from surgery
- a family that is barely hanging together
- several teenagers who are going through extremely difficult times
- a man who just had major back surgery
- several people who are unemployed
- several parents who wonder what happened to their kids
- some single men and women wishing they were married
- some married men and women wishing they were single
- several who are struggling with alcohol or drug addiction
- many teenagers grieving the death of a classmate
- a man with heart problems
- a couple trying to have a baby
- a man recovering from surgery
- someone living with chronic pain (me)

This is just the tip of the iceberg. Some of you are suffering silently right now because you can’t even talk about the trials you are going through. Sadly, there are people who have given up on God because they feel like He’s let them down. While many of you are struggling to hang in there; at least you’re here today. Others don’t come to church any longer because of their disappointment and disillusionment. I often go for a run early on Sunday mornings and I’m amazed at how many people are up early reading the paper and watching TV. I don’t think most people ditch church because they’re not awake; rather, some unplug because they’re in agony. Many of them don’t come to church anymore because of unmet expectations or pain that just seems unbearable. I’m reading a very eye-opening book right now called, *“Dear Church: Letters from a Disillusioned Generation”* by Sarah Cunningham. She makes the observation that *disillusionment occurs when real life doesn’t live up to our expectations.*

Many of us today are graduate students at the University of Unmet Expectations. Life can be counted on to provide all the pain that any of us might need because suffering is guaranteed for anyone who takes on the task of living. But that can be a good thing

because God is graciously transforming us through our trials. I'd like to suggest that there are some things you can't learn in a lecture, in Sunday School or even in a sermon; they can only be discovered when you and I enroll in the school of suffering.

Last week we learned from Romans 5:1-2 that it is normal to be radical because we have peace with God, we have full access to Him 24/7, we stand in grace and we have hope in the glory of God. How can it get any better than this? But it does! Notice Romans 5:3: **"Not only so..."** You think that's good, wait until you hear this! We can rejoice in the glory to come *and* we can find joy in the junk of life right now. While Paul appears to be doing a turnaround from the first two verses, he's actually linking the benefits of belief to practical living.

We will see in Romans 5:3-5 that God's curriculum for us involves the successful completion of at least four classes. By the way, I hope you're planning to take at least one of the Dive Deep Classes this fall. I can remember when I was in college that I had to take some core courses; I didn't have a choice. I didn't do so well in a couple classes and even had to take one over. Likewise, God has some core classes for the Christian that we can't pick and choose from. They are requirements for graduation. How we do in our course of study is largely determined by our response to His curriculum:

Reasons to Rejoice 101

Patient Perseverance 201

Christian Character 301

Holy Spirit Hope 401

Unfortunately, we can't be excused from the syllabus of suffering. God's not giving out passes for us to get out of these classes. The only prerequisite for the course of study is having problems. I guess that means that we've all been accepted into this university. I should warn you that this curriculum is counter-intuitive for most of us. It was easy to say "amen" last week but it won't be so easy today because some of life's greatest lessons are learned in the school of affliction. It's my observation that many times we want to know *why* bad things happen when God is more concerned with *what* we can learn. It's like the man who said right before he died: *"I never would have chosen one of the trials that I've gone through, but I wouldn't have missed them for the world."*

Reasons to Rejoice 101

The first class we must take is called *Reasons to Rejoice 101*. I'm going to spend more time on this course because if we don't pass this class, we'll flounder in our faith and struggle in the ones to come. We see this in verse 3: **"...But we also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that..."** The Amplified Bible describes rejoicing as **"being full of joy right now and exulting in the triumph of our troubles."** Our English word "tribulation" comes from the Latin word "tribulum," which was a heavy timber with spikes in it, used for threshing grain. It literally means "a thing with teeth that tears." The spikes separated the good grain from the superficial chaff. Likewise, our sufferings sometimes feel like spikes, but they're designed to get rid of the chaff in our lives. The word was also used of squeezing or crushing olives to get the sweet oil inside. When I'm squeezed by suffering, I'm not always real happy with what comes out. The synopsis for this entry-level class has three sub topics.

1. We should expect to suffer.

Friends, we should not be astonished when suffering comes according to 1 Peter 4:12: **"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you."** It's not strange to suffer; rather, it's definite for the disciple of Christ. In John 16:33, Jesus said, **"In this world you will have trouble."** Some of us secretly think that because we're believers, we should somehow be exempt from tough times. We'd like to take a pass on persecution and to hold the heartaches, but our faith comes with the full meal deal.

Listen to these words from Philippians 1:29: **"For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him."**

Acts 14:22 is even stronger: **"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."**

Jesus warned in Matthew 13:21 that some people don't grow when hard times come because they allow adversity to uproot the growth that God intends: **"...When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away."**

2. We should exult in our suffering.

The unanimous testimony of the writers of the New Testament is that we are to find joy in the junk of life. It's possible to have jubilation in the midst of tribulation.

James 1:2: **"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds."**

1 Peter 4:13: ***“But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.”***

This past Wednesday was the nationwide “See You at the Pole” gathering where students met together around the flag pole on their campus and prayed. I parked across from PTHS and watched our students intercede fervently and prayed that God would give them courage to live for Christ on their campus. Pastor Jeff tells me that at the Junior High they had over 100 students. Those who gathered to pray were teased and heckled by some other students. Students, if that happened to you, you are blessed for bearing the name of Christ and you will be rewarded for your courage. May these words from Acts 5:41 minister to you today:

“The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”

Instead of whining, we can worship. Instead of just telling people that we’re “surviving” we can actually give testimony that we’re thriving through Christ.

That reminds me of the vivid description of a person who didn’t exult in her suffering from John Steinbeck’s book, “East of Eden.” I’m going to substitute the word “Presbyterian” with the word “Bible Church” for effect: *“She was a tight, hard little woman. Humorless as a chicken, with a dour Bible Church mind...that pinned down and beat the brains out of nearly everything that was pleasant in life.”* Do you know anyone like this? Some people believe that the more miserable they look, the more spiritual they must be.

Jeannette Shubert, our missionary to the Philippines, has been struggling with some serious lung problems. In addition, one of the trips that her husband Keith was planning to take had to be canceled. I love what she writes in her recent prayer letter: *“Personally it was a time when I realized I could either be unhappy that things were not going as planned or I could choose to thank God. I didn’t think I had much for which to be thankful. Later I was surprised at how quickly I came up with over 115 reasons. It changed my attitude.”*

3. We should exhibit some benefits when we suffer.

Paul is able to say that we can rejoice in our sufferings ***“because we know that...”*** The word “know” means to be sure.

2 Corinthians 4:17: ***“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”***

We could say it this way: *suffering sanctifies us.* Pain has a purpose and a trial is a good teacher. Tough times can work for us, not against us. However, Hebrews 12:11 says that we often don’t appreciate the anguish until some time after it’s over:

“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

I can’t get through a sermon without quoting Charles Spurgeon: *“It is something to feel that my Father cannot do me a bad turn. Even if He should use His rod upon me, it will do me good, and I will thank Him for it, for I am at perfect peace with Him.”* In a message on this passage, David Dykes had his congregation recite the phrase “Praise the Lord” five times in a row. He told them to get a little louder and more exuberant each time. Let’s try that together:

Praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord!

PRAISE THE LORD!!!

My guess is that many of you didn’t really want to say this when we started. That’s all right, we did it anyway. Here’s the truth about rejoicing: *Rejoice even when you don’t feel like it.* Don’t let your feelings tell you how to live. Instead, tell your feelings that you’re going to obey God. Make the choice to rejoice and find joy in the junk of life.

Patient Perseverance 201

After finding reasons to rejoice, the next class we’re scheduled to take is called *Patient Perseverance 201*. Look at the last phrase of verse 3: ***“...suffering produces perseverance.”*** The word “produces” means to bring about or to accomplish. Suffering brings patience. Perseverance literally means “to bear up under” something or to remain under trials in a God-honoring way. That’s why we should be careful when we ask for patience because the only way to get it is through suffering. Get ready when you pray for a submissive heart, because Hebrews 5:8 says that we learn obedience through suffering. Be prepared when you pray for unselfishness for God will give you an opportunity to sacrifice yourself by putting someone else first (Philippians 2:4). Watch out when you pray for more love because God may give you loss so that you’ll love the unlovely people in your life.

We have a choice to make when tough times come; we can get bitter or we can allow God to make us better. Suffering is inevitable, but misery is optional. Unfortunately, too many of us drop out when we get to this class. We might try to rejoice but then when we have to hang in there we say, “Hang it” and we bolt. Hold on to Luke 18:1: “...**always pray and not give up.**”

Kent Hughes reminds us that God’s blessings are poured out in bitter cups. We’ll miss these blessings if we bail. If you need some encouragement to hang in there...

- Ask Abraham and he’ll point to Mount Moriah.
- Ask Jacob and he’ll point to a stone pillow.
- Ask Joseph and he’ll point to a prison in Egypt.
- Ask Moses and he’ll point to the backside of the desert.
- Ask Daniel and he’ll point to a lion’s den.
- Ask Peter and he’ll point to one of his denials.
- Ask John and he’ll point to Patmos.

Christian Character 301

Once we get a handle on becoming a bit more patient, we’re assigned a seat in a 301 level class: *Christian Character*. Notice verse 4: “**perseverance** [brings about] **character.**” God is more concerned with us being holy than He is with our happiness; and He is more committed to our character development than He is to our comfort. He saved us in order to conform us to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ.

I walked a mile with laughter,
She chatted all the way
But I was none the wiser
For all the things she had to say.
But, I walked a mile with sorrow,
And not a word said she.
But, oh, the things I learned
When sorrow walked with me!

Malcolm Muggeridge offers this wise insight when he writes,

Supposing you eliminated suffering, what a dreadful place the world would be! Everything that corrects the tendency of man to feel over-important and over-pleased with himself would disappear. He’s bad enough now, but he would be absolutely intolerable if he never suffered.

John Piper has written an amazing article called, “[Don’t Waste Your Cancer](#).” He sat down the night before his cancer surgery and reviewed ten ways to make sure we don’t waste any pain that we have. I’ll mention just two. Let me warn you that his words may strike you as surprising. First, you will waste your cancer if you do not believe it is designed for you by God. Second, you will waste your cancer if you believe it is a curse and not a gift.

When you study at the School of Hard Knocks, your character will change. Someone has said that character is who we are when nobody is looking. Trials, when undertaken with the right attitude, actually develop a tested character. This word was used in the Bible to describe gold purified in the fire.

Job 23:10: “**But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I will come forth as gold.**”

All our impurities are burned away so only what is strong and beautiful will remain. Character development will *only* happen in the midst of difficult circumstances because this is where we learn whether our faith is fake, or the real deal. Think about it: a person who always gets what he or she wants has no chance to learn perseverance, or character development. That’s why sometimes children need to be told “no” simply to help develop their character.

The story is told of someone who watched a Cecropia moth go through the struggle of coming out of its cocoon. In an effort to help, the person snipped the shell of the cocoon. Soon the moth came out with its wings all crimped and shriveled. It was unable to fly and was doomed to crawling out its brief existence on the ground, never able to soar through the air. The person trying to help did

not realize that the struggle to emerge from the cocoon was an essential part of developing the muscle system of the moth's body. By unwisely seeking to cut short the moth's struggle, he had actually crippled it and doomed its existence.

God uses our distress and disappointment to develop our character. The messes we're in are designed to build our spiritual muscles. He gives us difficulties in order to give us the opportunity to know who He is, who we are and who we can be. Life's losses are a privilege, in that they allow us, or force us, to break through what is superficial to the deeper life within. Suffering makes those who are invincible, vulnerable; the independent become dependent; the insensitive suddenly seem more sensitive; the arrogant exhibit humility and the tough are transformed into tenderized people.

Holy Spirit Hope 401

After our character begins to change, God then brings hope to our hurting hearts. I love the promise in Ro 5:5: "***And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.***"

Some of you are disappointed because life has not lived up to your expectations. Listen. Holy Spirit hope will never disappoint you when you understand that God has poured out His love in your life. The idea here is that He has given so much love that it lavishly overflows. The picture is of gushing water. The tense of this phrase indicates that it "has been poured out like a river and is continually being poured out moment-by-moment." Biblical hope is the confident expectation that we will not be disappointed. You might be disappointed that things have not gone *your* way; but you can take heart that they have gone *His* way.

Psalms 22:5: "***They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed.***"

Here's a radical thought. Suffering actually gives us the assurance that God loves us. This is a pretty amazing truth because many people are prone to doubt God's love when they're faced with disappointment and discouragement. God loves us too much to deliver us from all our struggles. He wants us to rejoice, to persevere, to have our character changed, and to give us hope. This can *only* come about through difficulties. Incidentally, this is the first of many references to the Holy Spirit and to God's love in the Book of Romans. It's no accident that we learn about Him and about His love when we encounter the trials of life.

Former Illinois Governor George Ryan has received a prison sentence as the result of an investigation that goes all the way back to a November day 12 years ago, when a piece of scrap metal fell off a truck driven by a man who had obtained his license illegally in exchange for bribes and campaign contributions when Ryan was Secretary of State. Pastor Scott Willis, his wife Janet, and their six young children were in a minivan that ran over this piece of steel. It punctured the gas tank, which exploded, killing all six children.

In an article in the September 23, 2006 issue of *World* magazine **Marvin Olasky** writes:

The Willises could have spent the rest of their lives looping the 'what if' tape...and they could have hated God. 'The depth of pain is indescribable,' Scott later said. 'We're ordinary people. But what's the point of learning all the things about living the Christian life if when the need arises we don't live it? This is what God has prepared us for...God knows all of history and time from its beginning to its end. What happened to us wasn't an accident. God is never taken by surprise. God had a purpose for it, probably many purposes...We live with a God-promised hope in Jesus Christ.' ([WORLD - Corruption and providence - Marvin Olasky - Sept. 23, 2006](#))

Lessons from the School of Hard Knocks

1. These classes are not always consecutive, but concurrent.

2. We won't complete the curriculum this side of eternity.

Our graduation ceremony will be in glory.

3. Accept what cannot be changed, and allow God to change you.

Even though your circumstances may not change, God can use them to change you.

4. Focus on what's left, not on what's lost.

5. God has a solution to match your suffering.

6. Worship God while He works out His will in your life.

7. Pain doesn't always mean that you're being punished.

Billy Graham tells the story of a friend who went through an incredible series of setbacks, losing his job, his fortune, his family and his future. The only thing he had left was his faith in God. One day as the man was walking through the streets of a major city, he stopped to watch some workmen who were repairing the spire of a great cathedral. His attention was fixed on a stone mason who was chipping away at a triangular piece of stone. He decided to ask the man what he was doing. The worker motioned upward to the spire and said, "Look all the way to the top." When the man did, he saw a tiny triangular space near the peak. The worker said, "I'm shaping this down here so it will fit up there." Tears filled the man's eyes as he realized, "That's what God is doing in my life. He's shaping me down here so I will fit in up there." (As quoted by James Montgomery Boice in Romans: The Reign of Grace. Vol. II, p. 531).

Romans 5:6-8 God's Timing is Perfect - 10/8/06

I love the honest answers kids give when they're asked questions. Listen to these responses to the topic of love.

When asked why love happens between two people...

"One of the people has freckles and so he finds somebody else who has freckles too."

"No one is sure why it happens, but I heard it has something to do with how you smell...That's why perfume and deodorant are so popular."

"If you want to be loved by somebody who isn't already in your family, it doesn't hurt to be beautiful."

When asked how to get someone to love you...

"Tell them that you own a whole bunch of candy stores."

"Don't do things like have smelly, green sneakers. You might get attention, but attention ain't the same thing as love."

This past Wednesday I taught the older boys in AWANA. In the midst of their squirming and punching and talking, I realized that I was just like they are when I was their age...if not worse. The only difference is that I wasn't as deep as they are. Our topic was the importance of loving those who are near us and loving those who are difficult to be around. We all agreed that the toughest thing in the world is to love our sisters! Tune in to their responses when I asked them to tell me what they think about God's love...

"It's a blessing."

"It's everlasting."

"God loves sinners and believers."

"God loves aliens, if there are any."

"God's love is not ordinary because He loves everybody."

And one boy responded with tears in his eyes: "You just can't explain it."

It is tough to explain God's love, isn't it? I have a renewed appreciation for those of you who serve in AWANA, in Sunday School, or in Promised Land. Bless you! Your ministry matters!

Last week we were reminded that we've all been enrolled in the school of suffering and are required to take four core classes: *Reasons to Rejoice 101*, *Patient Perseverance 201*, *Christian Character 301* and *Holy Spirit Hope 401*.

We pointed out that when we're going through tough times, it's easy to wonder if God really loves us. Romans 5:5 gives us an anchor to hold on to: "...**God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.**"

God's love "has been poured out like a river and is continually being poured out moment-by-moment." This morning we're going to ponder the truths of Romans 5:6-8. This is one of the clearest passages in all of Scripture about God's love for losers like us:

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Our Terrible Condition

This passage describes our plight. As we've been learning in Romans, we must first understand the bad news of our condition apart

from Christ before we will embrace the good news. Or to say it another way: We won't be moved by the limitlessness of God's love until we grasp the depth of our depravity.

1. We were weak.

Ro 5:6 says that we were "**powerless.**" To be "powerless" means that we can't change our basic nature on our own. The King James Version says, "*without strength.*" This word was usually applied to the sick and feeble, to those who have been wiped out and weakened by some kind of disease. It's also used in the moral sense to denote an inability with regard to any undertaking or duty. Our sin has made us spiritually sick. Specifically it means that we have no power to come up with a plan of justification on our own – left to ourselves, no one is able to do even one small thing to please God or achieve salvation. We are spiritually incapacitated. Incidentally, that's why efforts to improve our society based on outward change ultimately don't work. That's also why "self-help" books don't usually help. We cannot change our basic nature by self-effort because at our core we are self-centered and selfish. On top of that, we're powerless in our strength to make lasting change.

2. We were wicked.

The phrase "**ungodly**" in Ro 5:6 means that we had no desire to change in the first place. We were not only helpless, but also vile and obnoxious. The word "ungodly" indicates that we were both irreverent and impious, and have deliberately withheld from God what is rightfully His. Romans 3:18: "**There is no fear of God before their eyes.**" It literally means that we have violated God's standards. This word means that we live our lives as if God does not exist and so we worship ourselves. One commentator refers to the ungodly as "mighty in evil." Turn back to Romans 1:18: "**The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men...**"

3. We were wayward.

The third truth is seen in Ro 5:8 – we were "**sinner**," meaning that we were desperately in need of a change that we couldn't make and didn't want to make. Spurgeon captures our condition succinctly when he writes: "*No power remains in his system to throw off his mortal malady, not does he desire to do so; he could not save himself from his disease if he would and he would not if he could.*" The word sin means "to miss the mark" and was used of an archer who takes aim at a bull's-eye but ends up totally missing the target. No matter how careful he is, his arrow always falls short. As sinners, we always come up short. Turn back to Romans 3:23: "**For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**"

Isaac Watts wrote that amazing hymn, "At the Cross." The original has this line: "*should He devote His sacred head for such a worm as I?*" Worm is a strong word but that's exactly how David described himself in Psalm 22:6: "**But I am a worm and not a man...**" Some hymn editor changed this language because it seemed too strong. It was cleaned up a bit so it now says, "*for sinners such as I.*" Did you know that some denominations have changed this even more so that it doesn't even use the word 'sinners?' Some newer hymnals now contain these words: "*Should He devote His sacred head for such a person as I?*"

As much as we try to make ourselves look better than we are, apart from Christ we are helpless, hopeless and horrible; undeserving, unbelieving and uninterested. As ungodly, impotent and ugly sinners, we are indeed smelly before a Holy God. And yet, in spite of our terrible condition, God loves losers just like us.

God's Perfect Timing

Look again at the beginning of verse 6: "**You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.**" When Jesus lived on the earth, He operated with an acute awareness of divine timing. Speaking to his earthly mother in John 2:4, Jesus said, "**My time has not yet come.**" Responding to His brothers' sense of timing in John 7:6, Jesus said: "**The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right.**" On another occasion, in Mark 1:15, Jesus gets the green light from God the Father: "**The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!**" Later, in His prayer for His disciples before He died in John 17:1, Jesus cried out, "**Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.**"

As we think about God's sense of timing, we must remember that He is eternal. Time is one of the gifts that He has given to us, but the clock does not control Him. The great "**I AM**" of Exodus 3:14 can be translated, "*I am the God who always is.*" While He is above time, He is working everything out according to His divine date book.

Did you know that the timing of the Incarnation was impeccable? Please turn to Galatians 4:4:

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law.

The phrase, "**had fully come**" is a very eloquent expression in Greek. It literally means, "*The fullness of time had come.*" The idea is that something is complete and fully developed, like ripe fruit ready to be picked, or in our context, corn that is ready to be

harvested. The expression is also used of a pregnant woman feeling labor pains, as she gets ready to deliver her baby. The stage was perfectly set for the Savior to be sent. Every detail was prearranged; every circumstance was perfect, and every event happened on cue. When time itself was pregnant and ready to deliver, God sent forth His Son to be born and then to die, not as an accident, but as a specifically planned and perfectly timed event.

Let me make an application that ties back to our topic from last week. Just as God worked out His plan perfectly at Christmas, Good Friday and Easter, He is wonderfully working out His purposes through the pain in your life right now. Since He controlled the details surrounding the birth, death and resurrection of the Savior, is He not controlling the particulars in your pain? Maybe your circumstances don't look very good right now. Will you trust His timing anyway? Perhaps you've been angry with God because you're hurting and you don't like what's happening. It's time to surrender to the Savior just like Mary did when she said, ***"May it be to me as you have said."*** It's time to trust His timing.

Charles Spurgeon once said, *"There are no loose threads in the providence of God...the great clock of the universe keeps good time."* The "right time" also means that Jesus is offering salvation to us at the time of our greatest need. And when the time is fully come in the future, He will keep all His promises to you.

God's Incredible Love

God's timing is perfect and His love is incredible. This might be hard to hear but you are not a naturally lovable person – and neither am I. Sin has infected our lives so much that it has distorted even the parts we think are beautiful. Sin "uglyfies" everything it touches. God loves us because He is love and because it's His nature to love us even when we weak, wicked and wayward. His love is greater than our sin, and He loves us in spite of our sin. 1 John 4:10:

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

He loves losers just like us.

If you find all this discouraging, remember this: *If God loved you only when you were lovable, then when you stopped being lovable, God would have to stop loving you!* It's better to admit the truth, isn't it? God loves the unlovely and sent His Son to die for the ungodly. We can count on His love because it doesn't depend on anything we say or do.

So what is the love of God? How do we define it? Human love is generally a *response* to the conditions and circumstances around us. We love because someone pleases us or because they're beautiful or because they have freckles and we have freckles. By contrast, God loves us *because that's the kind of God He is. Period.* Nothing in us causes Him to love us. Matthew Henry has said that,

The great God not only loves His saints, but He loves to love them.

We get angry and harbor hatred toward people who do bad things, don't we? It's tough to be tender-hearted toward people who open fire on innocent children in our schools, isn't it? We're at a loss to love when we hear of murder and mayhem. For those of you who live in Pontiac, how did you feel when you heard of vandals slashing tires several weeks ago? What happened inside you when you learned that some more vandalism took place last weekend when the words *"He's not real!"* were spray painted on the doors of a church in town? It's difficult for us to comprehend that God loves everyone, which includes vandals, villains, and vile people. Our love doesn't usually work that way, does it?

God doesn't just love the beautiful or the good smelling people. Why is that? Because there really aren't any beautiful people. The smell of our sin is repugnant to a holy God and yet He loves losers just like us. Now that we've established the truth about who we are, let's look at God's incredible solution to our impossible problem. Let's look at two questions from verses 7-8.

1. Who would you die for?

Take a look at Ro 5:7: ***Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.***

As I've thought about this passage, I've wondered how many people I would be willing to die for. It's actually just a handful. I would give my life for Beth, Emily, Lydia, Becca and Megan but probably not for our dog Charlie. Everyone's probably willing to die for a few people, but certainly not for those we don't know, and for sure not for those who are weak, wicked and wayward. This verse is telling us that God's love is not like that; He went far beyond what we would do. We would never think of doing what He did.

2. Who would die for you?

This is a totally different question. Do you have confidence that someone would step in and take a bullet for you? Given the

opportunity where you die or they die, how many would take your place? Loved ones, I can tell you definitively that at least one person would do this because He already has. Look at Ro 5:8: ***“But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”***

The emphasis is on the fact that we were still sinners when Christ died for us.

The key phrase is ***“But God...”*** This is similar to Ephesians 2:4-5: ***“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ...”***

God took the first step. He didn't wait for us to turn to Him because He knew we never would. The word “demonstrate” means to set together and was used of introducing or commending someone. It has the sense of showing, proving, or establishing. The wonder is not that Christ should die for us – *but that He should do so while we were powerless, while we were ungodly, rebellious sinners!* He didn't die for his friends. He died for his foes. He died for those who crucified Him.

In the middle ages a monk announced that he would be preaching on the love of God. As the shadows fell and the light ceased to come in the cathedral windows, the congregation gathered. In the darkness of the altar he lit a candle and carried it to a picture of Jesus. Without saying a word, he first illuminated the thorns on His head, then His two wounded hands, and finally the mark where the spear had entered the skin of the Savior. He then blew out the candle and left the church. There was nothing else to say.

The word “demonstrates” is in the present tense, meaning if you want to know how much God loves you right now, then go back to the Cross:

If God loved me enough to give His Son to die for me when I was a spiritual loser, surely He loves me enough to care for me now that I am His child. Having given such a priceless gift as His Son, He will most definitely give all else that is consistent with His glory and my good.

God's love is inexhaustible, incomparable, and immeasurable. And like the young man at AWANA said, *“You just can't explain it.”* Look at it this way. “Lord, how much do you love me?” “This much,” he said. Then He stretched out His arms, bowed His head, and died.

Richard Halverson is quoted as saying, *“There is nothing you can do to make God love you more than He already does.”* Let's ponder that together. We don't get more love when we perform good deeds or when we do the right things. Listen to the next part: *“And there is nothing we can do to make God love us any less than He already does.”* That means that God doesn't remove his love from us when we get a bit rebellious. His love doesn't diminish even when we ditch Him.

We can leave here this morning loving the fact that God loves us but we must do more than that. God's love must lead to some actions.

1 John 5:3: ***“This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome.”***

Our Response to God's Love

1. Be saved by your substitute.

I want you to see something. Look at Ro 5:6: ***“Christ died for the ungodly.”*** Now notice Ro 5:7: ***“for a righteous man.”*** And I want you to see Ro 5:8: ***“While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*** This word in the Greek has the idea of a substitute and means “in place of, for the benefit of, on behalf of, and instead of.” That means that Jesus died instead of us, taking the punishment we deserve. You see, the gospel is not just “God loves you.” The gospel message is this, *“God loves you weak, wicked and wayward sinner, at the cost of His Son who died on your behalf.”*

1 Timothy 1:15 captures why Jesus came: ***“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-of whom I am the worst.”*** Until you can say like Paul that you are the worst sinner, you can't be saved. Have you called out like the man broken by the depth of his own depravity in Luke 18:13?

But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

Friend, if you are still in your sins, you are weak, wicked and wayward and you are in great danger! But here's the good news. You are in a good spot because Jesus loves losers just like you, and just like me. In other words, you qualify for conversion. Listen to these words in Ephesians 2:4-5:

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-it is by grace you have been saved.”

It's time to cry out to Christ and ask for mercy. By God's grace, that's what I did 27 years ago this past Tuesday. Don't put it off. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 6:2: **"...Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation."**

2. Fall more deeply in love with Jesus.

One of the best ways to love the Lord more is to simply focus on the depth of your forgiveness. Jesus said it this way in Luke 7:47: **"...He who has been forgiven little loves little."** For those of us who've been forgiven much, our understanding and experience of God's grace and love should be high. I was at a leadership conference this week up in Rolling Meadows and heard Joe Stowell, former president of Moody Bible Institute and now teaching pastor at Harvest Bible Chapel. He recalled that when he was president of Moody, people would often come up to him and ask what the most challenging part of his job was. He would always give the same answer: *"The most difficult part of my job is me."* He then told us that he just turned 62 and that he continues to be tired of himself. I don't remember his exact words but he lamented his lack of love, his propensity for pride, and his frequent descent into discouragement. And then he said this, *"I'm really tired of me but the longer I live, the more I'm in love with Jesus. I'll never tire of His beauty, His indescribable attributes and His amazing grace."* Joe Stowell loves much because He knows he's a loser apart from Christ.

3. Let the love of God change your life.

Max Lucado often repeats this stunning statement: *"God loves you just the way you are...but He loves you too much to let you stay that way."* Friend, don't take God's love for granted and don't stop growing and serving and loving the Lord. A full realization of what God has done for us in Christ is motivation to change the way we've been living. When we realize that we are worms apart from Christ, how can we not worship Him with everything that we have? When we own our sin, how can we not serve the Savior full throttle?

C. S. Lewis once said:

On the whole, God's love for us is a much safer subject to think about than our love for Him.

4. Demonstrate God's sacrificial love for others.

Someone has said, *"Love at first sight is easy to understand. It's when two people have been looking at each other for years that it becomes a miracle."* One of the other speakers at the conference was James MacDonald, pastor of Harvest Bible Chapel. He addressed the topic of discouragement and depression among pastors, using Elijah as an example.

He then shared with us that when his daughter was a freshman in high school he started noticing that her attitude had gone south and that her heart had started to shrivel spiritually. He tried everything he could think of to break through but nothing worked. Finally, one Friday afternoon he picked her up from school and told her that they were going for a drive. Her first question was, *"When will we be home?"* To which her dad said, *"When I get my daughter back."* He then explained to us that they drove to Louisville one night and then to Nashville the next night and then on to Chattanooga. Meanwhile, every night at home, his wife gathered with some friends who held hands around their daughter's bed and prayed for her. They continued their road trip and spent the following night in Montgomery, Alabama and then a night in Biloxi. They ended up in New Orleans before he realized that the problem wasn't his daughter. The problem was him. God's love then broke through in both of their lives and they headed home after being gone for a week, more in love with Jesus and with each other than they had ever been before.

Who is God calling you to love so that he or she will come home? Who is God bringing to your mind right now? Demonstrate God's sacrificial love in such a way that God breaks through. Don't wait until she is nice to you or he cleans up his act or until forgiveness is asked for. God didn't wait for us to worship Him before He took the first step. And in the process, you just may realize that some of the problem is you.

Here are some practical applications related to living out sacrificial love.

Parents, don't miss the three-hour seminar this Saturday called "Understanding Your Teenager." If it's true that we tend to judge what we don't understand, then we better do a better job of understanding our teens if we want to grow in our love for them.

Make plans as a family to be involved in Operation Christmas Child and Project Angel Tree this year.

Ask God how he may want to use you to come alongside the Amish community in Pennsylvania as they strive to recover from that terrible school shooting and how God may want to use you to encourage the team that is going to Biloxi next month.

Make a commitment to say these words of life at least once a day to at least one person: "God loves you...and so do I."

Would you close your eyes as I read this medley of Scripture over you?

Titus 3:3-8: *At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.*

1 John 3:16: *"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."*

And from Romans 5:6-8: *"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

We began this morning by listening to what children have said about God's love. The real challenge is that since all believers are children of God, we must all grow in our love for God. We are losers, but God loves losers just like us and He sent Jesus to die for us. Listen to these closing words from 1 John 3:1-2:

"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

Romans 5:9-11 The Results of Reconciliation - 10/15/06

A teenager received his driver's permit and asked his dad about using the family car.

His father sat him down and said, *"I'll make a deal with you. You bring your grades up from a C to a B average, study your Bible more, get your hair cut, and we'll talk about the car."* After a couple weeks went by, the dad said, *"Son, I'm real proud of you. You brought your grades up, you've been studying your Bible more and you're going to youth group. But, I'm disappointed that you haven't gotten your hair cut."*

The son paused for a moment, and then said, *"You know, Dad, I've noticed in my study of the Bible that Samson had long hair, John the Baptist had long hair, Moses had long hair, and I wouldn't doubt that Jesus' hair was long."*

To which his father replied, *"You're right son. Did you also notice that they all walked everywhere they went?"*

As we've been roaming through the Book of Romans, we've been learning that God loves losers like us even when we don't do what we're supposed to do. We were reminded again last week that not only do we have a hard time living up to external expectations, we have even bigger problems: we're weak, wicked, and wayward. This morning we're going to see that there are some amazing results of our reconciliation.

Let's read Romans 5:9-11 together:

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Last Saturday night at the Men's Night Out, many men gave testimonies about what God is doing in their lives. We heard from the young and the old, from farmers to a car salesman. By the way guys; don't miss the men's breakfast this Saturday. When we were leaving Joe Myzia commented to me that the one common denominator in all the sharing was the blood of Jesus. He put it something like this: *"The thread through all the discussion was the cross."* We'll see in our passage today that indeed the thread is the cross.

Paul is using a form of argument called *a fortiori*, or "how much more." It basically works like this: *If the greater thing is true, then*

the lesser thing is of necessity also true. If God has done the harder thing, then surely He will do the easier task. Look closely at Ro 5:9: **“Since we have now...how much more shall we be...”** And verse 10: **“For if when we were...how much more...”** Even verse 11 employs something similar: **“Not only...we also.”**

Since God did the more difficult task of justifying weak, wayward and wicked sinners, then to rescue us from wrath is relatively effortless. We could say it this way: *If God has already done the difficult, can we not trust Him to do the comparatively simple thing of completing the task?*

Paul is making some stunning statements in this section of Scripture to show that we are to live with the tension of what we have “already” and what is “still to come.” The best is really yet to be! In each of these three verses we’ll discover a conviction that comes with a corollary truth.

Look at Ro 5:9: **“Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!”**

Conviction #1: We have been justified by His blood.

At conversion our sins are forgiven, and all charges against us are dropped. This is a legal term from the world of law. To justify means to “declare not guilty.” Wayne Grudem defines it this way: *“An instantaneous legal act of God in which He thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ’s righteousness as belonging to us.”* We are found not guilty but we are also declared righteous. According to 2 Corinthians 5:21, the righteousness of Christ is credited to your account. Romans 8:1 says, **“There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”**

Don’t miss the fact that we are saved by **“His blood.”** As the song says, “there is power in the blood” not in pop psychology or in other blather baptized in the waters of Christian words. Why is the blood of Jesus so important?

There is no forgiveness without blood.

Hebrews 9:22: “...Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”

The blood satisfies the Holy claims of God.

Exodus 12:13: “...when I see the blood, I will pass over you.”

The blood redeems the believer.

1 Peter 1:18-19: “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”

The blood cleanses us from sin.

1 John 1:7: “...the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”

The blood of Jesus justifies us. That’s conviction #1. Here’s the corollary to that.

Corollary #1: We shall be saved from God’s wrath.

God’s righteous wrath was unleashed on Jesus, who died as our substitute, in our place. The word “wrath” has already appeared six times in our study of Romans and means *“an inner, deep resentment that seethes and smolders.”*

Last week we focused on God’s love. The other truth to keep in mind is God’s justice. Because He is just, He must punish sin and because He loves us so much He sent His own Son as substitute so that He remains loving *and* just. His wrath is fully satisfied because He has fully unleashed His love. Here’s a truth that blows us away: *The love of God rescues us from the wrath of God.* Romans 3:26: **“He did it to demonstrate His justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.”**

The word for saved means, “to deliver or preserve a person from extraordinary danger or destruction.” This means that we are not only saved at conversion, we are saved forever. That’s why we believe that once saved, always saved. You are saved from your own wickedness and from God’s wrath. I love these words of life in 1 Thessalonians 1:10: **“Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.”** 1 Thessalonians 5:9 puts it this way: **“For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** Loved ones, Jesus intercepted and absorbed the wrath of God for you on the cross, where all of God’s fury was poured out.

Forgive me for the theology of this joke but it makes a good point. A man died and was transported to the pearly gates. He was met by an angel who said, *“All you have to do is perform one task correctly and you’ll be granted entrance into heaven. It’s really pretty easy. All you have to do is spell ‘love.’”*

The man sighed in relief and quickly answered: "**L-O-V-E.**" The angel then asked the man if he could watch the gate for a few minutes because he had a couple errands to run. The man immediately agreed. As he awaited the angel's return, he saw another man walk up the pearly gates. He recognized him as someone he couldn't stand when he was alive. In fact, he had incredible conflict with him for many years. Seeing who was manning the gates, the man became noticeably anxious. The gatekeeper said, "Don't worry, all you have to do is perform one task correctly and you'll get in." The man breathed a sigh of relief and said, "What do I have to do?" To which his enemy said, "Spell 'chrysanthemum.'"

Aren't you glad that there's no human gatekeeper to God's kingdom? Flawed people cannot judge whether someone makes it or not. The task that needs to be performed has already been completed by Christ. It's through His blood that we have entrance. We are justified by Jesus through faith, and we're saved from wrath because we've been declared righteous.

Ro 5:10 gives us the next pair of truths:

For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

Conviction #2: We are reconciled by His death.

It's not an easy truth to stomach but before we come to Christ, the Bible says that we are at war with God. The word "enemy" was often used to describe bitter military foes and meant "hated, odious and hostile." In our context, it would be like the U.S. and North Korea. Amazingly, Jesus now refers to us not as foes, but as friends in John 15:15: "***I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I made known to you.***" If God did all that He did for us when we were enemies, what will He do for us now that we are friends?

Corollary #2: We are saved by His life.

Since a dead Savior can redeem us, don't you think a living Savior can keep us? Christ not only gave His life for us, He gave His life to us. He lives in order to live in us so that He can liberate us. We should look at His earthly life as an example as taught in 1 Peter 2:21:

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

It's good to wear the bracelet and ask the question: What Would Jesus Do? But I think it's even better to allow Jesus to live His life within you.

What does it mean that we are saved through His life? I don't believe this is referring to how Jesus lived 2,000 years ago, but how He is living His life through you and me right now. This is not some spiritual milk that you can just slurp down quickly. This is one of those "meaty" truths of the Word that we need to chew on to understand. Paul stated that the key to the Christian life is very clear in Galatians 2:20: "***I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me...***"

If there's a secret to the Christian life, here it is. It's not a matter of trying to imitate Jesus, though we should strive to do that. It's not a matter of keeping rules or even getting our hair cut. The secret to the Christian life is simply allowing Jesus to control every part of our life so that He lives out His character through us. Someone put it this way: When I was saved, I was "in Christ," but when I appropriate His life, then it is "Christ in me." Listen to the words of Jesus in John 14:20: "***... You are in me, and I am in you.***"

David Dykes illustrates this truth with a glove. This glove is nice but it's empty. It represents a person who is not full of Jesus. I can say to this glove, "Come on, pick up this watch." I can urge it to do so, I can give it an example to follow, but until it is filled with something it won't be able to do anything. Here's the application. If you're struggling to love an unlovely person, you'll never be able to do it on your own. If you're having a hard time forgiving a friend, you'll fail in your own power. Actually, everything in the Christian life is impossible without the filling of Christ. But, when Jesus fills our lives (put hand in glove), Jesus in us can love the unlovely and forgive the unforgivable.

Not only is Jesus living His resurrection life in and through us, when we let Him; He is also praying for us. Turn to Hebrews 7:25:

Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

Jesus saves completely and He intercedes constantly. Jesus died to reconcile us and He lives in us to save us. If God has done the most, will He not do the least? If God has done the best, will He not do the rest? If we were forgiven while we were foes, will he not save us now that we are friends? This passage helps us see that there are three dimensions to our deliverance: past, present and future.

1. Justification. This deals with our past liberation from the *penalty* of sin through the shedding of the Savior's blood.

2. Sanctification. The second stage covers our present liberation from the *power* of sin. By God's grace and the Holy Spirit's enablement, the cords of our bondage to sin are broken as the Lord Jesus lives His life through us. What this means is that Christians are being transformed, set aside for the Savior, and set apart from sin. Our challenge is to live out in practice what is ours in position. Actually, this is just whetting our appetites for what we'll learn in Romans 6-8.

3. Glorification. This third dimension will take place in the future when believers come face-to-face with Jesus, and are liberated from the *presence* of sin. In this world, sin is everywhere. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the boastful pride of life is pervasive, including what lurks and lives inside each of us. In the twinkling of an eye, our mortal bodies will be exchanged for immortal ones, and we will never have to deal with sin again. Romans 8:30: ***"And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."***

The penalty of sin is paid for; the power of sin can be broken in our lives, and there's a time coming when we will be free from the presence of sin. Incidentally, these three stages correlate to three of our four vision points for this year.

Gaining more disciples.

We want to see more people become justified by faith in Christ so that they are freed from the penalty of sin. I'm looking forward to the Dive Deep Class that Brian Tumbleson will be teaching on October 24 and November 16 called "How to Share Your Faith." I'm praying that more of us will be more committed to sharing Christ with those around us.

Growing in depth.

We ache to see more believers dive deep with Christ so that as a group of Christ-followers we will experience the victory that is ours! It's time to find freedom and grow in character development so that the fruit of the Spirit blossoms in this body.

Glimpsing the dream.

As we contemplate the future, we will be motivated to live for Him in the present.

1 John 3:3: "Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure."

First, we are justified by His blood and saved from His wrath. Second, we are reconciled by His death and saved by His life. Thirdly, verse 11 teaches that we have received reconciliation and therefore we rejoice in God:

Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Conviction #3: We have received reconciliation.

Would you notice that reconciliation must be received in order for it to be activated in one's life? God initiates reconciliation with His enemies and we are recipients only when we receive what He offers. John 1:12: ***"Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."***

On Wednesday and Thursday of this week, Pastor Dick and I, along with three of our elders: Chuck Carroll, Jon Dewald, and Lloyd Troyer attended a leadership conference in Indiana. Jon drove and would always go out and get the car when we were leaving the church and pick us up. On Wednesday night, the four of us were waiting out in the cold weather, and when we saw him pull up, Lloyd and I jumped in the suburban, with Pastor Dick and Chuck right behind us. When I got in the back seat I looked up at the driver and realized that we were in the wrong vehicle! The driver was nice and said, "You're in the wrong vehicle but you're welcome to stay." We turned beat red and bolted out of there in a hurry. I'm really glad we did because it was then that I noticed the Michigan license plates and realized that we would have been headed to that desolate land on the wrong side of the lake.

I wonder, are you in the right vehicle right now? There's only One who can get you to the right place. Jesus said it this way in John 5:24:

I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

Perhaps you've been trusting in other methods but I'm here to tell you that if you're in the wrong vehicle you'll go to the wrong place.

Corollary #3: We rejoice in God.

This is the third time in Romans so far that Paul has referred to rejoicing in God. The Greek word joy means "to exult and rejoice jubilantly, or to be thrilled." Notice that we are to be thrilled with God Himself. This could be translated this way: *"glorying in God."*

Psalm 35:9: ***“Then my soul will rejoice in the LORD and delight in his salvation.”***

Sir Thomas Moore used to complain about the English Reformers because he said they were *“too frivolous, too giddy, and too joyful in their salvation.”* I wonder how many people would make that complaint about me. Has it been awhile since you exulted in an expression of your salvation? Are you thrilled with God today or are you bored with Him? I don't believe Christians can lose their salvation but they can certainly lose the joy of their salvation. Watch this video clip and like David in Psalm 51:12, ask God to ***“restore the joy of your salvation.”***

Video Drama

Through faith in Jesus,

- We have been justified by His blood and we shall be saved from God's wrath.
- We are reconciled by His death and we are saved by His life.
- We have received reconciliation and we rejoice in God.

When God forgives sin,

He purges the RECORD

Erases the REMEMBRANCE

And empowers the RECIPIENT

Romans 5:12-19 Christ Delivers from Adam's Death - 10/22/06

We're going to begin a bit differently today. I'd like you to turn to the person next to you and first introduce yourself if you don't already know each other and then share your answer to this question: *“Other than Jesus, who has had the greatest influence in your life?”*

Now let's hear from some of you. Who has had the greatest influence in your life? So as to not embarrass anyone here this morning, you could just share in general terms, and not use any specific names.

[After listening to answers] Without minimizing the impact that any one individual has made in your life, there's one person that has influenced you more than anyone else you've mentioned. If you wonder how I know this, it's because he's affected me as well. His name is Adam.

The section of Scripture we will be looking at today is complex and complicated and contains some of the deepest theological truths in the Book of Romans. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia refers to this passage as *“the logical center of the epistle, the central point to which everything that precedes has converged, and out of which everything else will flow.”* The Presbyterian preacher Donald Grey Barnhouse preached 25 sermons on these verses alone! I plan to preach only two, with next week's focus on *“The Greatness of God's Grace.”*

Paul's argument is a bit challenging to follow and the verses themselves are not easy to outline. One person referred to this passage as the most difficult part of the entire New Testament. At first glance, perhaps this was what Peter meant when he said this about the writing of Paul in 2 Peter 3:16: ***“His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures to their own destruction.”*** While this is a deep section, and I don't want to distort it, these verses are actually fairly easy to understand. We may not like what we learn, but I think we can all comprehend what is written here.

In essence, Paul is comparing and contrasting Adam with Christ and how we either have a legacy of guilt or of grace, depending on how we respond to Jesus. Adam and Christ are different in many ways but similar in the sense that they both represent a multitude and they both have passed along the effects of their actions to others. Before we look at some of their dissimilarities, let's go all the way back to the beginning of the Bible and take a refresher course.

As we were reminded by the little girl who quoted Psalm 8 at the start of the service, human beings are the pinnacle of God's creation, the apex of all His creativity. In the beginning, God walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Adam was king over all creation and the head of the first human family. He and Eve were given great gifts, and were encouraged to enjoy the pleasures of paradise. God gave just one restriction to Adam in Genesis 2:16-17: ***“You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”***

Not content to be in close community with God, Adam and Eve want the one thing they can't have.

Eve is tricked into eating the fruit and gives some to Adam, who ate willingly. But here's the difference: Eve was deceived while Adam sinned deliberately. We see this in 1 Timothy 2:13-14: **"For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived..."** It was through that fatal choice that sin entered the world. Adam chose the wrong path, and in so doing, plunged people everywhere into the depths of depravity and despair. Theologians refer to this as the Fall, for when Adam ate the fruit he fell from grace into guilt; from communion with God to chaos; from sweetness to shame.

Romans 5:12 summarizes the entire section: **"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned --."** We know from verse 14 that the "one man" is none other than Adam. Loved ones, before we go much further, allow me to make the obvious point that Adam was a real person, not the fabrication of some myth or legend.

Related to this, the opening chapters of Genesis are to be taken literally, just the way they are written. If you hold to the theory of evolution, and discount God's account in Genesis, then you'll never understand where sin came from and you'll miss the whole meaning of *why* the Savior came. Not only is Paul's argument wrapped up in the historicity of Adam, Jesus Himself held to the literal account of creation in Matthew 19:4: **"Haven't you read, he replied, 'that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female?'"** Destroying or distorting Genesis undermines and eventually unravels the Gospel message.

It's Adam's Fault

Let's look at what Romans 5:12 is saying...

1. Sin is present.

The word **"therefore"** is connecting this section to what we just finished studying in the first eleven verses. Sin **"entered"** the world through Adam, which means that it was introduced into the world through his deliberate act of disobedience. The word "enter" means to spread, or to go through, like a contagious virus spreading through the entire population. It's like Adam opened a huge container of anthrax and the spores of this deadly sin virus have been inhaled by each of us.

This verse deals with what is commonly called "original sin." G.K. Chesterton said it this way: *"Whatever else may be said about man, this much is certainly true: He is not all that he could be."* This sermon is almost too easy to illustrate because the evidence for the sorry story of our sinfulness is plastered in the headlines everyday. Here are a few from just one day this week:

- Mother Murders Social Worker
- Four U.S. Soldiers Charged with Rape and Murder
- Boy Killed His Twin, 14, Over Gum
- Teen Stabbed to Death at School Bus Stop

Sin is not just "out there" in the headlines but is also present in our own hearts as Jeremiah 17:9 says: **"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"** Jesus put it this way in Matthew 15:19: **"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander."** No one is immune from the virus of sin because it has spread everywhere. No one is exempt from its excruciating grip and no one is innocent.

This actually explains a lot, doesn't it? When I was an associate pastor to Ray Pritchard in Oak Park, I used to come into his office on occasion and lament someone's lack of love or wonder why a ministry event didn't match my expectations. After listening to me vent for awhile, Ray would invariably lean forward in his chair and in his signature southern drawl would say, *"Brian, we live in a fallen world."* That's good theology and a good reminder that I find myself still quoting on a regular basis.

Our world doesn't make sense without the doctrine of original sin. Something has gone wrong; terribly and wickedly wrong. The Bible is clear that we live in a fallen world and even secular studies show how savage our sinfulness is. Listen to these words from the Minnesota Crime Commission:

Every baby starts life as a little savage. He is completely selfish and self-centered. He wants what he wants when he wants it —his bottle, his mother's attention, his playmate's toy, his uncle's watch. Deny him these wants, and he seethes with rage and aggressiveness, which would be murderous, were he not so helpless. He is dirty. He has no morals, no knowledge, no skills. This means that all children, not just certain children, are born delinquent. If permitted to continue in the self-centered world of his infancy, given free reign to his impulsive actions to satisfy his wants, every child would grow up a criminal, a thief, a killer, a rapist" (As quoted by Ray Stedman, "From Guilt to Glory," I, p. 131).

These words were written 80 years ago, though they sound like they could have been penned yesterday. Our slant toward

sinfulness starts even before we were born as David details in Psalm 51:5: **“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”** C.S. Lewis got it right in the Chronicles of Narnia when he referred to young men as “sons of Adam” and young women as “daughters of Eve.”

2. Sin’s penalty is death.

Sin is present because it entered the world through one man. And because sin came in, death did as well: **“...and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men...”** The word “death” is used seven times in this passage. Adam was told very plainly that his disobedience would result in death. He died physically but more importantly he died spiritually because his sin separated him from a holy God. Ezekiel 18:4 says, **“The soul who sins is the one who will die.”** 1 Corinthians 15:22 says, **“For as in Adam all die...”** Death didn’t take long to make an entrance when Adam’s one son Cain killed his other son Abel.

Because of the power of death, we are in its grip and according to Hebrews 2:15 are **“held in slavery by [our] fear of death.”** The dynasty of death is traced all the way back to Adam. We learned two weeks ago that we were weak, wicked and wayward. Last week we added that before we came to Christ we were at war with Him. Now we see that those without Christ are without life because they are dead.

3. The Pervasiveness of Sin.

Sin is present and death is its penalty. What does the number 300 million mean to you? That’s right; the U.S. population has now reached that milestone. That’s amazing. But even more astonishing is that out of 300 million people in our country, 300 million of them are sinners. Sin is pervasive because it is everywhere and it is in everyone. Notice the last phrase of verse 12: **“Because all sinned.”** This echoes back to Romans 3:23: **“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”**

Drew and Timmy were brothers and one day their parents gave them a list of jobs to do while they went to the store: *“Clean your rooms, do the dishes, and mow the lawn.”* When the parents returned they saw that nothing had been done. Dad was obviously not very happy and so he asked Drew a question: *“What have you been doing while we were gone?”* Drew replied in a quiet voice: *“Nothing.”* Dad then turned to Timmy and questioned him, *“And what have you been doing, young man?”* To which Timmy replied, *“Helping Drew.”* We can sin even when we do nothing.

I got a kick out of a letter Dear Abby received several years ago. Her response shows that she clearly understands the pervasiveness of sin.

Dear Abby: *“I am 44 and would like to meet a man my age with no bad habits.”*

Dear Rose: *“So would I.”*

When Adam sinned, somehow you and I sinned because our lack of holiness is hereditary. I heard one person put it this way: When Adam sinned it was if he was the bus driver of humanity and when he drove over the cliff, we all crashed and burned with him. Because Adam is our ancestor and he is the head of the human race, when he fell you and I fell with him. Paul is not saying that we all sin *because* Adam sinned, though this is certainly true. Paul is saying something even stronger: We all sinned *when* Adam sinned and death is in our DNA.

Maybe this doesn’t sound fair to you. How could Adam’s sin be counted against us? It’s because he represents each one of us. There’s biblical precedent for this. Do you remember the story of David and Goliath? When the battle lines were drawn, the deal was that David would represent Israel and Goliath would represent the Philistines. Depending on which man won, the nation he represented would win. And whoever lost, then his nation would lose. When Goliath was toppled by a pebble, the Philistines went down with him. When Adam sinned, we sinned.

A Relevant Rabbit Trail

I want you to notice something structurally about this section of Scripture. Ro 5:12 serves as a summary statement but Paul’s thought is not really finished. We see this in many versions with a hyphen at the end of the verse. The verse begins with the phrase **“just as”** but it’s not completed with the **“so also”** until we get to the second half of verse 18. Paul begins his argument about our lineage to Adam and then thinks about a few other things that he needs to say. It’s almost as if he interrupts himself.

I think this has a simple explanation. Those from a Jewish background saw themselves as superior to other people because they were children of Abraham. They bragged about their descent from Abraham the saint; Paul reminds them that Adam the sinner is their most important ancestor. Now that he’s made that point, he anticipates another objection that goes something like this: *If you’re going to skip Abraham then what about the impact that Moses made?*

While he leaves his initial argument dangling, Paul now goes down a relevant rabbit trail in verses 13-17. This is not just a tangent

however, because he is actually piling on more evidence as he goes. Let's walk through these verses and make a few observations:

Ro 5:13: ***“For before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law.”***

Paul makes the obvious point that the Law did not bring sin, but instead revealed sin. Like a magnifying glass, it shows us what was already there.

Ro 5:14: ***“Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come.”***

Death is pictured as reigning from Adam to Moses, a time period of about 2500 years. Like a King, the dynasty of death had its beginnings with Adam and continued through the time of Moses. This verse introduces the idea that Adam was a **“pattern”** of Jesus. Jesus came as a man, though He was fully God, to reverse the ruin unleashed by Adam's sin. 1 Corinthians 15:45 refers to Jesus as the **“last Adam.”**

Ro 5:15: ***“But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!”***

Paul is now starting to compare and contrast Adam with Jesus. One man (Adam) brought guilt to all. One man (Jesus) brings grace to all. The gift that Jesus offers is for everyone, just as the sin of Adam has infected everyone. The phrase **“how much more”** is used in verses 9, 10, 15, 17 and 20. We'll speak more about God's amazing grace next week but suffice it to say that the grace of Jesus Christ **“overflows** or super abounds. Jesus gives us much more than we expect and certainly much more than we deserve. Remember this truth: *Grace is always greater than sin.*

Ro 5:16: ***“Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.”***

Would you notice that God's gift is so much different than the judgment that came from Adam? Adam's one sin brought condemnation. The gift of grace follows **“many trespasses,”** which means that it doesn't matter what you've done, or how much you've done it, you can be justified by Jesus.

Ro 5:17: ***“For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.”***

This is an amazing verse. The dynasty of death has been reigning unabated since Adam plunged us into the sea of sin. When we **“receive God's abundant provision”** we will reign in this life. One commentator captured this well: *“Adam's sin brought life to an end; what Christ did dethrones death and enthrones righteousness, which is evidenced in life.”*

The word “abundant” means to exceed a fixed number so as to have enough, and more to spare. It's the idea of running over. Friends, Christ's one act of obedience was immeasurably greater than Adam's one act of condemnation. We could say it like this: *“The sin of Adam brought death—a decaying degenerative force. But grace brought a far more dynamic power—life...the trespass of Adam brought death once, the sacrifice and death of Jesus brings life a thousand times.”*

God's Remedy Must Be Received

Once again we see that the gift of grace must be received. It's not automatically applied to your life like Adam's sin has been. We died because of Adam but we can live and reign because of Christ, provided we receive what He offers. No longer conquered by King Death, believers are now conquerors because of what Christ has done. Romans 8:37: ***“In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”***

Ro 5:18 completes the thought from Ro 5:12. The first half summarizes Paul's argument: ***“Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men...”*** And the second half finishes it: ***“...so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.”*** This is the greatest “gift exchange” in all of history! The word “gift” is found five times in just three verses, reminding us that salvation is not something we can earn. When we receive reconciliation we will be released from blame (condemnation) and bondage (the reign of death).

In the movie called “The Last Emperor,” a young boy is anointed as the last emperor of China and lives a life of luxury with 1000 servants at his command. One day his brother asks, *“What happens when you do wrong?”* The emperor answered, *“When I do wrong, someone else is punished.”* He then demonstrates by breaking a jar, and one of his servants is beaten. In Christianity Jesus reverses that ancient pattern. When the servants (that's us) make a mistake, the King is punished. Instead of us being condemned

eternally for our sins, Jesus is condemned instead.

Ro 5:19 reiterates and reinforces these astonishing truths: ***“For just as through the disobedience of the one man many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”*** David Dykes has helped my understanding here. When Adam sinned, he died:

- Immediately in his spirit. His community and intimacy with God was fractured.
- Gradually in his soul. More and more he became aware of how rotten he was.
- Eventually in his body. 930 years later, he died physically.
- Listen. What Adam ruined, Jesus restored. As sons of Adam or daughters of Eve, when we receive Jesus Christ, His redemption reverses the ruin of Adam:
 - We receive spiritual life immediately in our spirits and are instantaneously justified.
 - We receive grace to become more like Jesus through the gradual process of sanctification.
 - Eventually we'll receive a renewed and resurrected body. That's glorification.

Implications

I see some implications that flow from what we've learned this morning.

1. God takes sin very seriously and so should we.

Some may say that what Adam did was no big deal since all he did was munch on some fruit. But it was a big deal because he disobeyed God's command. Let's not minimize sin. Adam did, and he died...and we died with him.

2. No one is inherently good.

If you're here today and you think that you're really a pretty good person, think again. Some of us hesitate to share the gospel with people because we may think that they're just nice people who don't do bad things. That may be true on the outside but everyone apart from Christ is in a precarious predicament. Only Jesus can extricate from sin, death and condemnation.

3. We don't become sinners by sinning; we sin because we *are* sinners.

Sin is not what we do; it's what we are and is evidenced by what we do. Sin is more than just an act; it's an attitude and a condition. We do what we do because of who we are.

4. You are either “in Adam” or you are “in Christ.”

There's no middle ground. Adam is your ancestor or Jesus is your advocate. Either Adam is having the greatest influence in your life; or Jesus is. It all boils down to just one question: Are you “in Adam” or are you “in Christ?”

5. Birth is both the cause and the cure for our sin.

Don't leave here thinking you just have to be a better person. Listen very carefully: *You don't need to make a new start in life; you need to receive a new life to start with.* The cure for the curse is to transfer your lineage from Adam to the Lord Jesus Christ. We must exchange our identity with Adam which leads to condemnation to an identity with Christ in order for us to be justified. Since we were born in sin; the only way to be saved from sin is to be born again. There is no more important decision to make. Jesus emphasized this truth to a religious man, who looked pretty good on the outside in John 3:3: ***“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”***

TWO GARDENS TWO TREES

Look at it this way. There are two men, two gardens and two trees.

- Two Men. You are in Adam or you are in Christ.
- Two Gardens. Adam chose to follow his selfish desires and disregarded God's command; Jesus surrendered to the Father's will and fulfilled His purpose.
- Two Trees. Arthur Pink draws some contrasts between the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree upon which Christ died, the cross. The first tree was planted by God in the Garden, the second was planted by man at Golgotha; God forbade man to touch the first tree, but all are invited to embrace the second tree; the punishment for eating of the first tree brought condemnation, the eating of the second tree brings life and justification; Adam was sent out of Paradise for eating of the first tree, when we receive the fruit of Jesus' work on the second tree we enter Paradise.

You may still be saying, *"It's not fair that I should be punished for Adam's sin! This isn't right and so I'm going to reject God."* Son of Adam or daughter of Eve, that voice has been heard before in human history. The voice of the viper told Eve to question God and to ultimately reject Him. The voice you hear today is the voice of the evil one, the enemy of your soul. Satan is seeking to destroy you. Flee to the tree of Calvary before it's too late.

Sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, aren't you glad we're not stuck with the sin of Adam? The only way to be cured from the curse is through Christ. The only way to be set free from sin and break the dynasty of death is by having the death of Jesus applied to your account. He doesn't just want you to confess your individual sins, but for you to say as an individual that you are a sinner. He doesn't want your stuff; He wants yourself. Are you ready to surrender to Him and let Him own you?

Let's watch this video now about the centrality of the cross. The song you'll hear is called, "Own Me" by Jesse Owens. Let me read some of the lyrics so you don't miss them.

Got a stack of books,
So I could learn how to live;
Many are left half-read,
Covered by the cobwebs on my shelf.

And I got a list of laws,
Growing longer everyday;
If I keep pluggin' away,
Maybe one day I'll perfect myself.

Oh, but all of my labor,
Seems to be in vain;
And all of my laws,
Just cause me more pain;

So I fall before You,
In all of my shame;
Ready and willing to be changed-
Own me

Take all that I am,
And heal me
With the blood of the Lamb.
Mold me

With Your gracious hand;
Break me till I'm only Yours-
Own me

God is pleased when we give our sins and idols to Him but what He really wants is for us to surrender our sinfulness to Him and to give our very selves to Him. Does He own you? Sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, it's time to surrender all by leaving everything at the cross, including ourselves.

Closing Hymn: "I Surrender All"

Romans 5:20-21 The Greatness of God's Grace - 10/29/06

Note: I used the sermon by **Ray Pritchard** called, ["Martin Luther's Highway to Heaven"](#) for background information for this opening first-person monologue:

Good morning. My name is Marty. I'd like to tell you a little about my story. I grew up knowing about God but when I was 21-years-old I had a life-changing experience. One day I was out walking on the road during a thunderstorm and was struck by lightning. I knew I wasn't living like I should and believed that God was trying to get my attention so I left everything and joined a monastery.

Life as a monk was anything but easy. We'd get up about 2:00 a.m. every day – that's even earlier than your pastors wake up! As soon as we crawled out of bed we would pray and sing, followed by a time of meditation.

We'd then pray some more and sing some more. Next we'd have breakfast and then morning prayers. We'd work all morning and then after lunch we had another time of prayer and singing followed by a brief nap. Then came more prayer and singing and meditation, after which we had supper. In the evening we'd pray some more and sing some more and then meditate one last time. My life was filled with religious ritual, ceremony and solitude, penance and poverty.

I was willing to live like this because I was on a desperate search for peace. Some days I felt that all these rituals were helping me but most of the time I was gripped with fear that I wasn't doing enough. I knew I was a sinner and that God was holy and that I would never measure up. But I kept trying my best. In fact, my brothers referred to me as "a monk of the monks." When praise and prayer didn't rid me of the dread in my life, I started confessing every sin I could remember. This might be hard for you to believe, but there were times I would spend six hours a day in confession! This only led to more guilt and despair because I knew I couldn't remember all my sins. And if I couldn't remember all of them, how could I truly be forgiven? My transgressions were tearing me up and my wayward heart was wiping me out.

In my despair I decided to travel to Rome, which in my day was the center of the religious world. But I was surprised and then shocked and then sickened by what I saw. I won't go into it all now but I remember thinking, *"If there was a Hell, Rome was built upon it."* Outside one of the buildings I saw some ancient stairs that had been transported from Jerusalem. Apparently Jesus had walked on this same staircase outside Pilate's hall. Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims would come and climb those 28 stairs on their hands and knees. I decided to do the same thing, hoping this act of devotion would help alleviate my agony. I got on my hands and knees and started crawling up each stair, kissing each one as I recited the Lord's Prayer at each stop. When I got to the top I questioned what this had to do with appeasing a righteous and holy God. I felt foolish and emptier than ever.

The turning point in my life came when my friend Johann asked me to teach the Bible. Ironically, I had never really studied the Bible before. I was excited because I could use my Hebrew and Greek and Latin to really dig in. The first book I was assigned to teach was the Book of Psalms, followed by Romans and Galatians. It was when I was studying the Book of Romans that I came across this phrase in the first chapter: **"The righteous will live by faith."** I was both excited and yet skeptical because it all seemed too simple. I understand you've been studying Romans as well. I hope that it has radically redirected your life, like it has mine.

Allow me to read from my journal:

My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage Him...then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sincere mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into Paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning...this passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven" (Roland Bainton, "Here I Stand," 49-50).

I tried to change things within the church because I had been changed within but after much study and prayer, 489 years ago this Tuesday I posted 95 statements on a church door in Wittenberg, Germany. That might sound strange to you but that's how we did it back then. Today you'd probably just post something like this on an online discussion board. I was hoping to engender public comment and discussion. It worked. I had no idea that these statements would bring forth a movement that would change the course of world history. If I were to read these theses to you, you'd find most of them to be out-of-date, but I have to tell you that they were burning issues in my day. I was particularly upset about the sale of indulgences, which was a system whereby people could pay their way out of purgatory, and I also addressed the abuse of authority by religious leaders.

I'm not going to read all of them to you, for if I did you would be here longer than Pastor Brian normally keeps you – I hear he is a bit long-winded at times! I do want to share with you what I consider to be the most important one, its number 62 if you're counting: *"The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God."* By the way, if you've not figured it out yet, my name is Martin Luther.

[Thanks, Marty. We'll hear from you again at the end of the sermon.]

On what is recognized as Reformation Sunday, our focus is on the gospel of the glory and grace of God. It truly is our greatest treasure. Please turn to Romans 5:20-21: **"The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to**

bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

I see three facets of grace in the closing verses of Romans 5.

1. Grace is greater than our sin (Ro 5:20).

Follow along as I read the first part of verse 20: ***“The law was added so that the trespass might increase.”*** Surprisingly, the Law does not restrain or subdue sin. Rather, it excites and increases it. Just ask Martin Luther. The Law of God was a good thing but it is interesting that the word ***“added”*** that Paul uses has a negative connotation the only other time it is used in the Bible. Galatians 2:4 uses this word to speak of sneakiness, of ***“slipping in unawares.”*** When God gave the Law, it was intended to be secondary not primary. It came in beside sinners to show how huge our lack of holiness really is; it was given *not to make* us sinners for there was sin long before Sinai smoked, but to *show us* the depth of our depravity. One writer said it well: *“The Law makes little Adams out of us all.”*

As Paul says in Romans 7:7, the 10 Commandments convince us that we are sinners: ***“...Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law...”*** We can't get right with God by keeping the Law because it's actually impossible to keep. It won't commend us because it condemns us. We saw this in Romans 3:20: ***“Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.”*** That's what happened to me when I started reading my roommate's Bible when I was in college. The more I read, the more I realized what a rebel I was. Actually, after I became a Christian, my conscience and the Holy Spirit using His Word convicted me of sin I wasn't even aware of before. For example, before I was saved I swore a lot; after I became a Christian, every curse word out of my mouth convicted me of my unholy heart. God's commands convince and convict us of sin, and that's a good thing. James 1:23 refers to God's revelation as a mirror that reflects what we're really like.

[Philipp Melancthon](#), Luther's young helper during the Reformation, expressed his exasperation with trying to keep all the commandments with these words: *“Old Adam is too strong for young Phillip.”* Notice the word ***“trespass”*** is in the singular. I believe this is still referring to Adam's sin and thus to our very nature, or condition as sinners. The word “trespass” refers to crossing the line, or breaking God's boundaries while the word “sin” means to miss the mark of God's standards.

Chuck Swindoll tells the story about his days as a paper boy. He rode his bike on the sidewalk and whenever he would come to a sharp corner, he would just ride on the grass so he wouldn't tip over trying to make the turn. He had done this so many times on one particular corner that he had actually made a dirt path in the grass. One day he noticed a new sign planted on the corner that read,

“KEEP OFF THE GRASS. NO BIKES.”

Swindoll says that he just kept doing what he had always done until the homeowner came out and had a talk with him. The next day he was back to tracking across the path. The sign, representing the Law, did not change his behavior. But it did identify the offense and gave the owner a clear basis for judging his deeds.

Let's look now at the second phrase of Ro 5:20: ***“But where sin increased, grace increased all the more.”*** It's difficult to get the full meaning of this verse in the NIV because the two uses of “increase” are not the same word in the Greek. The first “increase” speaks of addition. But when he says “grace increased” he uses a prefix that means multiplication. Where sins are added one by one, grace is multiplied a thousand times over. Sin abounds and adds up but grace super-abounds and expands exponentially. Check out these words from the hymn, “Grace Greater Than My Sin.”

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,

Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt!

Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured,

There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.

Church music over the centuries has been saturated with the theme of God's great grace. Listen to the words of “Wonderful Grace of Jesus.”

Wonderful the matchless grace of Jesus,

Deeper than the mighty rolling sea;

Wonderful grace, all sufficient for me, for even me.

Broader than the scope of my transgressions,

Greater far than all my sin and shame,

O magnify the precious Name of Jesus.

Praise His Name!

I like what **Corrie Ten Boom** once said: *"There is no pit so deep that the love of God is not deeper still."*

It's been said that Christianity is supremely a religion of grace. And that is certainly true. But, even so, grace is not well understood and often not embraced. We use the word a great deal but rarely think about what it means. Words like favor, beauty, thankfulness, gratitude, delight, kindness, benefit— all come from the same root that gives us the word "grace." It is easy to see why grace as a concept gets so diluted. Webster's New World Dictionary alone gives six different definitions. Grace literally means "a free gift" and is defined as the unmerited favor of God. But grace is more than that. God's grace causes Him to pardon guilty sinners who deserve damnation and a home in Hell.

In his book, **"What's So Amazing About Grace," Phillip Yancey** points out that part of our problem is in the nature of grace itself. Grace is scandalous. It's hard to accept, hard to believe, and hard to receive. Grace shocks us in what it offers. It is truly not of this world. It frightens us with what it does for sinners.

Grace teaches us that God does for others what we would never do for them. We would save the not-so-bad. God starts with prostitutes and then works downward from there. Grace is a gift that costs everything to the giver and nothing to the receiver. It is given to those who don't deserve it, barely recognize it, and hardly appreciate it. That's why God alone gets the glory in your salvation. Jesus did all the work when he died on the cross.

Jerry Bridges once said,

Your worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach of God's grace. And your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God's grace.

In the end grace means that no one is too bad to be saved. God specializes in saving really bad people. Do you have some things in your background that you would be ashamed to talk about in public? Fear not. God knows all about it, and His grace is greater than your sin. Grace also means that some people may be too good to be saved. That is, they may have such a high opinion of themselves that they think they don't need God's grace. God's grace cannot help you until you are desperate enough to receive it.

I like what **William Shakespeare** once said:

That word 'grace,' in an ungracious mouth, is profane.

Brothers and sisters, we need to put the "amazing" back into grace. We've allowed grace to become blasé and even boring. Many of us think that it's our right; that God somehow has to show us grace. We're no longer surprised by grace because we've gutted its meaning. And we don't marvel over it because we've marginalized it. Actually, if we're not stunned by the grace of God, perhaps we've shunned it. If grace does nothing for you, maybe it's because you've never embraced God's grace.

This passage shows us that grace is multiplied a million times over and is exceedingly greater than our sin. It's surprising and amazing and utterly unexpected because by its very nature it is underserved. Paul never got over grace and neither should we. Listen to his words in 1 Timothy 1:13-14:

Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man...the grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly...

Let me make two related points.

Grace is great but sometimes sin still has consequences. After being made right with God, we often have to make things right in other ways. Faults can be forgiven but consequences still come. Grace is amazing but wrong actions often come with a reaction. We need to strive for the balance of grace and truth, following the example of our Savior. John 1:14 says that Jesus was "full of grace and truth." Pastor Dick shared with me that one of his students at Moody really struggled with memorizing Scripture and doing well on tests because of drug abuse before he got saved. He knew he was forgiven by God's grace but the truth part was that his mind would forever be affected.

Don't presume upon grace and just do what you want. I've been asked a couple times this week why we don't just sin more if grace is going to abound anyway. Look with me at how Paul addresses this issue in Romans 6:1-2: "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"

Romans 6:12-14: "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace."

Sin is still a sinister force for the believer: don't play around with it!

2. Grace reigns through righteousness (Ro 5:21a).

We see the purpose behind the multiplication of grace in Ro 5:21:

"So that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life..."

There are three contrasts in this verse:

1. Sin vs. Righteousness
2. Reign vs. Might Reign
3. Death vs. Eternal Life

The word "reign" means to rule as a king with absolute authority. Paul is reminding us one last time that the dynasty of depravity is death. Apart from Christ, you and I are "in Adam" and therefore are controlled and ruled by the reign of unrighteousness. In his book "The Ragamuffin Gospel," Brennan Manning writes:

"Though lip service is paid to the gospel of grace, many Christians live as if only personal discipline and self-denial will mold the perfect me. The emphasis is on what I do rather than on what God is doing. In this curious process God is the benign old spectator in the bleachers..."

But here's the really good news. Just as we were automatically placed "in Adam" at birth, as we learned last week, when we are born again we are transferred to a different domain, where grace has the highest place. Before you know Jesus Christ, sin is your master and you were handed over to the domination of death. At conversion, you are granted grace and you are placed "in Christ." Grace is given so that it rules and reigns in your life and brings you to eternal life.

1 Corinthians 15:54-55: ***"Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"***

Someone has said that "grace gives us something and takes us somewhere." For the believer, eternal life begins at conversion, as Jesus longs for us to live the "abundant life" referenced in John 10:10: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

The reign of grace, properly understood, does not lead to a sloppy spirituality that minimizes sin. In fact, according to Titus 2:11-12 grace empowers us to avoid sin: ***"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It [grace] teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age."***

The puritan **Thomas Brooks** put it this way:

As heat is opposed to cold, and light to darkness, so grace is opposed to sin. Fire and water may as well agree in the same vessel as grace and sin in the same heart."

Grace then, is not some static principle but rather a dynamic life-changing reality.

Phillip Bliss penned these profound words ([Play "Free from the law, oh happy condition"](#)):

Free from the Law, oh happy condition; Jesus has bled and there is remission.

It can be argued that grace is not just a presence or a principle; it is a power that reaches out to save the perishing and sanctify believers so that we become more like Christ.

Charles Wesley knew all about the triumphing power of grace when he wrote these words:

O for a thousand tongues to sing

My great redeemer's praise,

The glories of my God and King,

The triumphs of His grace.

[David Crowder O For A Thousand Tongues To Sing](#)

3. Grace comes through Christ (Ro 5:21b).

This past Thursday night Beth and I attended the 50th Anniversary Banquet for Christianity Today International at the Hilton Hotel in Lisle. When I received an invitation to attend, I thought there must be some mistake so I sent in our R.S.V.P. quickly in case they changed their mind. When we arrived the first person I met was a board member who started the magazine called "Christian History." We then met the editor of "Today's Christian Woman." Later I found out that I'd be sitting right next to the editor of "Christianity Today" and one of the heads of Intervarsity Press. Beth sat next to a professor at Wheaton College who has written nine books on church history. John Ortberg, the keynote speaker walked past us and later we caught a glimpse of Twila Paris in the hallway. Billy Graham, the founder of Christianity Today, was unable to attend but he sent a letter that was read to everyone. Even President Bush sent a letter congratulating Christianity Today on this milestone.

We immediately felt out of place and quite insignificant, thinking that there had to be some sort of mix-up in the mail. When people starting asking us about our connection to Christianity Today, I told them that I'm a pastor at a great church located in the flattest regions of the Land of Lincoln; I quickly added that I read the magazine, I have a subscription to Leadership Journal and I enjoy listening to sermon CDs from Preaching Today.

I still wasn't sure why we were there until I saw my old friend Brian Ondracek, who is one of the Vice Presidents. I took Brian aside and asked him how we got an invite to this exclusive gathering. He smiled and said, "*Because I put you on the list.*" The saying is really true: "It's really not what you know but *who* you know." Without a friend in high places we never would have gotten in. We had done nothing to warrant our access to this anniversary banquet. We were there only because of an invite, generated only by the grace of my friend. We had a very enjoyable time, had a great free meal, and received some complimentary copies of some of their products. We gave nothing and received much.

Friend, if you are a born again believer, you have given nothing to God and you have gained much. Notice the last phrase of verse 21: "***Through Jesus Christ our Lord.***" It's as if Paul can't resist saying the name of Jesus one more time! This section crescendos with an emphasis on Jesus Christ, through whom we are granted grace, if we but R.S.V.P. to His invitation. Did you catch that Jesus Christ is "***our***" Lord? He is not a generic Jesus; He is the only way, the only truth and the only life. He will share His throne with no one. I went back and counted how many times Paul said the phrase "***our Lord***" in Romans and came up with twelve! Which leads to a question: *Is He your Lord?* Jesus is the King of the kingdom where grace reigns.

On our car ride back home, it struck both of us that while many of the people we met are famous Christians, if it were not for *the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God*, none of us would have been there, and no one would be in the kingdom of God. It really has nothing to do with us and everything to do with Jesus Christ our Lord. Paul said it this way in Colossians 1:16-17:

All things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

We've all received an invite to a bountiful banquet where we have a reservation to be seated next to the guest of honor, Jesus Himself. Brothers and sisters in Christ, allow these truths to permeate and percolate through your soul:

- Grace is greater than our sin
- Grace reigns through righteousness
- Grace comes through Christ

Are your sins piled before you like a mountain? Are you burdened and broken by the bondage of sin? If so, make a place for God's grace in your life. It's time to embrace the grace of God that comes only through a relationship with Jesus Christ, inaugurated through the new birth.

[Let's go back to Marty for some closing comments...]

Boy, I didn't think your preacher would ever wrap up today. Actually, if the truth be known, I used to preach much longer sermons than he does! You have it better than you think (he told me to tell you that). Loved ones, it boils down to this. You can continue to follow a performance-based religion like I did for way too many years and end up in a ditch of despair. Or, you can enjoy a pardon-based relationship and embrace the grace that is yours in Christ. I used to come back to this phrase many times: "*Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a man could stake his life on it a thousand times.*" I would also tell people who wanted to put off a decision for Christ that they were on dangerous ground. As I recall I said this: "*How soon 'not now'*

becomes 'never.'" Receive the grace of Christ right now. Ask Him to forgive you and cleanse you and make you into the person He wants you to be.

One of the distinctives of the Reformation was music. I understand you still sing some of those hymns that were our lifeline in those dark days. I have always appreciated music and did what I could to take contemporary tunes and add deep meaning to them. I went back and read part of my journal again and came across this sentence that I know many of you will appreciate: *"My heart, which is so full to overflowing, has often been solaced and refreshed by music when sick and weary."*

Here's something else I wrote: *"I, Doctor Martin Luther, wish all lovers of the unshackled art of music, grace and peace from God the Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ! I truly desire that all Christians would love and regard as worthy the lovely gift of music, which is a precious, worthy and costly treasure given to mankind by God...A person who gives some thought and yet does not regard music as a marvelous creation of God, must be a clodhopper indeed and does not deserve to be called a human being; he should be permitted to hear nothing but the braying of donkeys [I changed that word for you] and the grunting of hogs."* I guess I've never had trouble saying what I think!

Take a listen to this closing song sung by a mother and her son. We're reminded that we can start over because of grace. When we fall, we can reach out and take the hand of Jesus. There's no guilt or shame or blame because of the greatness of God's grace. And if you need a reformation in your life, by all means ask Jesus to first give you rebirth and if you're already a believer, then ask Him to revive you by His grace.

Romans 6:1-7 The Freedom You've Always Wanted - 5/20/07

I came across an article this week called "[The Fruit of the Word](#)" that was unsettling and yet it resonated with me ([breakpoint.org](#)). Here are a few quotes:

The contemporary evangelical Church is the most Christian-educated generation of believers in all of Church history...Never before has a generation of believers had so many options and opportunities for studying and hearing the Word of God. Sermons, Sunday School classes, Bible study groups, TV and radio ministers, tapes and CDs, retreats, workshops and seminars abound week after week, month after month, year after year. [I would add that we also have a seemingly infinite number of resources available on the Internet as well]...You have a veritable monsoon of Christian teaching raining down on the evangelical community every day of the week...the field of the evangelical Church is sown and re-sown with the Word of God, and watered and re-watered with the rain of God's truth."

The article then makes this rather stunning conclusion:

The world complains over and over about our shallowness and hypocrisy...What's wrong? Why is the most Christian-educated generation in all of church history so devoid of the fruit we should reasonably expect to find?

George Barna has pointed out, in study after study, that the way Christians behave is not appreciably different from the way non-Christians live their lives ([www.barna.org](#)). On a pastoral level, I'm often discouraged when I see Christ-followers falter and fail or when I see church members chuck it all. Sometimes I wonder if what I do makes any difference at all in the disciple-making process. Maybe my sermons are too shallow, too deep, or they just don't matter at all. Maybe I'm not praying enough, which is certainly the case. On a more personal level, why don't I practice everything I preach?

G. K. Chesterton once said:

Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried." Warren Wiersbe notes that "too many Christians are 'betweeners,' living between Egypt and Canaan, saved but never satisfied; or they live between Good Friday and Easter, believing in the Cross but not entering into the power and glory of the Resurrection."

Maybe that's because we're still living in bondage to sin.

The habits and customs of the Eskimos of North Alaska have remained very much the same for 500 years. They have developed an ingenious way of catching the polar bear, which provides them with meat, clothing, fat for cooking, and tools from the bear's teeth and bones. However you don't just go out and catch a polar bear. Here's what they do. They first kill a small seal and drag the carcass across the snow leaving a trail of blood. They then take a double-edged knife and freeze the long handle about two foot deep into the snow leaving the double-edged blade protruding. They then place the carcass over the blade and wait patiently for the polar bear.

The polar bear smells the blood in the snow and follows the tracks to an easy meal. After saying grace he chows down on the seal. The Eskimos are smart because they know that if they use a small seal rather than a large seal, the bear will still be incredibly hungry even after eating the seal. He devours the little seal, cutting his tongue on the knife. The bear licks the knife some more, and then licks, and licks and licks some more. The more he licks, the more his tongue bleeds. And the more blood he tastes, the more he licks. Sadly, it's the taste of his own blood that kills him!

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the more we lick the sharpness of sin, the more blood we shed. And the more blood we shed, the more we want. It's like we're trapped...and we are. We've fallen and we can't get up on our own. If we don't break away from the bondage of sin it will destroy us.

One of the keys to communication is to know your audience. Let me just make sure I know who's here today. Can I see the hands of everyone who is a sinner? That's good. I feel at home with you. This is a church for sinners and we don't really have anything to offer you today unless you're a sinner.

In the first three chapters of the Book of Romans we learn that we are all sinners who have been separated from God. In chapters 4-5 we're introduced to the topic of justification. Those who put their faith and trust in Jesus have been declared righteous. Beginning in Romans 6, we'll see that we're more than just sinners; we're also saints. While justification takes care of the *penalty* of sin, sanctification addresses the *power* of sin. Using Lazarus as an illustration, S. Lewis Johnson says that justification brings us from the tomb while sanctification delivers us from the old "threads."

John 11:43-44: ***"When He had said this, Jesus called out in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, 'Take off the grave clothes and let him go.'"***

Ray Pritchard writes:

There is a sharp right turn between Romans 5 and Romans 6. Romans 5 explains how God declares people righteous. Romans 6 explains how God makes people righteous. Justification is that act whereby God declares you righteous in his eyes. Sanctification is that act whereby God makes you righteous. But those things are not the same...

Justification happens at the moment you trust Christ and is never repeated.

Sanctification happens moment-by-moment as you surrender your life to the Lord.

Justification is an event.

Sanctification is a process.

Justification happens once and only once.

Sanctification is gradual and continuous.

Justification cannot be repeated.

Sanctification must be repeated.

Justification is the work of a moment.

Sanctification is the work of a lifetime.

Justification gives you the merit of Christ.

Sanctification gives you the character of Christ.

Justification leads to sanctification. Those who are truly born again are led of the Spirit into a life of growing holiness...These two chapters are distinct yet joined by a natural progression of thought"

[\(Free at Last - sermon by Dr. Ray Pritchard\)](#)

During the summer months we're going to rehearse the transforming truths of Romans 6-8. These three chapters are designed to be read and understood as a unit and so I encourage you to read this section at least once a week for the entire summer. It's my prayer that when we're finished you'll not just endure your Christian life; you'll actually enjoy it. Instead of licking sin, you'll allow the Lord to lick the sin in your life so that you can move from defeat to deliverance.

Please follow along in your copy of the Scriptures as I read Romans 6:1-7:

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died

to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin--because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

As believers we have the freedom to not sin. Unfortunately, I think most believers feel stuck in their sins. Instead of living victoriously many are vanquished by besetting sins. Some of you have given up hope of ever changing and you feel bad about it. Others of you might feel like sin is no big deal since God forgives anyway. Many people today don't live like they should because they have a grossly misinformed view of God's grace. After all, if God forgives, why does it matter how one lives? W.H. Auden, one of the greatest literary figures of the 20th century boldly stated: *"I like committing [sins]. God likes forgiving them. Really the world is admirably arranged."* Friends, the gospel of grace, properly understood, leads not to licentiousness but to righteousness. Remember that Jesus fully and freely forgives but he also says in John 8:11: ***"Go now and leave your life of sin!"***

A Common Question

As Paul loves to do, he anticipates a question and addresses it before his critics can complain. He used a similar technique in Romans 3:5: ***"But if our righteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us?"*** In order to understand why he raises this issue, we need to go back to Romans 5:20: ***"...But where sin increased, grace increased all the more."*** If we get more grace when we sin, then why not just sin more? Look at Romans 6:1: ***"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?"*** The phrase ***"go on sinning"*** means to stay in sin. The word was used of one who remained in the same place for a long time and carried with it the idea of habitual persistence. The Phillips paraphrase says this: *"Shall we sin to our heart's content and see how far we can exploit the grace of God?"*

It would be helpful at this point to understand the word antinomianism. The phrase "anti" means against and "nomos" is the word for law. An antinomian is the person who says, *"I'm saved but I can sin any way I want. God will forgive so why does it matter how I live?"* I'm afraid that the American evangelical church is filled with antinomians today. I've heard people say, *"I know what God says but I just want to be happy."* Or, *"Everyone sins so why does it matter if I do this? God will forgive me anyway."* Friends, this is not biblical Christianity.

Justification was not intended as a license to sin, but as liberation from sin. Or to say it even stronger: *if you believe and behave like this you may not even be a believer.* Charles Spurgeon put it like this: *"An unchanged life is the mark of an unchanged heart, and an unchanged heart is a sign of an unregenerate life."* Donald Grey Barnhouse said: *"Holiness starts where justification finishes, and if holiness does not start, we have the right to be suspect that justification never started either."* We could add that salvation is more than a transaction; it is a transformation.

An Amazing Answer

In verse 2 we see Paul's highly emotional answer to his own question. You can hear his sense of horror and outrage when he bluntly responds: ***"By no means!"*** This phrase is used 14 times in Paul's writings and can be translated: *"May it never be! Perish the thought!"* He finds this idea deplorable and rejects it indignantly, using the strongest Greek idiom to communicate that this is unworthy of acceptance. It is inconceivable and inconsistent for a born again believer to persist in sinning just to get more grace.

After making this strong statement from his gut, it's as if Paul returns to logic in the second half of verse 2: ***"We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"*** Don't skim over the phrase ***"We died to sin."*** Notice that it is in the past tense. It's not something we're told to do now; it something that happened to us in the past. The picture is of finality because you and I share in Christ's death. The truth that we have died to sin is the foundation of this entire chapter and for the Christian life. One pastor put it this way: *"This is not a present tense—'We are dying to sin'—or a future tense—'We will die to sin'—or an imperative—'Die to sin!' Nor is it an exhortation—'You should die to sin.' This is a simple past tense—'You died to sin.' The simple truth is that if you are a believer, you have already died to sin. It's a past event, an accomplished fact. It means that you have been set free from the ruling power of sin in your life"* (www.keepbelieving.com).

It is not normal for a Christian to live in sin because we have died to it: ***"How can we live in it any longer?"*** That doesn't mean that we will be perfect this side of heaven but it does mean that we should experience power over habitual sin. As Christians we will sin, but sinning should be out of character for the Christian. We need to balance 1 John 1:8: ***"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us"*** with 1 John 3:9: ***"No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God."*** To be dead to sin means that it has

no influence over us because we are now identified with Christ. Notice how this idea is developed in the opening verses of Romans 6:

Ro 6:2: ***“We died to sin.”***

Ro 6:3: ***“Baptized into his death.”***

Ro 6:4: ***“Buried with him through baptism into death.”***

Ro 6:5: ***“United with him like this in his death.”***

Ro 6:6: ***“Our old self was crucified with him.”***

Ro 6:7: ***“Anyone who has died has been freed from sin.”***

Ro 6:11: ***“Count yourselves dead to sin.”***

Ro 6:13: ***“As those who have been brought from death to life.”***

We need to grasp this amazing truth because in a real sense when we put our faith and trust in Christ, at that precise moment we shared in His death and thus His mastery over sin. Check out these additional passages:

Colossians 3:3: ***“For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”***

Galatians 2:20: ***“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”***

Now, how do we do move this from propositional truth to personal application? Verses 3-7 tell us that we must know certain things, we must grow, and we must let it show.

1. Know that we are identified with Christ.

In Ro 6:3-4 Paul asks one last rhetorical question: ***“Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”*** Paul wants us to know about the importance of baptism. Baptism can be a controversial topic and I don’t want to spend a lot of time on the methods and the modes this morning. If you’d like to study more, see “Proclaiming God’s Purposes in Baptism” (www.pontiacbible.org/sermons/faith_factor.php?id=C0_108_49).

Bob Beasley, a pastor in Ontario, Canada told the following true story: “Our three-year-old daughter, Rena, sat with us during the baptismal service last Sunday night, which was a new experience for her. She exclaimed in surprise, *‘Why did he push that guy in the water? Why, Dad, why?’* My wife tried to explain briefly and quietly, but Rena just wouldn’t be satisfied. Later that night we tried to provide an answer that a child’s mind could comprehend. We talked about sin and told Rena that when people decide to live for Jesus and ‘do good’ they want everyone to know. We then explained that water symbolizes Jesus’ washing people from sin; when they come out ‘clean,’ they try to be ‘good.’ We quickly realized we’d have to work on our explanation a bit when she immediately responded, *‘Why didn’t the Pastor just spank him?’*” (Source: www.sermoncentral.com)

While baptism doesn’t change one’s behavior, it does give public testimony to the change that has taken place within. Let me just say that in the early church it was unthinkable for a Christian to not be baptized. In the Book of Acts, baptism followed so closely after belief that they were often considered part of one event. If you are a born-again believer and have not been baptized, it’s time to take the plunge. Let me make two additional points:

When you are converted, you are immediately spiritually “baptized” into Christ. We see this use of the word in 1 Corinthians 10:1-2: “For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” The Israelites were not literally baptized with water in the name of Moses but were identified and united with Moses in the sense that they belonged to him. In the same way, believers are united with Christ at conversion, because when Christ died, we died.

When you confess Christ in water baptism, you are symbolizing salvation. I believe that baptism by immersion most closely lines up with this passage for it graphically represents dying with Christ as we go into the water; being buried when we are under the water and rising from the dead as we come up out of the water. In addition, the Greek word for baptism means “to dip, immerse or overwhelm something.” Water baptism is a divine object lesson of what has taken place internally because you are saying, “I died with Jesus Christ, I was buried with Him and now I am raised with Christ to brand-new life, and it’s my intent to live my life under His leadership and for His glory from this point on.” In short, in your baptism you are preaching a sermon without using any words at all.

How important is your baptism? *It is your personal identification with the greatest act of human history--the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.* Baptism doesn't save you as Ephesians 2:8-9 makes very clear: **"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-not by works, so that no one can boast."** Your guilt before God is removed the moment you trust in Christ. *But baptism is your personal testimony to, and the inward assurance of, your passage from the old life to the new life.* In essence, believer's baptism is a funeral. It's an act of faith in which we testify, both to God and to the watching world, that the person we used to be is dead and buried, and that we've been raised to new life as 2 Corinthians 5:17 states: **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"**

2. Grow in our relationship with Christ.

We need to have the right information but we must also make sure that it leads to transformation. We must learn it and then we must live it. Truth must be apprehended and then appropriated. We see this in verses 5: **"If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection."** The phrase "united with him" literally means to "grow along with when planted together." It has the idea of being fused into one. We have been united in both His death and His resurrection, meaning that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to us. The old is gone, the body of sin is dead and we are no longer slaves to our passions. As a result we have been freed from sin because what happened to Christ is counted by God as happening to us.

Warren Wiersbe writes:

Our union with Christ is a living union, so we may bear fruit; a loving union, so that we may enjoy Him; and a lasting union, so that we need not be afraid.

I had a phone conversation with Tammy Hitch this week. After saying "hello" I asked her this question "What's the word?" She responded quickly, "Jesus is the Word." That's exactly right. Jesus is the Word. And she answered this way because she has a loving union with Christ and is growing in Him.

3. Show our freedom in Christ.

We must know certain things; we must grow and finally it must show. Take a look at Ro 6:6-7: **"For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin- because anyone who has died has been freed from sin."** Brothers and sisters in Christ, we no longer have to be slaves to sin! The New English Bible captures this well: *"We know that the man we once were was crucified with Christ."* The phrase **"done away with"** literally means "rendered powerless." The whole goal here is freedom from sin. Jesus said in John 8:36: **"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."**

We're going to develop the idea of freedom in greater detail in the weeks to come but let me just say that you don't have to sin! Augustine explained it this way:

Adam before the Fall...was able to sin.

Adam after the Fall was...not able not to sin.

Believers in Christ are...able not to sin.

In heaven we will be...not able to sin.

The key to all of this is that born-again believers have been united with Christ.

Hitting a Home Run

Recently, at a fund-raising banquet for a school for children with special needs, one of the fathers got up and told a story about his son named Shéa. He described how he and his son had been walking through the neighborhood of Brooklyn a week before, and they stopped to watch a group of boys playing baseball. Shéa does not communicate well, but he let his father know in his own way that he so wanted to play baseball with these boys.

The father thinks that there's no chance of this happening but he goes up to the pitcher and explains the situation. The pitcher makes an executive decision and says, *"You know, it's the eighth inning. We're down by six. What have we got to lose? Come on in, we'll let you bat in the bottom of the ninth."* Shéa is ecstatic.

But when the ninth inning comes things have turned around. Now they're down only by three runs and the bases are loaded. If they get a home run, they'll win the game. And now it's Shéa's turn to bat. The father's heart begins to beat rapidly as he wonders if they'll keep their promise to Shéa and let him bat. The team realizes their predicament so they have a little huddle. Then, to the

father's amazement, they say to Shéa, *"Come on. You're up to bat."* And Shéa is absolutely delighted. He clutches the bat at a strange angle and holds it tightly.

Then the pitcher from the opposite team does an amazing thing. He takes several steps forward and lobs an easy one right over the plate. Shéa swings wildly and misses widely. Then a player from Shéa's team comes up behind him and gently wraps his arms around him. Together, they hold the bat. The pitcher lobs another one, and they bunt it, and the ball just rolls to the feet of the pitcher.

It's an easy out, but everybody's screaming: *"Run to first. Run to first, Shéa!"* And the pitcher throws it far and wide. Shéa makes first, and they say, *"Run to second, Shéa! Run to second!"* The guy out in the field is planning to whip it into second, but then realizes what is going on and throws it far and wide. Everyone starts yelling, *"Run to third! Run to third!"* All the other players have crossed home plate and they start yelling, *"Run home, Shéa! Take it home!"* And just as he hits home plate the ball zings in. A loud uproar from both teams erupts; they put Shéa on their shoulders and parade him as a hero. (Source: "Preaching Today," Issue #285).

Friends, because of our sins we have all struck out spiritually. But Jesus has wrapped His arms around us so that what He has experienced we have too. He's hit it out of the park in order to bring us safely home. In the meantime we enjoy the victory that He has won. I close with three action steps.

1. Believe.

2. Be baptized.

3. Behave as a Christian.

**Know...Grow... Show...
That's fruit that anyone can find.**