

Our Past, Our Future

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Date: 14 January 2018

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[0 : 00] Well today we are going to continue our study on Romans and we have come as we said to chapter 5 verses 6 to 11.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die. But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since therefore we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by his life. More than that we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we now have now received reconciliation.

Now as we have been saying throughout our study, Paul's great theme in Romans is the Gospel. He is talking about the good news of Jesus and he is explaining how that wonderful news works.

[1 : 08] And step by step since chapter 1 he has been building up a logical and coherent argument in order to explain the nature of the Gospel. And we have come to the middle of chapter 5 but in order to summarise what Paul has said, we can highlight three main sections or three main headings that Paul has covered up to this point in Romans.

First of all, he's explained our situation before conversion. He said that we were unrighteous, we were under the law, we were liable to judgement, we are sinners falling short of the glory of God and therefore we are accountable to him as chapter 3 says, no one is righteous, no not one. He's spoken about before conversion. He's then spoken about what happens at conversion. By faith in Jesus Christ we are justified, that means to be declared righteous and that is possible because Jesus' death has functioned as a propitiation, that is an atoning sacrifice turning away the wrath of God.

So instead of God's wrath coming down upon us it's been turned away, turned onto Jesus Christ in our place and a great exchange has taken place.

Our sin placed on Christ, Christ's sin counted, Christ's righteousness counted to us and so at that moment of conversion all these wonderful things are applied to us so that our status is transformed instead of being condemned we're justified all because Jesus was condemned in our place.

[2 : 51] So Paul has spoken about what happens at conversion and then last week we saw that Paul explains what happens after our conversion. We have peace with God, we have access to God, we have hope and we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts and pouring God's love into us.

As we said last week, justification is not the conclusion of the Gospel, it is only the start because those who are justified now receive an abundance of extraordinary blessings from God.

So Paul has taken us on a journey from before conversion then he explains the situation at conversion and then he describes our wonderful privileges after conversion.

But we're only in chapter 5, Paul has got a lot more that he wants to tell us and that's what we're going to look at from verse 6 to 11 and we're going to look at these verses just under two simple headings.

Paul is telling us something about our past and he's telling us something about our future, past and future.

[4 : 09] So in verses 6 to 8 Paul starts talking about our past. Remember in verses 1 to 5 he had described some of the wonderful blessings that we have as Christians.

So in verses 1 to 5 he's saying this is what we now are but then in verses 6 to 8 he goes back into the past and he talks about what we were and as he does so Paul is giving us an answer to a vital

question.

When did God start loving us? So we're going to get a diagram, when did God start loving us?

Which box is it?

Well it might be easy to think that God loves us after conversion, that would make sense wouldn't it? Because now we have peace with God, now we are God's friends, now we have access to Him and He's given us these wonderful promises that give us hope and even God himself has come to dwell in our hearts by His Spirit.

That's one of the astounding privileges of being a Christian, you are a beloved child of God who is so dearly treasured and loved by their Father.

[5 : 26] It would make sense to say well God starts loving us after we're converted because that's when everything is put right but that is not what Paul says, that's not when God starts loving us.

So we go back a step, at conversion maybe that's the moment when God loves us because there when we trust in Jesus we are united to Him, united to His death on the cross and there we see that God has made such wonderful provision for us.

There all that Christ has done is applied to us and by trusting in Jesus our faith is simply showing that we depend on God and everything that He's done.

We are relying on Him, relying on His love, relying on the provision that He has made for us. Easy to think that would be when God starts loving us but no, that's not what Paul says because the great point that Paul is making in these verses is that God's love for us does not begin after conversion, it doesn't begin at conversion, God loves us long before we ever come to faith and that's telling us that the great foundation of the Gospel from beginning to end is the love of God and this is a really, really important thing to grasp and it's vital that we recognise what Paul is teaching because it is so easy to think that God loves us because of the cross.

So if you think about it, because of the cross God can now love us because if you think about it, on the cross our sin is covered, on the cross our debt is paid, on the cross reconciliation is made and therefore because of the cross God can stop hating us and start loving us because everything about us has been changed.

[7 : 36] That makes sense doesn't it? But it's not what the Bible says. The truth is not that Jesus died on the cross and as a result of that God loves us, the truth is that God loves us and as a result of that love Jesus had to go to the cross and die and that's what Paul is highlighting here before our conversion.

That's when God loves us and he explains that we have done nothing to earn that love and he describes a pre-conversion state using three key terms.

He says before we are saved we were weak, we were ungodly and we were sinners. And so here he's using very, very strong language to describe our pre-conversion state.

He's not saying before you were converted you weren't that bad so God loved you. He says before you were converted you were in a desperate state. That word weak conveys the idea of being sick, of being feeble, of being powerless.

So we are weak, feeble, ill in terms of our resources. We are powerless in terms of our ability. We're sick in terms of our condition.

[9 : 16] We are in a helpless and destitute state. We are ungodly. That basically means to live your life with no regard for God. So it's not just saying that you're not like God.

It's saying that you've got no regard for God. You're living without any reverence, any fear, any concern to God for God. So not only are we weak before God, we're totally uninterested in him. That's why so many people go through their lives with hardly any regard for God in his ways. No time towards him. Quite happy to indulge in a godless life.

So we're weak, we're ungodly. We are sinners. Not only do we have a weakness in our condition, not only do we live our lives forgetting about God, we actually spend our time in open, active rebellion against him.

God has his standards of righteousness, but we don't want to conform. We miss the mark, we do our own thing, and we do what is right in our own eyes.

[10 : 25] So Paul says we're weak, we're ungodly, we're sinners. Is he right? Is what Paul is saying true?

Well if you look at the world around you, what does the evidence say? Does the evidence of the world in 2018 back up what Paul said almost 2,000 years ago?

Well, in terms of weakness, has the human race ever conquered the power of sin? No it hasn't. Because we only have to look around to see that people's lives are wrecked by addiction. Corruption is pervasive across all sorts of areas of the world from the top to the bottom of society and people are still horrible to each other. Even today, people are horrible to each other. There's this sickness and weakness within people. In terms of ungodliness, again you only have to look at Scotland and Britain today to see that people live their lives without a regard for God.

[11 : 35] People don't have a reverence towards him. And in terms of sinners, well I've often said the doctrine of sin is the easiest doctrine in the Bible to prove.

Because we only have to look around us, we only have to look within us and we can see it. And the key point is that all of these things wreck our lives. Our weakness means that we are prone to hurt other people and we are prone to be hurt by them ourselves. Our ungodliness means that people do what's right in their own eyes and people ultimately tend to just be selfish and do what benefits themselves. And our sin means that instead of following God's perfect ways, we rebel against him and we end up doing all sorts of awful things to one another. All of these things, our weakness, our ungodliness, our sinfulness, it wrecks our lives and it wrecks the world. But all of these things make the human race very unlovable. Our weakness makes us unattractive.

[12 : 45] Our ungodliness makes us incompatible with God. Our sin makes us enemies of God. And in the midst of all that mess, what does God think of you? He loves you. And that is unbelievable. I shouldn't say it's unbelievable. It is believable but it's astonishing in the midst of that wreckage.

God loves you. That's what Paul is saying. And so even though sin has caused havoc in our lives and in the world around us, even though sin has given rise to countless reasons why we are unlovable and even though sin has wrecked our relationship with God, even though sin is incredibly powerful, sin is totally impotent in terms of quenching God's love for you. Sin is powerless in quenching and distinguishing God's love for you. That's why it's when we're still weak.

[14 : 11] That's why it's when we were ungodly. That's why when we were still sinners, God loved us. And he showed that love by sending his son to die for us.

And that's why the cross is not the cause of God's love. The cross is the proof of God's love. That's what Paul says, God shows his love for us. That word shows can also be translated Demonstrates.

It conveys the idea of making something known by action. It's something that serves as proof. Literally the word means to stand beside.

So in other words, if we ask the question, where does God stand in terms of his love for you? The answer is that he stands at the cross and he says, this is the proof that I love you.

[15 : 21] The cross demonstrates and proves the reality of God's love for you. God doesn't just say he loves you. He proves it by action.

So does the proof of God's love for you lie in your feelings? No. Does the proof of God's love for you lie in your qualities?

No. Does the proof of God's love lie in your actions? No. The proof of God's love lies in the greatest act of love that the world has ever known.

The proof of God's love is in the cross. So where does God stand in terms of his love for you? He stands at the cross.

But the vital question is this. Where do you stand in terms of your love for him?

[16 : 27] And we must recognise the fact that if God is standing by the cross in terms of his demonstration of love towards us, then if you want to love God and if you want to have a relationship with him, where do you go to meet him?

He's standing at the cross. So it's the cross that you need to go to. That's the only place where we can meet him.

And that's why our salvation rests on the finished work of Christ on the cross. That's the place where God is showing his love for you. That's the place where God is standing waiting for you. And that's the place by faith where we all need to go. That's why you can't get to God if you bypass the cross. You can't.

Because he's waiting there for you. He's proving his love for you. He's demonstrating it. He's saying, I am here waiting for you.

[17 : 29] And we want to just go to the cross. And by that I simply mean bowing our heads before our Savior Jesus Christ and saying, Lord save me.

And aware of the fact that it is only through the cross that we can be saved. So the fact that you are weak, the fact that you are ungodly, the fact that you are a sinner does not for one second mean that you can't be saved by the cross because it's while we were weak and it's for the ungodly and it's while we were still sinners that Christ came and died for us.

And all of that is because of the astounding depth of the fact that God loves you.

Because in the eyes of the world, hardly anyone is worth dying for. That's why Paul says one will scarcely die for a righteous person, but perhaps for a good person one would even dare to die. But in terms of the world, dying for somebody doesn't happen much. People aren't really worth dying for.

[18 : 41] But in God's eyes, in God's eyes you are so precious, so valuable, so loved that God came to die for you.

So Paul is telling us something about our past. We were weak, ungodly and sinful and in so many ways we still are, but despite that we are loved by our amazing God.

But in verses 9 and 10, Paul starts then to talk about our future. Now this is quite interesting because when we talk about becoming a Christian, we will often say, I have been saved, won't we? That's what we say. I say, I was saved 10 years ago, or I was saved through so-and-so's preaching, or I was saved as a student, or I was saved in my 50s, or I was saved last year.

As Christians, we often say, I was saved. But as a Christian, do you ever say or think, I will be saved?

[20 : 01] I don't think I've ever heard anyone say that. I don't think I've ever said it myself. I'm a Christian and I will be saved. We don't tend to say that, but if we look at verses 9 and 10, we'll see that that's exactly what Paul says.

Since therefore we've now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life?

Paul is saying that as Christians, we shall be saved. What does he mean? What's he talking about? Well, Paul is talking about the wonderful fact that although our salvation brings many blessings now, there are also future blessings that are still to be realised.

We often call that the already not yet balanced in the New Testament's teaching. So there's an aspect of our salvation whereby we are already saved. We have peace with God, access to God and the Holy Spirit dwells within us.

But at another level, there is a not yet balanced aspect to our salvation. And that's why we have hope for the future and we look ahead. And so Paul is talking about this not yet aspect.

[21 : 20] He's saying that we will be saved. And he highlights two things in particular. First he says, we shall be saved from the wrath of God.

Now, remember, back in chapter one, Paul has presented a very clear argument emphasising the fact that our sin and our unrighteousness provokes the wrath of God.

God is fair, God is righteous. If we're going to provoke him, then he will be provoked. And Paul says in explaining that, that there is an already and a not yet aspect to God's wrath.

Already God has given us up to the lusts of our hearts, to dishonourable passions and to a debased mind. The Bible makes it clear that God judges humanity now by allowing us to do our own thing. It's a very solemn reminder that if we keep pushing God away, ultimately God will let us go our own way. And the consequences of that are always devastating.

[22 : 27] That's one way in which we are judged. God lets us push him away if we keep on doing it. So there's an already aspect to God's wrath. There is also a not yet element to God's wrath.

That's because in the future there will be a day of judgement. Because of your heart and your parent heart, you're storing up wrath for yourselves on that day of wrath when God's righteous judgement will be revealed.

He'll render each one according to his works. To those who by patience and well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

Now this is something that we must recognise. We are accountable to God. We will be judged fairly. And if our works are sinful, then we are made liable to God's wrath.

And in terms of the future, that of course is talking about hell. Now it's interesting to note that Paul doesn't actually mention hell in this chapter.

[23 : 43] In fact, do you know how many times the word hell appears in Paul's letters in the New Testament? It's a very interesting question. How many times does Paul use the word hell?

Zero. He doesn't mention it. The word. And the New Testament doesn't mention it very often and preaching should reflect that biblical proportion.

But the fact that he doesn't use the word hell does not mean that we can ignore it. And the fact that Paul doesn't mention it doesn't mean that he didn't believe in it.

And here he is reminding us of the fact that sin does not just wreck our lives now. Sin wrecks our eternity.

And the reality of hell is the most horrendous thing that we can think about. And all the awfulness of life on earth is reminding us of the awfulness of our lost eternity.

[24 : 50] But the amazing truth of the gospel is that if you trust in Jesus Christ, you will be saved from all of that. God's desire is that no one should perish.

God's promise is that whoever calls in the name of the Lord shall be saved. That means that if you put your trust in Jesus, the day of judgment will not be a day when you're condemned.

It will be a day when you will be saved. So make no mistake. Hell is a reality. But thanks be to God, it is not an inevitability.

God is calling you to repentance. And he has provided a way of salvation. Paul is saying we will be saved from the wrath of God. He also says that we will be saved by his life.

Now this is very interesting again. We've said that there's an already not yet aspect to God's salvation. So we receive salvation in a sense already, but there's a not yet element to it as well.

[25 : 54] Alongside that, there is what we call a from to element of our salvation. So we are saved from something awful. We are rescued from condemnation and wrath.

But we are also brought into something amazing. We're given eternal life through Jesus Christ. And here Paul reminds us that salvation is not just about being united to Christ in his death.

We're also united to Christ in his resurrection. He mentioned that in the next chapter. He says we have been united to Jesus in a death like his.

So think of Jesus on the cross. Think of his death by faith. We are united to that death. But we shall certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. So not just are we united to his death whereby his penalty is the way whereby our penalty is paid by him.

We are also united to him in his resurrection so that the resurrection life that we see in Jesus Christ will be given to you and it will never ever ever be taken away.

[27 : 01] Not only do we benefit from the cross, we benefit from the resurrection. He is reminding us that God's promise to you is eternal life.

And he is reminding us here that the fullness of that reality is going to come in the future. And though all this makes perfect sense in terms of our own experience because right now our bodies are still subject to death.

In fact, Paul calls his own body a body of death in chapter seven and we experience that every day we get older. Every day our bodies get frailer, weaker and more painful.

And as we suffer more, as our bodies deteriorate, we can feel incredibly vulnerable and more and more of the wear of the fact that we will one day face death ourselves.

But the amazing news of the Gospel is that we are not just united to Jesus's death, we are also united to his resurrection. So just as he was raised to life, so too we shall be saved by his life.

[28 : 15] That's why Paul can say in 1 Corinthians, this perishable body must put on the imperishable and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory.

Oh death, where is your sting? Oh death, where is your victory? The sting or death is sin. The power of sin is the law, but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ.

Our bodies will be transformed to be made like his body. So instead of pain and suffering and deterioration and sorrow and hurt and struggle, what will it be like for us in the new creation?

What will it be like for you? Revelation tells us there will be no more crying or pain or mourning.

The former things will pass away and God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. Our bodies are a time bomb that's ticking away and we are powerless in doing anything about the fact that death has a power over us.

[29 : 32] We are absolutely feeble, weak, powerless, but God isn't. He has broken the power of death so that for all of us who trust in Jesus, whether you're a Christian or whether you become one which you can, you will be saved from the consequences of death.

You will be saved because of the resurrection life of Jesus. So as a Christian, you will be saved and you can say, I will be saved, not just I was saved, but I will be saved.

And if you become a Christian, which you can and I so want you to, if you just become a Christian, you can say, I am saved and you can say, I will be saved.

And all of this is reminding us that without Christ, the worst is yet to come. But with Christ, the best is yet to come.

And God has an abundance of blessings that he wants to pour out upon us. And Paul in these verses is emphasising how confident we should be as Christians.

[30 : 51] Now there's something that we, the Osoks, are not good at, confidence. But Paul is saying that we can be confident in all that God has promised.

And he uses a particular form of argument to highlight this. In verses 9 and 10, he uses what's called an a fortiori argument. Now don't worry if you've never heard of that, don't worry at all. It basically means a how much more argument. So look at what Paul has said. If you've been justified, how much more are you going to be saved and safe and secure on the day of judgment? And if you've been reconciled by God through the cross and that past event, how much more are you going to be saved by his life and enjoy all the fullness of God's promises in the new creation? We should be so confident because basically Paul is saying if he's made you your friend now while you're an enemy, and if he's justified you while you were guilty, he's done the hard bit.

[32 : 01] And so how much more now can you be sure that you will be saved and that God will pour out his blessings upon you? You can be so confident that God will look after you and that you will be safe with him.

And it's a great reminder that the Gospel does not come with conditions. The Gospel does not come with conditions that say you do this, you do that, you do this, you do that.

The Gospel does not come with conditions. The Gospel comes with guarantees. When God saves anyone, he does it with an eternal guarantee.

So if you put your trust in Jesus, then your justification is guaranteed. Reconciliation is guaranteed. Peace with God is guaranteed.

Access to God is guaranteed. Salvation from wrath is guaranteed. Our life is guaranteed and perhaps most amazing of all, the love of God for you is guaranteed.

[33 : 20] And all of that, if we could just maybe see it clearly, all of that should lead to one result, abounding joy in God.

And isn't that what Paul says? More than that, we rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we've now received reconciliation, reminding us that as Christians, we should be the most positive, the most happy, the most excited, the most enthusiastic, the most joyful people on the planet because we have got such good news and so many reasons to rejoice.

And I just want to finish by looking at that word rejoice because it's a really interesting word.

Literally, that word means to boast.

So you go back to Romans 22, 23, it says, you who boast in the law dishonour God by breaking the law, exactly the same word in those two verses. You can see them there.

So Paul is using a word that means boast when he's talking about rejoicing in God. What does he mean? Well, if you think about it, what is boasting?

[34 : 42] Well I think that to boast is to talk about something that we think is amazing, isn't it? Now, all too often we make that about ourselves, so we'll talk about our possessions, our achievements, our knowledge and the root of that lies in this strange combination of pride and insecurity that lies in all of us because we have a high view of ourselves and yet at the same time we want the approval of others to make us really believe it.

That's the kind of boasting you get in the world. It's not a good thing. It's unhealthy. It's deluded and it hurts ourselves and it hurts others. That's not what we mean by boasting but that basic principle still applies because if boasting means to talk about something that we think is amazing, then we

most definitely have something amazing to talk about.

We definitely have reason to boast because the Gospel is such good news and so we rejoice and boast in God, not in an arrogant way because if we understand the Gospel, if it tells us anything it tells us how much we have failed and how much we have got nothing to boast about but in the Gospel we have got God the Father demonstrating His love for us.

We have got the Son willing to die for us and we have got the Holy Spirit pouring His love into our hearts. That is amazing.

That's what God wants to do for you. That's what God wants for you. It is the greatest news ever and we want to spend our lives talking about just how amazing the good news of Jesus Christ really is.

[36 : 36] We have so much to rejoice in our God. So if you look back into the past, you'll discover that God loves you.

If you think about the future, you will see that He is promising to save you. All He asks is that you trust Him.

Amen. Let's pray. Our God and our Father, we thank you so much for the Gospel, for the fact that we don't earn your love because we can't.

But yet while we were weak, while we were ungodly, while we were still sinners, you have shown us your love in sending your Son to die for us. We thank you for all that you've done for us and for all of that means and we pray, oh God, that you would just give us hearts that understand and help us, Lord, to always remember all that you've promised for us in the future.

Help us, Lord, to see the fullness of the blessings that you've promised your people as they are revealed in Scripture. But help us also to recognise the peril that we are in if we push you away.

[38 : 03] So please, draw us to yourselves and open our hearts and our minds. In Jesus' name, amen.