

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Great Chapters of the Bible: Romans 5

Have you ever been in the public gallery at your local law courts or watched a court scene on television? If so, you'll have seen the defendant with his counsel, the prosecutor and, over all these, the judge himself. Perhaps you heard the verdict brought in at the end. This letter of the Apostle Paul to the Romans has been likened to a courtroom drama. Our "great Bible chapter", Romans 5, is about the outcome of this court case. It begins in verse 1, "Therefore since we have been justified through faith". This word "Therefore" is used by Paul at various points throughout the teaching of Romans to state a conclusion (see for example 3:20 and 28; 8:1 and 12:1). He uses it here in chapter 5 to start his legal summary: that is why I liken it to a judge summing up. Let us briefly review what has happened so far in this "court".

After Paul presents the case against all of the different types of mankind in the opening chapters, the court is silenced by the verdict given in chapter 3:19 and 23 the whole world held accountable to God... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God". But immediately the case takes a dramatic turn as the words 'But now' of 3:21 are heard. Not only has the Judge passed the sentence, but He has also provided the full payment! "...the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." (3:24). A person who believes Jesus "was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (as 4:25 states) is justified by God (that is, free from any charge or condemnation regarding his sins). He is also made righteous by the same holy God, who is also right in doing this as we find in 3:26. The basis of this justification is made clear in 3:24-26, and the way in which it is obtained (that is by faith) is skilfully argued "in court" by the lawyer Paul from verse 7 of that chapter and through all of chapter 4.

The court closes in chapter 5 with a summary of the historical events that led up to the case and with the salient facts of the case. As to the results, the predominant thought in this chapter is all that we as Christian believers receive "through" or "by" the Lord Jesus Christ: these great blessings include peace, joy, and hope - things which everyone in the world would like to possess.

Let us divide chapter 5 into its 2 parts: verse 1-11 and then verses 12-21. In the section verses 1-11 notice how the past, the present, and the future results of the Gospel for the Christian believer are reviewed.

The Past is covered in verses 6-10. In verse 6 we discover we were powerless - without any strength to help ourselves; and also we were ungodly - without any desire either to live for God or to ask for His help. In verse 8 we find we were sinners - without any relationship with a holy God - but worst of all verse 10 states we were enemies of God, actively rebellious against Him!

Now it is in this awful state that we discover for the first time in Romans the real secret of the Gospel: not only is God holy but He is also love. He offers His own love to us in our lost condition, holding it out, having proved it in the death of His only Son. To quote verse 8: "God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us". Finally, to complete our look at verse 10, we have been reconciled to God - that is, brought back from the distance of enmity and death. The Lord Jesus illustrates this truth in Luke 15 with the parable of the prodigal son.

That was the Christian's past but at the present time he possesses wonderful spiritual blessings: verse 1 says "we have peace with God" - the God who clearly has revealed His wrath against sinners (see 1:18). No outstanding issues remain! Verse 2 says that we have "access"; the continuous ability to avail ourselves of God's favour - there are no barriers now! Our position is one of grace, His unmerited favour. Verse 5 tells us that we know God's love by the gift of His Holy Spirit, who was given to us when we believed (see Ephesians 1:13). This gift is not just a taste but a "deluge" flooding our hearts so that we appreciate all He has done, all that He is doing and all that He will do for us. 8:32 triumphantly asks the question 'He Who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all - how will He not also, alone with Him, graciously give us all things?' Verse 14 tells us we are being saved at the present time by the endless life of His Son - that is the priestly intercession of Christ at God's right hand in heaven. Again we can refer to another victorious statement in chapter 8 for this; it's verse 34. We are not left to cope with the difficulties of living in this sinful world where the Christian suffers. He supports us so that we "rejoice in our sufferings" (verse 3). This enables us to persevere, develop character, and have hope. Best of all we have the present enjoyment of God as verse 11 states. The reconciliation provided for us enables us to worship God in a living and true way. The words of the hymn by W Yerbury give some idea as to the meaning of the expression "We also rejoice in God" in verse 11:

*We joy in our God, and we sing of that love
So sovereign and free, which did His heart move,
When lost our condition, all ruined, undone,
He saw with compassion, and spared not His Son.*

*His Son, His delight, His loved One He gave
The wrath to endure, by suffering to save;
Sure love so amazing, unmeasured, untold,
Since Him it hath given, no good will withhold.*

*We praise then our God; how rich is His Grace!
We were far from Him once, estranged from His face.
By blood we are purchased, are cleansed and made nigh,
And blessed in His presence, in Jesus on high.*

The Past, the Present, but what about the Christian's Future? Well this is not just a great escape, although verse 9 verifies "We shall be saved from God's wrath through Him"! We find in verse 2 a future aspect of the Christian's "rejoicing". It has to do with "the hope of the glory of God". This is the part that the Christian has in the coming kingdom of his Lord, when "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea." (Habakkuk 2:14). Exceeding this millennial glory there is then the coming eternal glory of heaven. Listen to these words from Ephesians: "...that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus" (2:7); "to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen." (3:21).

We now come to our second section of Romans 5, verses 12-21. At verse 12 Paul changes to focus on the "one Man," Jesus Christ. In these verses he contrasts the legacy believers receive from Him, with that legacy the race of mankind has inherited from Adam. He does this in a comprehensive way, covering every angle of legal argument. This is why the language is so precise, although it appears repetitious and sometimes complicated. To simplify it we will first take a general overview of the teaching, and then make some comments on the verses, which will be read at the appropriate point.

In general then we have the character and effects of the acts of these two contrasting "Heads" – Adam and Christ. First of all there was Adam, the first human being, from whom we all originate. He committed one trespass when he broke the divine command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as stated in Genesis 3: 17. This deliberate offence constituted all mankind sinners and brought in the terrible reign of sin and death. We know from history that this is true, so very true!

On the other hand there is, by contrast, Jesus Christ (the Second Man, the Last Adam). By His one act of righteousness when He "became obedient to death - even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:8). He makes believers righteous in life. So now in the Gospel era it is grace which reigns supreme over sin and death! (Here the word "reign" carries the idea of being a "king" in victory, with overall power and with great glory). One other general point: there is a bracket after verse 12, which closes at the end of verse 17. Verses 18-21 are a direct conclusion of the statement made in verse 12.

Now we can read and make some comments on these verses. First of all verse 12: "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." As a father, not only do I recognise my bad points coming out in my children, I also notice some of my own father's in me! Here then the root cause of the problem - sin and death in the world - is plainly stated and traced back to the father (or head) of the human race, Adam.

Now verses 13 and 14 "for before the law was given sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. 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." From these two verses we learn that men also died before the law was given to Moses, proving them to be sinners even though they did not trespass like Adam. That is, sin was not formally imputed to them. Just at the end of verse 14, Adam is seen as a picture of the racial Head, Christ. The first sentence of verse 15: "But the gift is not like the trespass" is a title over the section verses 15 – 19. From 6:23 we learn that "the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." As we read the rest of verse 15: "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!" it shows how much better this gift is than all that we have derived from Adam. A sense of the abundance of the Grace of God reaches to us.

Verse 16 reads: "Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: the judgement followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification". In other words, God's gift brought in the only effective way of putting things right after the one sin of Adam had introduced an ongoing state of universal condemnation.

Next is verse 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.' Here we learn that whereas the outcome of Adam's act was that none escaped the terror of the king 'Death', by contrast, those who accept the gift they reign in life like kings!

Now verse 18: "Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation, for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men." The consequences of the actions of Adam and of Christ are described now in their bearing towards all men. Adam's sin leaves every human being condemned - no one is excluded. Christ's action reaches out to all so that God "may have mercy on them all" (11:32).

Verse 19 says "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous." Although Adam's disobedience caused all mankind to be sinners, we see that Christ's obedience causes all believers to be right with God.

Our chapter concludes with verses 20 and 21, which read, "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." When the Law was brought in it made matters worse because, by breaking these commandments, the whole of mankind was shown to be no different from Adam. His trespass was repeatedly repeated! The more stated rules there were, the more they were broken. Don't we know this is true? If we see a boundary line we always want to step over it! But grace superabounds in this situation. Asserting its royal power, it secures the victory over sin and death and it can rightly bring eternal life, which is available through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, as we end our talk, we notice that Paul has now introduced the concept of sin - the tree that produces the fruit "sins". Note too that it pays wages: death! Having done this, he is now able to expand the teaching of the Gospel in the next section of Romans (chapters 6-8) to show the freedom that the believer gains from sin's controlling power and from the practice of it.

Let us pray: "God our Father, we thank You that this passage of Your word teaches us so much about the Gospel and its effects. Help us to understand more and more the grace that has reached us. Enable us to be effective witnesses of it! Now we worship You for the gift of Your only Son and for everything You have given us in HIM. through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

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