Romans 5 | JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

Synopsis
Romans 5 is the blessed contrast of Romans 1-3. In Romans 3 we learn that there is a problem; in Romans 5 we find the answer to that problem. The problem is that we are separated from God. Utterly hopeless and depraved. But God intervened. Like Abraham before us (as Paul lays out in chapter 4), we can be reconciled to God through faith.

There are really two conversations going on in Romans 5. In Romans 5:1-11, we learn about how we are justified before God and learn about salvation. There is also a quick discussion about what life with Christ looks like when we are made right with God, specifically in regards to suffering. Romans 5:12-21 is a historical discussion of sin and grace from the standpoint of two men: Jesus and Adam. Paul presents Jesus as a new Adam, who forgives us our sin inherited from Adam.

The reading is Romans 5. The focus passage is either Romans 5:1-11 or Romans 5:12-21.

The win this week: Having a meaningful discussion on both passages might be difficult, so start with one of these sections and go from there. With either passage, remember that we’re now talking about the solution to the problem of humanity—Christ has died for us so that we might have life.

Justified through faith

Read Romans 5:1-11

Commentary
In the first half of the 1500’s, the protestant reformation sparked one of the greatest religious revivals ever. In it, Martin Luther had radical ideas about Christianity. Though he had been taught otherwise all of his life, based on passages like this and specifically Romans 1:17, he began to formulate the doctrine of “justification by faith.” Of course, the idea of “justification by faith” not Luther’s at all, and Paul expounds on it in numerous places including this
passage. Sticking to Scripture would be the rallying cry for the reformers, and they realized the importance of faith.

Like Abraham before us, we are made right before God through our faith in Christ. Faith implies a wholehearted trust, not just an intellectual assent to this-or-that doctrine. You might have heard the word justification before. It's an enormously important concept for salvation. It sounds intimidating, but it's really the act of pardoning or forgiving that God does on our behalf; it is because of the work of Jesus. Note that this is not an actual change, but a relative change. It is a change in relationship between us and God, it doesn’t change us. We don’t instantly become righteous, but we are declared righteous. As v. 1 says, it gives us peace with God. And it's all because of God's grace.

It’s at this point where we also experience regeneration. This is an actual change as opposed to a relative change. We are becoming righteous. Both of these, though different in effect, happen simultaneously. It is fully because of the grace of God. Not because of our works, but fully because of the work of Christ. Romans 5:8 sums it up well: “God demonstrates his love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Regeneration is the process that helps us to live out the new life we have found in Christ.

 Romans 5:10 goes so far as to call us enemies of God. You certainly get this sense from Romans 5:1-11. Certainly, the sin of Adam has put enmity between us and God. The relationship has been tarnished. But because of Christ’s death, we are saved, and how much more will we be saved through his life (v. 10)! Christ becomes the instrument by which our relationship with God is restored.

 In Romans 5:3-5, Paul takes a minute to discuss suffering. Many have even rejected God because what is called the “Problem of Evil.” If God is good and powerful, the argument goes, why is there so much suffering in the world? Paul flips that on its head saying we should boast in our suffering. Why? We know that suffering produces perseverance, and perseverance produces character, which produces hope. And hope points us to God.

 Most people view suffering as pointless, meaningless, and simply evil. Certainly, some forms of suffering might be that. But we shouldn’t discount suffering so quickly. If we allow God to shape us through suffering, we can come out looking more like Jesus. This is similar to a philosophical argument against the problem of evil called the “Soul-Making theodicy.” It has many forms, including some from Irenaeus, C. S. Lewis, and John Hick. Basically, it goes like this: some forms of suffering put us in situations and present us with choices that we normally wouldn’t find ourselves in, and ultimately shape or make our character (a la Romans 5:4) in a unique way. In other words, God wants to use your suffering to make something good and beautiful.

❓ Questions
Paul says to “boast in the hope of the glory of God.” What do you think he means by this?

Why could suffering be a good thing for Paul? Does he say it’s always a good thing?

V. 9 says we have to be saved from God’s wrath. Why do we have to be saved from God’s wrath?

What in the world is Paul talking about in v. 7?

**Read Romans 5:12-21**

**Commentary**

Just to quickly reiterate, it’s probably not a great idea to tackle both of these passages together. You’ll probably want to pick one and mine the gold that’s there because there’s a lot in both sections. This passage is very often written about, and a fun passage to study.

Romans 5:12-21 and Paul’s Adam-Christ contrast is part of a larger argument concerning Abraham, whom we read about in chapter 4. The purpose of this letter, as we have seen, is to deal with the problem created by Adam. This is God’s redemptive purpose in the world. This passage speaks deeply into the human predicament while adding a solution to the problem we find ourselves in.

In Romans 5:12, Paul begins this section by pointing out that sin entered the world through one man, and death comes with sin. This is original sin. The image of God in man has been marred and tarnished. It’s unlikely that we’ll ever fully grasp, on this side of death, the cosmic and anthropological effects of human sin. But Paul is quick to indict us as well: “death came to all people, because all sinned.”

Yep. That includes you and me. We have sinned too. Remember that stuff back in Romans 3 about all people falling short of God’s glory? All people...except one. Adam is a pattern of that one—the one who is to come. Jesus. Romans 5:15: if many died because of Adam’s sin, how much more will grace overflow because of the work of Christ!

N. T. Wright uses an excellent example of a sculptor who makes a beautiful statue. Some dumb kids come by and start breaking it. They spray paint over and, quite frankly, ruin it. Some who had previously enjoyed the statue might be upset and want the sculptor to somehow make the statue just as it was before. The sculptor has a better idea, though. What if he takes the paint and parts where the statue is broken and make it even better than
before. This is what is under Romans 5:12-17—God is remaking us beyond where we were before sin. It will be something far more beautiful than before.

This is not, then, a conversation about universal salvation. The salvation that comes through Jesus is available to all people, and it’s effects are far greater than that of the fall! But it remains a choice for people to reject this incredible gift of salvation. This has its foundation in the great story of God that Paul has been connected to throughout all of Romans. God enters a covenant with Israel for the purpose of redeeming the sin of Adam. This is the climax of his salvation plan. Where Adam’s sin screws up humanity, Christ fixes it. Where there was once condemnation before the law, there is now grace. Where sin once reigned, there is now life.

Jesus has become a “new type” of Adam. We can remain to be “in Adam”, if we choose. Fully enveloped in sin, separated from God. But the work of Christ has made a way for us to be reconciled to God. We can finally be “in Christ” and no longer in the type of Adam. These renewed human beings are the ones whom God will declare “in the right” (or justified). And on this basis alone, it is these that we will be saved, because of the work of Christ.

❓ Questions

How can sin be around before the law, as Paul suggests in v. 13? What is the relationship between “sin” and the “law”?

Paul talks a lot about the law, but Paul uses “the law” in a few different ways throughout his letters. What do you think he means by it here? What other connotations could “the law” have? Could those other connotations be relevant here at all?

Romans 5:18 says that just as sin came to all through one man, so life will come to all people through one man. Does this mean all people will be saved?

❓ Application Questions

This is a discussion about justification. What does justification look like in a person’s life?

Once a person is justified and made right before God, does that mean that salvation is complete? If not, what’s next?

Can suffering be a good thing? If yes, is it always a good thing? If no, does it have any purpose?
What is a story of suffering from your own life that you've seen a development like the one Paul lays out in Romans 5:3-5?

What does it look like to be an enemy of God? Once this relationship is restored, what does that look like?

What exactly does it mean to have “faith”?

Why should we “boast in God” and what does this look like?

How do either of these sections connect within the larger story of Romans?

If a friend came up to you, confessed that they’ve been living a life of sin, and asked you: “how can I be saved?” What would you tell them?

Accountability
Earning salvation has been an area of struggle for Christians for as long as Christianity has existed. Early Christians tried to revert back to the Mosaic law just to have a law to follow. There is something within us that feels as if we have to earn God’s love, and earn our salvation. Many religions teach just this. But Christianity is different.

It’s often hard to think of specific areas in which we feel the need to be in control, but we often have those. We feel a tug towards working out of duty, not out of love.

- Name some areas where you feel a struggle to work out of duty.
- How is working out of response rather than working out of duty different? Why is one better? How do you specifically model this?

Resource Toolbox
- **Matt O'Reilly - “Justification by Faith”**
- **Tim Keller - “Justified by Faith”**
- **N. T. Wright - “The Shape of Justification”**
- **N. T. Wright Book - Justification**
- **Athanasius - “On the Incarnation”**