

“Eternally Reconciled”

Romans 5:1-11

Dr. Jerry Nelson

My brother was in senior high school and I was in junior high.

My parents, after years of scraping to make ends meet, finally had enough that they dared to take a two-week vacation to California from Wisconsin.

My brother and I were left to take care of the farm.

Because it was winter the major tasks were feeding and milking the 60 or more cows that were the family's source of income.

Milking meant every morning from 5:00 - 7:00 and every evening the same hours.

Well, Mike and I were busy young men - busy in school and in our social lives. Cows were clearly a hindrance - a barrier to our preferred activities.

We may have started those two weeks well but within days we were totally off schedule - cows were getting milked at 4 in the afternoon to allow us to get away for the evening and they were getting milked at 8 or later, in the morning, because we would sleep in after a late night out.

As I remember it, it was actually my brother who was so irresponsible.

None-the-less, when my father returned from vacation he found quite a mess - barns that weren't cleaned, cattle uncared for, and milk production way down.

The proof of our undisciplined lives was clear in the milk-check from the dairy.

For good reason my father was angry.

And for many days we walked on “egg shells” around him.

There was an “air” of disapproval that could be cut with a knife.

The last thing you wanted to do in that situation was cross him.

We were very careful to do the right thing and say as little as possible.

We lived with the fear that the consequences of any mistake then would be more severe because of our past conduct.

There was great relief when the morning chores were over and we could get on a bus and out from under the apparent watchful and seemingly frowning eyes of my father.

I'm certain I remember it far worse than it was - and I'm equally certain my father wasn't nearly as angry as I, in my guilt, made him out to be.

But in a lot of the relationships of life - especially with those in positions of authority - we live with a certain uneasiness - maybe even a fear - that if we don't get it right, we'll lose "big time".

As I asked last week, how are things between you and God?

What is God's basic disposition toward you?

What is his attitude toward you right now?

Many of us assume that if we've been doing fairly well lately, if we've been acting like a Christian, that God is probably basically pleased with us.

While others of us who have blown it recently or just haven't been paying attention, assume that God is probably disappointed in us and maybe even slightly angry.

Is God "sore" at you right now? Is he peeved? Disgusted? Fed up?

Is he disappointed with you?

Do you kind of "walk on egg shells" around God?

Maybe you just kind of ignore God - you just do your best and hope it will be good enough?

If there is a God, and most people are convinced there is, then what that God thinks about us is important now and important forever.

Even those who claim to have no religion spend a lot of energy trying to believe there is no God so they won't have to deal with him.

The result is - most people are afraid of God.

One time in a small village in India, I saw an immense anthill - 6-8 feet high and 30 feet across.

I saw villagers bringing what was to them precious milk, fruit and other needed items to offer to the gods to appease the gods' anger -

to coax them into showing favor on the people rather than hurting them.

Many times I and others of you, in Calcutta, India, have visited the temple of Kali the Hindu god of death and destruction.

There blood sacrifices are offered each day in the midst of incredible filth - animals killed to assuage the anger of the gods - to keep them from inflicting more harm on the people.

In China, a woman writes “of finding shelter one night in a village temple because there was nowhere else to sleep. In the night she woke and the moonlight was slanting in through the window on to the faces of the images of the gods, and on every face there was a snarl and a sneer, as of those who hated people.” (In Barclay p72)

Why are even many Christians so afraid of God?

Do you remember the children’s song: “Be careful little hands what you do; be careful little hands what you do; for the Father up above is looking down in love, so be careful little hands what you do.”

Is that our impression of God?

Does God have a hidden video camera that watches everything we do to see if we “mess up”?

Is God just around the corner waiting for us to make a mistake so he can pounce on us and punish us?

The Apostle Paul, in the first 2½ chapters of Romans has painted quite a word picture of our relationship to God.

Describing all people, he used words and phrases such as:

godless and wicked
 unthankful to God
 refusing to give glory to God
 exchanging the truth of God for a lie
 considering God as unworthy
 stubborn, unrepentant

And then he described God’s relationship to us as:

“God gave them over” - God let people reap the consequences of their sin.

The “wrath of God” is being revealed against them.
And there is a day when God’s righteous judgment
will be fully poured out on unrepentant humanity.
People will perish forever.

According to the Bible that is an accurate picture of people’s relationship to God apart from Christ. We are in trouble with God.

What does it mean to stand under the wrath of someone?

We are now hearing in the news about the man who videotaped himself molesting a three –year-old little girl.

Imagine the parent’s righteous anger.

Fortunately the little girl is safe and will probably have no memory of the incidents.

Imagine the gulf of hostility between the parents and that man.

Such is the gulf that exists between a perfectly holy God and us.

The greater problem is not that we are angry with God but that God is rightfully angry with us.

And it is not simply that we have failed to live up to some arbitrary law but that we have spurned the very person of God.

Like the man recently arrested, we have not simply violated a code, we have deeply offended God, himself.

The Scripture presents God not as impassive and insensitive but as caring, as greatly loving, as invested in the lives of his creatures, as grieved, as emotionally touched by actions of his own.

So it is no wonder that the Bible also reveals God as angry about some things.

As I said a couple of weeks ago, God’s anger is not personal pique or wounded pride; it is a righteous anger at how his creation is being destroyed and how his holy character is being defiled.

Again the worst problem is not that we see God as our enemy (we can’t harm an infinite God by our anger); the worst problem is that God sees us as his enemy.

But in the last half of chapter 3 and chapter 4, as we have seen, Paul

makes it clear that while **wrath is our deserved destiny** - God in grace has poured out his wrath on the person of his Son instead of on us.

Christ has paid the penalty for our sin so that we might be granted the righteousness of God - a righteousness we must have if we are to have a right relationship with a holy God.

And so we saw in 3:21 that instead of the wrath of God, “now a righteousness from God, apart from the law, apart from works has been made known.

And we see in verse 22 that this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

Then Paul spends all of chapter 4 making the point that in no way can we earn that relationship with God - it is a gift of grace through faith alone.

Now in chapter 5, Martin Luther says the Apostle Paul "speaks as one who is extremely happy and full of joy" (Luther in Moo p297)

Everything has changed between you and God!!

I want to read the first two verses of this chapter once again and I want you to notice the **three specific things that have changed** for you because of justification by grace through faith:

Romans 5:1-2 “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² 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

“Therefore SINCE we have been justified through faith”

What have we already learned about justification?

What does it mean?

To be “justified” means to be declared “not guilty” by God.

Now Paul writes in 5:1-2 “Since” justification is true for those of you who trust in Jesus alone, what dramatic changes have taken place in our relationship with God?

#1, in verse 1, is what? “We have peace with God!”

#2, in verse 2, is what? “We have gained access into this grace in which we now stand”.

#3, at the end of verse 2 is what? “We rejoice in the hope of the glory of

God.”

#1 - What does it mean to have “Peace with God”?

Look again at Romans 5:1 "Therefore since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

This is not the "peace **OF** God" - This is not a feeling of serenity after a particularly difficult decision.

Do you know how some people speak of having a definite peace in the midst of some situation?

That is not what we are talking about here.

This is 'peace **WITH** God," which has to do with our relationship with God.

This “peace” is describing the actual relationship between you and God; How God feels about you and how you feel about your relationship with him.

I think Colossians 1:21 helps us understand this: "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation

What was our relationship with God before faith in Christ? Enemies.

Again, how would you characterize God’s attitude?

The Bible says we are alienated, separated, at odds, no positive relationship, in fact, God is angry.

“There's a familiar slogan in some Christian circles that goes like this: ‘God loves the sinner, but hates the sin.’ Many well-meaning people firmly believe that statement to be the one that best sums up God's emotional stance toward every member of fallen humanity. Based often on the words of 1 John 4:8 ("God is love"), the assumption is drawn that everything God does, every thought He has toward people, must be loving. But consider that idea and the words of the familiar slogan, which, interestingly, is not found in the Bible, in light of some words that are: Psalm 5:5, for example, where David says to God, ‘You hate all who do iniquity.’ Or Psalm 11:5 where we read, ‘The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked, and the one who loves violence His soul hates.’ Those two verses (and there are many

others) seem to convey the idea, contrary to popular opinion, that God hates the sin *and* the sinner. From "The Love of God for Man" by Daryl Wingerd

<http://www.ccwonline.org/love1.html>

The Bible says that God is angry and with good reason.

But what action did God then take? Christ died **for** us

In Romans 3:25 Paul called it a "sacrifice of atonement" or in another translation, a "propitiation," the means by which God's anger is turned aside; or as Paul says it here in Romans 5:1 "We have peace with God."

What resulted from God's action in Christ's death for us?

Paul calls it "peace" and later he will describe it as reconciliation. And we are brought into a positive relationship with God by God's gracious actions of forgiveness through Christ.

On April 14th of last year, the Boston Globe carried the story of little 3-year-old Kai Leigh who was paralyzed from the waist down because of a gunshot wound received while she played on her third floor balcony.

29-year-old Anthony Warren came into the neighborhood carrying a gun because he was angry with a man.

Firing warning shots into the air, one of his bullets hit and shattered the body of little Kai Leigh.

Two years later, Anthony Warren had pleaded guilty to the appropriate charges.

At Warren's sentencing little Kai Leigh, now 5, took the stand to testify.

She sobbed as she explained what the last two years of her life had been like.

Then she totally surprised all in the courtroom except her mother when she ended her statement with these words:

"I forgive you Anthony Warren. What you did to me was wrong, but I still forgive you."

The gravity of the situation punctuated by those words brought even veteran court officers to tears.

Even Anthony Warren was deeply affected.

He rose to say to the child, "I'm sorry!"
 Warren was sentenced to 13 years in state prison.

But the scene in that story that I most draw your attention to happened as Warren was being led out.

Kai Leigh's mother reached out taking one of Warren's shackled hands and pulled him to herself in an embrace. (Boston Globe, April 14, 2006)

That and so much more is what God does to us.
 When I wake up each morning my negative history does not cloud God's attitude toward me.
 God has no memory of my sins.
 God will not even hold any future sins against me.
 He will never withdraw his love contingent on my actions.

By God's grace I am at peace with God.
 Our relationship is one of unhindered friendship.
 And best of all, nothing I could do, would change God's attitude - because God's attitude toward me is not based on me but on him.
 "Having been justified through faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

But there is another dramatic result of having been declared righteous through faith:

Point # 2 in our text found in verse 2: "through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

By God's grace we have been moved into a whole new sphere of reality.
 Something is now true that wasn't true before.

Think of where we lived before!
 The Bible speaks of all the forces arrayed against us without Christ-
 At least three: Our own fleshly sinfulness, the world, and the Devil.

There is our own sinfulness, which is like a cancer destroying everything it touches.

Our greed destroys our dreams because even when we get what we want it isn't enough.

Our selfishness destroys our relationships because sooner or later the others realize it isn't friendship or love, it is opportunism.

And then there is the dog-eat-dog world wherein we fight a zero-sum game where I must lose for you to win.

And the Bible teaches there is a very real person called Satan, the devil, the destroyer who has the will and power to exploit every one of my weakness and to destroy.

And not only were these forces against us but worst of all, before, we lived in a situation where God's wrath was upon us.

BUT NOW we live in a situation where God's grace is continually upon us.

In Christ we have been moved, as it were, to a whole new house - before we were in the prison-house awaiting execution.

But now we are in the house of the king sitting on our Father's lap in the family room. We are surrounded by grace.

Many years ago my brother and sister-in-law flew to Brazil and there they met five young children, brothers and sisters, who had literally lived on the streets, scavenging for food, abandoned by their parents.

Mike and Natalie paid the necessary fees and costs to adopt those five children (in addition to the three children they already had).

They flew with them on their laps to Minneapolis, Minnesota where for the past many years they have fed them, clothed them, sat up with them when they were sick, schooled them, and most of all loved them.

Can you imagine the difference?

Children who had nothing and no future were given access into grace in which they now stand.

They live in a wholly different world - not most importantly materially but relationally.

Note we have gained "access...into this GRACE". We have been given the privilege of being in a state or environment of grace.

We live in grace, the realm in which grace reigns!

Jeremiah 29:11 "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future

Romans 8:28 "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose

1 Corinthians 10:13 "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

1 John 5:14-15 "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.¹⁵ And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him

Matthew 6:8 "for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

But what is the third thing that has so dramatically changed in our relationship with God?

Look please at the last part of the 2nd verse, "And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

First of all to "rejoice" is to be joyfully confident, to have a happy certainty.

So we have a "joyful confidence" in what?

"The hope of the glory of God"

Again I remind you that "hope" does not mean uncertain wishful thinking.

Usually when the Bible uses the word "hope" it means just the opposite - it means a confident certainty that something will take place.

And what can we be certain will take place? The glory of God.

There is coming a day when Jesus comes again that the glory of God will be seen in all its fullness.

In that day we also will reflect that glory of God in ways we cannot even now imagine.

Living historically on this side of the Fall of mankind in Adam, we have no understanding of what God originally created.

And we certainly have not experience of what it will all be like when creation is restored.

We were created in the image of God but sin marred that image.
We sinned and fell short of the glory of God.

But when we are justified and granted the righteousness of Jesus God begins to reform in us his image, his likeness.

2 Corinthians 3:18 “And we...are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory...”

And a day is coming when we shall be fully transformed.

1 John 3:2 “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.”

Paul will later tell us that the whole creation looks forward to that day when the creation, including God’s children, will be restored to that glory.

Romans 8:18-19 “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.¹⁹ The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.

Our great hope is the restoration of all things to their created glory, which reflects the glory of God.

That is our future.

But Paul knows that present circumstances challenge our certainty.

So Paul wants to put even our present difficulties, our present suffering into perspective.

Romans 5:3-5 “Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;

⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope.

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

As we saw in 1 Peter, usually when the Bible speaks of “sufferings,” they are not the physical maladies that we all experience sooner or later in life.

The “sufferings” spoken of here are the opposition to our faith that we experience by those opposed to the gospel.

It’s the ridicule a student experiences in the classroom when he/she defends the faith.

It is the discrimination an employee experiences when it is known that he or she is a Christian.

It is the isolation a family member experiences when the rest of the family shuts them out for being a Christian.

As a general rule the statement that suffering produces perseverance would prove untrue.

Calvin pointed out that suffering “provokes a great part of mankind to murmur against God, and even to curse him.” (Calvin, in Cranfield, 104)

But when suffering is met by faith in God as God’s loving discipline and when God sustains our faith, it produces endurance. (Cranfield, 104)

Paul is saying that suffering doesn’t contradict our confidence but actually builds stronger confidence.

Just as an infection produces the antibodies the human body needs to fight the infection so suffering produces the very perseverance the human spirit needs to fight the ill-effects of suffering.

In brief, here’s Paul’s argument:

- Discrimination, hostility, injustice, and suffering of all kinds because of our faith are used by God to build our perseverance, our endurance.
- Endurance builds proven character.
Character is a mature perspective that knows God is sufficient for every situation.
- And such character only builds greater hope or confidence.

It is Rick Bolunchuk’s story. It is Lou Stoen’s story.

I have seen it in the lives of so many of you.

Suffering has not brought despair.

To the contrary, it brought and brings greater and greater confidence in the hope of the glory of God.

And so Paul has given us three ways our relationship with God has

dramatically changed because we have been declared righteous by God's grace through faith:

1. We have "peace" with God.
2. We now live in the sphere of God's grace.
3. We have the great hope of sharing in the glory of God for eternity.

At this point in Paul's letter I think he responds to an unspoken doubt. Paul has so confidently spoken of the great results of justification but as I said earlier, our experience may make us question all of this.

In Romans 5:5 Paul wrote, "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."

I've had times when I have been almost viscerally aware of the reality of God so that I could say I can "feel" it.

There have been times when his presence and his love were so obvious that I could say that I experienced it.

Some describe a sense of being overwhelmed by the love of God.

John Wesley spoke of his heart being strangely warmed.

But there are times when I experience none of those feelings and my faith must fall back on truth alone.

How can we be so certain God's love for us is so sufficient and so certain?

Here's the convincing argument:

Romans 5:6 "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

The cross of Christ is the greatest proof of God's love for you!

God proved his love by dying for us when we were still sinners.

Paul says let me compare that to the way humans love.

Romans 5:7-8: It's rare that a person would die for a person who has done good or who is a friend, someone whose life is worthy of dying to save.

But I suppose there have been times when someone has died for

such a person - like when a parent dies for a child or a husband for his wife or a soldier for his well-loved buddy.

But, Paul says in verse 8, understand this: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners Christ died for us."

Two things about us:

We are "sinners" or as it says it in verse 6 "ungodly," "wicked."

These don't speak of neutrality toward God but a definite disregard for God and a hostility toward God's laws.

And back in verse 6 it also said we were "powerless," weak, and incapable.

So, when we were still ungodly, powerless, sinners God demonstrated his love for us..

Do we not realize that God already knows the worst about us?

Do we not understand that God knows every sin we have done or thought or will do or will think AND STILL he died for us and he loves us.

His love for us is not built on our ability to be worthy of it.

His love for us does not continue dependent on our ability to be worthy of it.

He has chosen to love us IN SPITE of us and because of Him.

How can you be certain of peace with God, of living in his grace, of the future with God?

Because, in history, God in Christ, has demonstrated his love for you already.

And how can I know God's love will carry through to the future?

Here is but one of many times that Paul wishes to give great assurance of your eternal relationship with God.

Paul uses what is called an "a fortiori" argument, logic that argues from the greater to the lesser.

If God can do the greater thing, surely he can do the lesser.

Paul says it twice in Romans 5:9-10: "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰ 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!

Verse 9: Since you have been justified by Christ's blood, since he willingly gave his life for you so that you could be forgiven you can certainly count on him to save you from the wrath of God that is to come.

If he would give his life for you, you can depend on him to save you in the end.

The second reason, similar to the first, is in verse 10: If he reconciled you to himself when you were his enemy, certainly now as his reconciled friend, he will save you by his life.

We are saved by his death and we are saved by his resurrected life.

The living Lord is the one who guarantees our future with him.

Christian, if you are trusting in Jesus, God is at peace with you.

Secondly, you live in the place of his grace - he wants nothing but what is good for you - he loves you.

And thirdly, he will love you without fail right through to the end.

You are not under his wrath you are under his love.

Are you afraid of God?

Please don't be.

If you are trusting in Jesus Christ as your saving-Lord - don't you realize your whole relationship with God is totally different than before.

That's why Paul concludes with V11

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

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