

## How to Reconcile an Enemy

Scripture: Romans 5:1-11

### Introduction

We have just entered a new section of Paul's letter to the Romans. So far Paul has revealed the theme of the letter — the gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Paul has clearly presented our condition as sinners in which we deserve the full wrath of God. Paul has also revealed to us that the Law, as good as it is, does not save us, it does not make us right with God. Something else is needed. We have seen that to be declared right with God, what Paul called *justification*, requires faith — a genuine trust in God and the work of His Son, Jesus Christ. We now enter a new section in the letter, spanning chapters five through eight, in which the main idea might be that followers of Jesus Christ have a certain hope of future glory and eternal life based on their right standing with God. In this section Paul revealed the blessings of salvation that everyone whom God justifies will enjoy.

Last week, I asked whether receiving all the benefits that come with salvation was the purpose of having faith in Jesus Christ? Is it really about what we receive from God? While the blessings of God are good and we want them, the main purpose of knowing Jesus Christ is to glorify Him and to know God. Seek the Giver and not the gifts from the Giver. Well, both of those things — the Giver and His gifts — are received by faith. We cannot work for them. We cannot do enough good things, or obey God's Law enough to have them. Thanks be to God, we are justified by faith. God declares us right with Him by our trusting in the saving work of His Son Jesus Christ. We have a new legal standing with God because of our faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, since we have been justified by faith in Christ, we receive several benefits from our justification:

- We have peace and hope in Jesus Christ
- We rejoice in suffering that transforms us
- We were enemies reconciled by God's love

### We Have Peace and Hope in Jesus Christ

Though the primary focus of our faith is knowing God and bringing Him glory, there are other benefits to God declaring us righteous. Paul mentioned two benefits of our right standing with God in the first part of this passage:

- We have peace with God
- We have hope for future glory

Most of us desire peace. The world speaks of it every day — or the absence of it. We hope for a time when we can all just get along. Unfortunately, we have not seen a long sustained peace in the world. We have periods of peace, but war and conflict are typically in the news everyday. That is certainly true for human relationships, but our relationship with God is also one of conflict. Ever since the Fall of Adam, human beings

have been separated from God and in conflict with Him. The first benefit of justification that Paul mentioned in this passage is that the enmity between human beings and God is ended. Through Jesus Christ, we have received peace with God.

Believers also have sure hope of participating in the glory of God. When we speak of hope, we may think of things like, “I hope my team wins, or I hope I get that new job, or I hope there is enough food at homecoming.” That is almost wishful thinking, but that is not the hope Paul described here. Through Jesus Christ, we can rejoice in the certainty of future glory in which we will spend eternity with our Lord and Savior. Being declared right with God means we have peace with Him and hope of sharing His glory.

### **We Rejoice in Suffering that Transforms Us**

Now, you might be saying, “Wait a minute. I thought we were talking about the blessings of salvation. How is suffering a blessing of salvation?” Most of us will likely say that suffering is not a good thing, at least it does not feel very good. If I were to take a poll from the congregation to see who desires suffering, I suspect everyone would say they do not want it. In fact, our lives are most often characterized by a persistent desire and yearning for pleasure, not suffering. That is not necessarily a bad thing, as long as you desire what will give you the greatest pleasure. John Piper often says, “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”

In regard to suffering, though it can be intense and ongoing, we have the promise of a better day. We have the hope of future glory. In fact, Paul states later that the sufferings we endure now are not worth comparing with the glory to be revealed in us. (Romans 8:18) The sufferings Paul may have had in mind might have been the persecution Christians receive in a world hostile to Jesus Christ. We oftentimes endure suffering because of other people. People want to do us harm, mostly the Enemy, who prowls like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8) In this passage Paul said that as a result of God’s grace we not only rejoice in hope of sharing the glory of God but also boast in our sufferings in the light of the beneficial effects they produce.

***Romans 5:3–4*** <sup>3</sup> *Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,* <sup>4</sup> *and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,*

Because we have this peace and hope, nothing in life should sway us. We rejoice in the hope we have in Jesus Christ. Not only do we rejoice in future glory but we boast in present trials and sufferings, not because they are pleasant but because they produce a step-by-step transformation that makes us more like Christ. We do not boast about the sufferings themselves but because we know God makes our suffering serve our good. Paul mentioned a three-fold process that begins with suffering but ends in hope:

- Suffering produces endurance
- Endurance produces character
- Character produces hope

Under God's good hand, the suffering we experience produces perseverance. One result of our faith in Christ and the hope we have for a better day — a time without suffering — is that we can endure difficulties of this life with patience and fortitude. By God's grace, we can persevere through all trouble in this life because we have the Great Comforter, the Holy Spirit, with us. In fact, Jesus promised us that He will be with us to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:20) We can endure suffering because we are not alone and we know there is a something better.

By God's grace, perseverance in suffering produces character. As we endure life's troubles, we build character. And lastly, that character produces hope. But how does character produce hope if we already have hope in being justified by faith? How can suffering result in hope? It might seem that suffering would weaken our hope. But, if we have a greater trust in God through enduring suffering, this in turn strengthens our hope of sharing the glory promised by God. Hope can be like a muscle. If it is not used or stretched, it will not be strong. It is in suffering that we must exercise our hope. The constant reaffirmation of hope in the midst of apparently "hopeless" circumstances will bring ever-deeper conviction of the reality and certainty of that for which we hope.

### **We Were Enemies Reconciled by God's Love**

By being declared right with God, we receive peace and hope, and endurance in times of suffering. The hope we have does not put us to shame. Our trust in Jesus Christ will never be shown to be in vain because God has poured His love on us.

***Romans 5:5** hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

We are a people who are loved. Love is an interesting concept. The world is enamored with love. The Beatles once wrote a song titled "*All you need is love*". People tell us that "the right to love" should not be hindered. It is interesting that the world's concept of love is oftentimes a poor comparison to God's love for us. I think everyone wants to be loved for we are built to love and be loved, but as Johnny Lee once sang, we often try to find it in all the wrong people and places. How did God pour His love on us, though?

***Romans 5:6–8** <sup>6</sup> For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— <sup>8</sup> but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Notice the descriptions Paul used to describe the people God loved — *weak* (lack of moral strength), *ungodly*, and a *sinner*. This is the kind of people God loves and Christ died to save. Earlier in this passage, Paul wrote that we have peace with God as a result of being declared right with Him. This, of course, presumes that we did not have peace with God at one time. Ask yourselves this question, "What sort of people do not have peace with one another?" In verse 10, Paul added one more description — *enemy*. Before Christ, we were enemies of God. What distinguished God's love for

humanity more than anything else is that “Christ died for the ungodly” — those who actually violate God’s expectations of humanity, those who are literally His enemies.

The depth of God’s love is that His Son, Jesus Christ, did not die for the righteous or a good people, but he died for ungodly sinners who were void of righteousness. These ungodly sinners were His enemies, but they have now been reconciled to Him. Reconciliation means a restoration of relationship. Not only are we reconciled to God now through the death of Jesus Christ, but we can be assured that we will be saved on the day to come when we will be glorified. God wants a restored relationship with us and was willing to die to have it. The Christian life starts with being declared right with God through faith in Jesus’ work on the cross, but it continues with sanctification through the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives, glorification at the end time, and freedom from final condemnation and future rewards.

## **Conclusion**

In closing, what does God’s love for us — enemies — say about us? Do you go out of your way to reconcile with an enemy? Would you die for an enemy? If God reaches out to His enemies, loves them, and reconciles them by sacrificing Himself, what do we need to do to be reconciled to our enemies?

- Love them sacrificially
- Live peaceably with them (as far as it depends upon you!)

Many of you have broken relationship with other people. What are you going to do about that? If God so loved you, an enemy who deserved His wrath, should you not also love your enemy and try to reconcile that relationship. Maybe you do not have an enemy (at least you do not call it that!), but maybe there is a former friend, a family member, or a church member that you are currently alienated. What can you do to reconcile that relationship?

If you have a broken relationship with God, if you are still His enemy, but want to know how to reconcile that relationship, just turn to Jesus Christ. The Christian faith is one of turning from self and trusting in Jesus Christ. It is giving up trying to work your way into Heaven and instead trusting in Jesus Christ as the Way to it. Will you trust Him? Will you be reconciled to Him today?