

The Hope Of Glory & Power For Today (Romans 5, Part I)

America, leading up to the election of President Obama in 2008, heard a lot of talk about hope and change. Hindsight being 20/20, all that talk was only a reminder that real hope and true change can and will only come through the King of kings and Lord of lords, Jesus Christ. The word hope in the Bible doesn't mean what most people in the world think of when they use the word. And deep, lasting change comes from Christ in us, not personal wisdom or strength.

Many times when we say "hope", we mean it in a wishful kind of way. "I hope that things can change" or "I hope everything works out." But hope in the Bible is used in a different sense. Hope in the Bible is the joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation, resting in absolute assurance that God can and will do what He promised. In Romans 5:2, Paul said that we "rejoice in hope of the glory of God." We know that God is faithful and able to accomplish all that He has promised.

The word "change" isn't used often in the Bible, but the idea of change is a major theme. Change, in a biblical sense, is something that is effected by God. Personal change for the good only happens by the power of God indwelling a person. When a person turns their life over to God by placing their faith in who Jesus Christ is and what He did for all of humanity (in dying for our sins on the cross), that person is spiritually born again, or born "from above". That means that they are born of the Spirit of God and God Himself takes up residence in the new believer's spirit. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the only way for real and lasting change to occur in a person's life. As believers, we have access to the power that created all things, and the power that rose Jesus from the dead. But, we have to appropriate that power in our lives in order to have victory over the sin that still attempts to work through our mortal bodies; today, tomorrow and for the rest of our earthly lives.

The general subject of Romans, chapters 1-4, is how a person receives the hope of eternal life from God. The assurance of our salvation is the general subject matter of Romans 5-8, but in substantiating those truths, Paul also shows us how to live changed lives, by giving ourselves to God and not to the sinful desires still present in our mortal bodies. At the moment that we are justified (made right) with God by faith, God also begins the process of setting us apart and progressively changing us from within by the power of His Spirit in us. He is changing us, more and more, into the image of His Son. This process is called sanctification. To have consistent victory over sin, to be pleasing to God in our daily lives and to have powerful ministries for Him, and by Him, we must learn to fully lean on Christ and cooperate with Him throughout this lifelong process.

So, here in chapter five, Paul transitions from justification by faith to our assurance of salvation in Christ. And, over the next few chapters, he will give us great insights into our sanctification, as well. The fifth chapter of Romans is a wonderful summary of the first four chapters, and an insightful introduction to the basic subject matter of the next three (chapters 6-8). It is a pivotal chapter in the book of Romans, and an essential chapter to understand for the Christian's life today. It summarizes our sure hope of

future glory and introduces the fact that now, in Christ, grace abounds (as opposed to sin), and that grace reigns through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus is our hope of glory, and in Him alone is found our power for today.

In chapter 5, we see a new phase in Paul's discussion as it moves forward. As he begins, he assumes that the reader has received and is enjoying the free gift of salvation by faith in Jesus. The guilty past is forgiven/removed, and the future glory is guaranteed by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Paul begins with the word "therefore". That points us back to chapters 1-4, especially 3:21-4:25.

Therefore, [or, in light of all that I have been speaking of] having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, (Romans 5:1, NKJV).

Paul is now turning to the experiential results of the Christian's justification, the sanctifying power of the Spirit and what this life by faith looks and feels like. The first result is peace with God- based on His work, not on our works.

For it pleased the Father that in Him [Jesus] all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself... having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight... (Colossians 1:19-22, NKJV).

We were once estranged, enemies of God. But now we have peace, we are reconciled to God through Christ. And it is He who has done the reconciling! Our relationship with God is established by His faithfulness to His promises and our belief that He will keep His word. "Through our Lord Jesus Christ" refers to Jesus' entire vicarious sacrifice.

through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:2, NKJV).

Prosagōgē (access) was used in the Greek language "to describe the privilege to approach a person of high rank". Access has been restored by faith. The door is always open to His children, to access our Father, to enter the very presence of God, the Living God and our Creator; and we are now the recipients of all of God's blessings for us. We stand in the place of highest privilege because of His gift of grace. The grace in which we stand is the goodness and power of God. His goodness to give it to us and His power to do so. I love that little phrase, "we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand"! We stand firm in all that God has done for us and all that God is! I believe this also refers to accessing God's presence and power for our walk with Him. We have special privileges to access His power to overcome the temptations to sin, His power working in and through us to bring glory to Jesus in all we do. Through grace we have close communion with the Spirit and receive His love for us, and the Lord fills us with His love so that we can share His love with others. We tap into His power to be a Christian, not just talking the talk, but walking the walk, who is found in His grace in which we now stand! And He has given us His Holy Spirit for this very purpose. It is by the Spirit that:

He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6).

The second half of Romans 5:2, “rejoice in hope of the glory of God”, is as wonderful as the first, looking beyond the here and now and into our glorious future inheritance-sharing in God’s glory for eternity. The sure hope of glory is a promise that only the Christian has, and whether we live or die, it will be fulfilled because of what Jesus has done for us and our faith in Him.

Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will give us later... (Rom. 8:18, NLT)

It [the body] is sown [buried] in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power... (1 Cor. 15:43, NKJV)

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding [and] eternal weight of glory... (2 Cor. 4:17)

To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Col. 1:27).

When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory (Col 3:4).

Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory (2 Tim. 2:10).

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2).

Notice also that in Romans 5:1 we have peace with God, and in verse two we rejoice (joy) in hope of glory (“joyfully looking forward to” in the NLT). Two characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) are listed here in these first two verses of chapter 5. The fact that “the love of God has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (v. 5) explains the source of the fruit in our lives!

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us because they help us learn to endure. And endurance develops strength of character in us, and character strengthens our confident expectation of salvation [our hope]. And this expectation will not disappoint us. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love (Rom. 5:3-5, NLT).

As a Christian in a fallen world, all sufferings (all distresses, problems, trials, pressure, weakness, pain, persecution, death, etc...) are on behalf of Christ (Moo, NICNT, p.303). The first object of our joy (or rejoicing) is hope of glory in verse two. Now, Paul says, the second object of joy is sufferings (v. 3). In both, we are learning to rejoice in God Himself (v. 11). The presence of suffering during our lifetime is a difficult reality to accept, but one that we must accept because we live in a fallen world and are followers of Christ. We rejoice in our sufferings because of what it produces, for God and for us.

...we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose [which is sharing His glory!] (Rom. 8:28).

According to 2 Corinthians 4:17, our suffering actually produces our coming glory (because without the subjection to the curse of all creation, in response to Adam's sin, we would not have the hope of glory)!

“Our sufferings produce our coming glory in at least two ways: one, our recognition of weakness causes us to turn to God, and two, a believer's weakness serves to magnify God's power. Endurance with the right attitude, by trusting in God's character and sovereignty, produces proven character. And proven character produces hope. Hope is like a muscle, if it is not exercised it will not become as strong as it could and needs to be. The experience of trusting God through our trials produces hope. The reason that this hope (resulting finally from affliction) does not disappoint is that God has poured out His love into our hearts (v.5, Witmer, TBKC, p. 456).” And that love that is poured out and available now will finally culminate in our final glorification/perfection with God.

Our hope of eternal life is the prominent theme of chapter 5:1-11. The glorious character of justification by faith is that it brings peace with God, and that peace brings a firmly anchored hope, especially through trials. God's love is poured out into our hearts, it gushes and overflows, not drop by drop, but in torrents of living water.

“The verb ‘pour out’ (v. 5) connotes an abundant, extravagant effusion (Moo, NICNT, p. 304).” The Holy Spirit will overflow out of our lives toward others, as well, the more we yield to His work in our lives. This is the powerful “secret” to walking in step with God's will for our lives day in and day out, and to having powerful ministries by and for the Lord.

Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers [torrents] of living water (John 7:37-38).”

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love (John 15:4 & 9).

We'll talk more about ‘abiding’ and ‘coming to Jesus’ as we work through chapters 6, 7 & 8.

Love has its origin in God and is reproduced in the children of God. He has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love and to overflow into other's lives with His love.

In Paul's mind, this filling of the Holy Spirit, this pouring out of God's love through the Spirit, fulfills the Old Testament prophecies of the New Covenant which was to come. The indwelling presence of the Spirit in the believer's life is the direct fulfillment of the Old Covenant and the pledge and guarantee of our future glory. The Old Covenant was established by faith (Rom. 3:31), to guard believers and tutor them, leading them to God's grace through faith in Christ (Gal. 3:23-25), until the New Covenant came. Jesus promised the disciples that this would happen after He died for the sins of the world, rose again and returned to the Father.

I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever-- the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you (John 14:16-18).

Again, in verse five Paul said that God has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love. This coming of the Holy Spirit fulfilled at least three OT prophecies that Paul would have had in mind. One would have been Joel 2:28-29, which Peter quotes in Acts three to explain the Coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. A second certainly would have been Jeremiah 31:31-34, quoted by the writer to the Hebrews in chapters 8 and 10 of that book. And the third OT reference to the coming of the Holy Spirit that Paul would have had in mind is found in the book of Ezekiel, chapter 36:25-27:

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

We fulfill the law of God by faith in Christ alone because we have been made right (declared righteous, justified, acquitted of sin) by faith in Christ. We are also being changed daily, by His Spirit, into the image of Christ. This is achieved by faith in God and yielding to His work in us. The only way to live out the law of God is by the Holy Spirit of God working in and through us. And that is precisely the gift the Lord has given to you- His Holy Spirit within you by His grace, through faith in Christ.

Wow, there's so much here in just the first five verses! But, we must move on. We will revisit these themes throughout the coming chapters. But, now on to verse six:

When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners (Romans 5:6, NLT).

Before we received Christ, and God's unfathomable gift, we were helpless without Him. Ephesians 2 says that we were dead in our sins, but that He has made us alive together with Christ. Christ died for us at the time of our greatest need, while we were in rebellion to Him.

For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:7-8, NASB).

I do not think that the NLT gets the gist of verse seven, which is why nearly all of the other versions translate it the way they do- word for word. But Greek doesn't always translate perfectly into English word for word. So, what does Paul mean in these verses? The answer, I think, is proved by common sense. In the study on Romans 1, I mentioned that my wife and I are so blessed with the opportunity to have a small Bible study in our home every week. When our group came to this verse, we asked everyone to share who they thought people, in general, might be willing to die for. And the answers were nearly all along the same line- someone that we know and care for in a special and deep way. Some of the examples were: a soldier laying down his life for a fellow soldier, a man dying for his wife, a mother giving her life for her child. Not one person mentioned dying for a really righteous and good stranger! I was amazed that as I looked through some of the commentaries on this verse, many of those preachers, teachers and writers felt the same way about this verse! In fact, this is the most popular interpretation of what Paul meant. It was so wonderful how the Holy Spirit led our group that night! I think that when Paul speaks of "a righteous man", he means someone especially good, but someone we do not know personally. And when he speaks of "the good man", he means someone we know and have a special relationship to. Most people wouldn't die for a stranger, even if they are a really, really good person. But some will lay down their life for a loved one. We may not know for sure until we are in God's Kingdom, but this interpretation makes the best sense to me today.

But, the point of these two verses is how great God's love is for us! He demonstrates (present tense, "is always demonstrating") His great love for us, in that Christ died for us when we were at war with God. That is like a soldier laying down his life for a soldier from the enemy's side! This illustrates the depth of God's indescribable love for us. He died for us and forgave us and cleansed us while we were still sinning against Him. Not one of us comes close to loving the way God loves. Yet, we see that love lived out in the life of Jesus.

And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's judgment (Romans 5:9, NLT).

Paul deploys the "a fortiori" argument here, arguing that if the greater can be done, than the lesser can be done. This style of argument was called "qal wayyomer" ("light and heavy") by the ancient rabbis. Verses 9 and 10 reiterate verses 1-8 and expand the central theme, which is the certainty of Christian hope. Paul's logic goes like this: since

God has done the more difficult, which is to justify sinners, than He will certainly do the less difficult, which is to save His children from the future wrath of God.

“He will certainly save us” or “we will be saved” is a temporal element in the statement (looking to a yet future event) that indicates a saving from wrath/judgement/condemnation. This is the final deliverance of the believer from sin, death and judgement, and therefore must include deliverance from God’s judgement on earth during the Great Tribulation, as well, because the Great Tribulation period is when God will pour out His wrath and judgement on a disobedient, faithless, Christ rejecting world. Obviously, Christians do not belong to that category of people.

This verse is a clear indication, for Paul and his readers (then and now), that Christians will not experience the wrath of God in judgement. “This absolutely excludes Christians from living through the Great Tribulation because it is God’s wrath being poured out (Moo, p. 298).” Paul speaks on this in 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10. And, he says in 1 Thessalonians,

“...for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath (1 Thess. 1:9-10, NIV).

But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 5:8-9, NIV).

In receiving Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we were not just forgiven of sin. We are now in the family of God, friends of the Lord.

For since we were restored to friendship with God by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be delivered from eternal punishment by his life (Romans 5:10, NLT).

Since God justifies His enemies, He will certainly save His family, His friends from wrath and judgement!

So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God--all because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us in making us friends of God (Romans 5:11, NLT).

Rejoice in what Christ has done for you. Live in the light of your wonderful friendship with God. And if you have not accepted this work of reconciliation that Christ has worked for you, consider this:

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting

people's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:17-21, NIV).

He is the Reconciler, He has done the work. But you must receive that gift. You must be reconciled to God by asking Christ into your heart, making Him Lord and Savior of your life, believing in His work that He alone accomplished at the cross for your sin. Be born of the Spirit right now (John 3), if you are not already, by receiving His free gift of eternal life by believing in the eternal Son of God- Jesus Christ.

Verse eleven is a wonderful reminder to contemplate and rejoice in all that we now have in Christ, and all that is to come! It's worth reading again:

So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God--all because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us in making us friends of God (Romans 5:11, NLT).