

*“Welcome One Another  
Just as Christ Has Welcomed You”*

A Study of Romans for the  
Diocese of West Texas, Fall 2009

Study and Reflection Session 4:  
“The Powerful Gift of God”  
(Romans 5:1-21)

*The Passage: New Revised Standard Version Translation*

Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. 3 And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person-- though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. 8 But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. 9 Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. 11 But more than

that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned-- 13 sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. 14 Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come.

15 But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. 16 And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. 17 If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

18 Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. 19 For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. 20 But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21 so that, just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might also exercise dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## *A Translation for Study, with Commentary*

**Romans 5:1** Therefore, since we are justified by faithfulness, we have peace with God through our Lord, Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have obtained entrance into this 'power for newness of life' (*charis*) in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. 3 And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces proven character, and being proven produces hope, 5 and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

*The very first verse of Chapter 5 contains an important point that might be masked by our familiarity with the phrase, "our Lord Jesus Christ." Many of us would speak this phrase as though it were all simply part of Jesus' name, but, in the first century, to call Jesus "Lord" rather than to call Caesar "Lord" was to set oneself apart from all the surrounding systems of power and authority. Calling Jesus "Lord" meant to follow his direction in all the details of one's daily decisions. See Paul's use of "Lord" again in the last line of this chapter. Calling Jesus our "Lord" sets him in right relationship with us, as the one who establishes the loving direction of our lives. We stand in that right relationship ("are justified") by something you might picture, imaginatively, as a kind of Celtic knot: the faith and faithfulness of Jesus, intertwined with our faith and faithfulness, with the golden thread of God's perfect faithfulness running throughout.*

*A second aspect of this passage that goes largely unnoticed is the role of the Holy Spirit in human life. In most of the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is the principle means by which God – who is utterly transcendent, invisible, incomprehensible by the human mind – acts, through human beings, to bring about God's will on earth. In this passage, the Holy Spirit is a channel for the love of God to pour into our hearts, so that we may be the means by which that love brings new life to all around us.*

*In our translation, you will also notice that, rather than use the word 'grace', we consistently use the phrase, "God's power for newness of life" (or something similar). Our common use of the word 'grace' has watered it down so much that it no longer makes the best translation for the Greek, charis, as Paul uses it here. Like the Holy Spirit, charis or a charisma is something given by God that allows the power of God to be effective on earth, through us.*

*You may recall that we discussed "boasting" in Session Two. What do you think it means to boast both in sharing God's glory and in suffering? How is that Christ-like?*

**6 For while we were still weak, at the appointed time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a just person – though perhaps for a good person [or "for the good," or "for what is morally good"] someone might actually dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his love toward us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. 9 Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath. 10 For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. 11 And not only that, but we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.**

*This passage is one of those in which Paul mixes his metaphors. While mixing metaphors is not considered proper in English, Paul does it rather often when he is trying to express a complex thought. Here, he begins speaking of the death of Jesus as a martyrdom ("Christ died for the ungodly," "Christ died for us"). Christ was willing to die as a martyr (a "witness" to God, and a sign against the world's powers), even for people who were not worthy. But then Paul picks up the theme of atonement from Chapter 3 (see Session Two): "we have been justified in his blood." It is clear that Paul is using a metaphor here, because death by crucifixion is not a*

bloody death. Rather, it kills by asphyxiation. Paul is emphasizing how God chose to receive Jesus' death, not how it actually occurred. In any case, it is important not to lose the content of either of these two interpretations of the death of Jesus. If we lose sight of his martyrdom, we lose sight of his earthly courage to live the ways of God in defiance of the powers of Rome. If we lose sight of the metaphor of Yom Kippur, then we lose sight of how it is that God can bring victory and life out of events that were intended to bring only destruction. Together, the two ways of looking at Jesus' crucifixion—as martyrdom, and as something that God has chosen to receive as a sacrifice of atonement—are a model of how the power of God can be realized on earth: through human faithfulness and courage, when it is met by the power of God to bring life out of chaos and destruction. Remember, too, that what God has done, in receiving the death of Jesus as an atoning sacrifice, is to welcome all people as one people, reconciled to God and to one another.

Paul sees God's choice to receive the death of Jesus as an acceptable sacrifice of atonement as the means by which we have become justified. But what is justification, exactly? In the legal sense, it might mean that we have been acquitted, but there is another way of looking at the term that helps us see more clearly how justification and faithfulness are related. The type on this page is "justified" to the left margin. But it is not justified to the right margin. Look at the difference. The left edge of the type follows the edge of the paper exactly, while the right edge of the type wanders all over the place. The justification brought about by Jesus, through his death, sets us in constant right relationship with God, like the left margin. Whatever God does, that is what we do, for our eyes are constantly on God, in moment-by-moment faithfulness. Our life "in Christ", the life we live empowered by Christ and lived by his pattern, is a life in right relationship with God. The Christian moral life is one shaped by the actions of Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Verse 10 alerts us to a consistent pattern in the letters by Paul himself, rather than those of his followers. He writes, "...we will be saved...." For Paul, we who are in Christ are in a lively process of salvation. But we are not yet saved for all time. This is why it is so crucial to understand justification as the establishment of a right relationship with

*God, a relationship of faithful obedience in each moment. Moment-by-moment relationship with God in Christ is our saving path. We experience the continuous unfolding of our salvation as we are empowered to make Christ-like choices that reflect our reconciliation.*

**12 Therefore, just as through one man Sin entered into the world, and Death came through Sin, and so Death spread to all because all have sinned – 13 Sin was indeed in the world before the Torah, but Sin is not reckoned when there is no Torah. 14 Yet Death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come.**

*Very frequently, we conceive of “sin” as “sins,” those things we do that we know are not faithful. But Paul understands Sin to be a power that holds sway over human life. Paul’s view is reflected in the first question that candidates for Baptism are asked in the Book of Common Prayer: “Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God?” (p. 302). Most of us have encountered in some way a presence of evil that seemed larger than any person or institution. That is Sin, with a capital ‘S’! The BCP goes on to ask about institutional sin, evil larger than any single human being, but still a product of human decisions: “Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?” Finally, the examination of the candidates asks about the level of sin in which we are directly involved (our ‘sins’): “Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God?”*

*Paul’s commentary on Adam (from Genesis 2-3) gives us some insight into his preaching. Paul understands both Adam and Christ, in their decisions and the consequences of their decisions, to be representative of all human beings.*

15 But the experience of God's power for newness of life [*charisma*] is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the power of God for newness of life [*charis*] and the free gift [*dōrea*] in the power of God for newness of life [*charis*] of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. 16 And the free gift [*dōrea*] is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the experience of God's power for newness of life [*charisma*] following many trespasses brings justification [*dikaiōma*]. 17 If, because of the one man's trespass, Death reigned through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of God's power for newness of life [*charis*] and the free gift [*dōrea*] of justice [*dikaioynē*] reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

18 Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's just act [*dikaiōmatos*] for all people results in justification of life. 19 For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made just. 20 But Torah came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where Sin increased, God's power for newness of life [*charis*] abounded all the more, 21 so that, just as Sin reigned in Death, so God's power for newness of life [*charis*] might also reign through justice [*dikaioyne*] for eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

*This is another difficult passage! One way to help get it straight in your mind is to list everything that has come down to us through Adam (sin, judgment, condemnation, many trespasses, disobedience, many made sinners, the reign of Death) and everything that has come to us through Christ (free gift, justification, the many made just, newness of life, abundance, eternal life, the reign of God).*

*Remember that Paul is speaking to both Jewish and Gentile believers. It appears from what he has said earlier (2:1-11) that there is a problem with*

*the Jewish members of this community looking down on the Gentiles and perhaps accusing them of sinfulness because they do not live by the Torah. How might it feel to one of those Jewish believers to hear Paul say that, where the Torah comes in, the trespass multiplies? Paul has a particular aversion for people's boasting of a Torah that they do not keep, thus he understands sinfulness to be magnified by people who have every possible help from God, but break the Torah by their hypocrisy (2:17-24). In verse 20, Paul assures the Jewish believers that God's power for newness of life is sufficient to cover even for their – more conscious - sins. Paul is working consistently in Romans to develop such a depth of thankfulness in both the Jewish and Gentile believers that they will gladly "welcome one another," just as God in Christ has welcomed them, freely, life-givingly.*

### *Questions for Reflection:*

1. How do you most frequently encounter or imagine sin, as a power (Sin), as an institutional form of evil, or as personal willfulness and destructive behavior? Can you tell a story about a time when you really felt that you accessed God's "power for newness of life" to withdraw from Sin, sin, or evil?
  
2. Much of Paul's argument depends upon how the receivers of the letter can really drink in a sense of what it means to be unreservedly welcomed by God: the "free gift" of being made completely acceptable. He seems to see the truly justified life, the life lived in right relationship with God and our neighbor, as flowing from a well of gratitude for our reconciliation. What are your own practices of gratitude? Often, we are grateful for the creation or for our family or friends or church, but we have a hard time living into the free gift of God's welcome to us and to all. How can we cultivate this deeper kind of gratitude, and how might it change our relationships with others?