

SJSM Know-The-Word

The Book of Romans, 1 May 2011 (Lesson 3)

Part 3. Rom 5:1 – 8:39 Life and Hope In Christ

3.1 Results of salvation, people united with Christ (Rom 5:1 – 11)

Paul turns next to the results of accepting this offer of salvation from God through faith in Jesus. He points to 6 aspects :-

- i) We have peace with God (v1)
- ii) We now stand in His grace (v2)
- iii) We rejoice in the hope of God's glory (v2)
- iv) We also rejoice in sufferings (v3-8)
- v) We shall be saved from God' wrath (v9-10)
- vi) We rejoice in God (v11)

The main emphasis of this section is the certainty of believers' acceptance by God, both now and in future. The present peace we have with God and the hope of future glory with Him forms the strong foundations to endure the sufferings that Christians are not exempted from.

The justification offered by God through Christ also comes with it His way of reconciling us to him that we are no longer enemies of God but have peace with Him. This peace is both quintessential for humans (since it is with the Creator God) and lasting (since it is founded on God's promise which His character guarantees that He will never break.)

By His work, we also "stand in the grace of God". This is more than mere "access" to His grace but we in fact stand in it, as a secure and permanent status before God. It is not a periodic acceptance before God but a permanent status before God under His love, from which nothing can separate us (Rom 8:38).

Our rejoicing is two-fold. First, we rejoice in the final glory of God when Christ returns. While we had fallen short of His glory previously (Rom 3:26), we now have part in this hope. Second, Paul tells Christians that they can expect also suffering in the meantime. This word suffering does not refer to the usual trials and difficulties of life, but rather the pressures, oppositions, and hostility of the unbelieving world. (Rev 7:14; Mk 13:19,24; Acts 14:22).

Paul explains that this hope of glory and the strength to endure are well founded on God's grace – since He can even send Jesus to die for His enemies. Knowing and trusting in God's character, what doubt do we have that He will save and deliver believers who are now reconciled to Him, and whom Jesus called friends. The experience of God's love for us, and in us, through the Holy Spirit's work are further inward testimony to this.

3.2 Christ & Adam (Rom 5:12 – 21)

We can consider this section as a conclusion to Paul's argument up to this point. He has set out the need for all humans for the saving grace of God through Christ, including Jews. He has set on the basis for this salvation (ie faith and not the law or works), and the results of accepting God's grace in faith. Now, Paul uses the archetype of Adam and Christ to set out the two distinctive humanities before his readers.

The one humanity under Adam is one of sin and death, while the other under Christ is of grace and life. Paul sets out these two as stark alternatives before his readers. In Adam, all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory, and destined for eternal death. In Christ, we have the righteousness and grace of God for salvation through faith that leads to hope and eternal life.

V12 asserts the consequence for all men from Adam's disobedience and sin. We can see v13 and v14 as Paul's explanation of this is possible. Paul states that the sequence of disobedience leading to sin, then to death is universally applicable to all, since death (both physical and spiritual) existed even before the law as given. This was so even though people's sins (including those who did not violate specific commands like Adam) were not taken into account before the law. This is of importance to us as believers, as our status as sinners to begin with are personal. We participated in Adam sin even though we were not yet born as Adam is a representative or federal head of all humanity. It is not that we merely imitated Adam in becoming sinful. It is also important because Paul made a comparison with Christ work for us in the cross. If we had merely imitated Adam's sin and hence are condemned, then our salvation in Christ would also be an imitation of His work; which we know is not possible. While we are exhorted to become like Christ, this can happen only after we have been saved and with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Paul covers these aspects in Romans 6.

Paul also made in clear that while the principles of sin & death, grace & life and how one man's action can have eternal implications for all men are similar, there is really no parallel between Adam and Christ. Hence, he starts v15 with "But". Paul stresses that Christ's work is "not like" Adam both in its nature (Adam transgressed, Christ obeyed and sacrificed) and its consequence (Adam brought death for all, Christ brought life for believers). Christ work is also "much more" in that from "many transgressions" we ought to have expected more punishment, yet it brought forth from God's grace one supreme sacrifice.

The ultimate effect is the eternal destination of these two humanities. For those in Adam, death with reign – the master is death. For those in Christ, not only does life reign in us now, Paul says that eventually we will reign in life with Christ – in fact we part-take in Christ's rule over life, not merely having life in us. This is the epitome of the Christ' glory in which we have been given the privilege to share in.

3.3 Under Law and sin no more (Rom 6:1 – 23)

In Chapter 6, Paul rebuts more completely, the earlier charge by his detractors that (3:8) that his gospel of free grace through faith rather than work encourages people to sin. Paul had taught that "as sin increased, grace increased all the more" (5:20). In chapter 6, Paul also deals with the relationship between grace and the law as he had also said "The law as added so that trespass might increase." (5:20)

Indeed, there has been since Paul's time those who used this to teach that we can sin without fear of punishment because God is kind and will always forgive. This teaching is termed "antinomianism" ie against morals (nomos).

Paul's argument in chapter 6 is well summarised by John Stott – Paul explains that God's grace not only forgives sin, it also empowers us from sinning. It not only justifies, it also sanctifies. This, Paul explains, come through our being united with Christ (v1-14), and being initiated into a new "slavery" to righteousness.

The fundamental argument Paul puts forward is that in believing in Christ and His work, we are united with Him; and in particular shared in His death. Traditionally, and for many commentators, "died to sin" or "dead to sin" refers to an insensitivity to the lure and temptation of sin after we have become Christians. The reasoning is that in our baptism, believers "died with Christ" and his old self had been "nailed to the cross"; thus rendering him unresponsive to sin's temptation. Our part as Christians is to consider such instinct as dead.

John Stott raises 3 issues with this interpretation:

- i) He noted that the phrase "died to sin" also applied to Jesus in v10. And since this phrase is used consistently in Chapter 6, what we say to be applicable to believers should also apply to Christ. Afterall, the basis for the interpretation is the identification with Christ's death in the first place. But it would be untenable to suggest that Jesus was, before his death, somehow living in a responsive manner to sin's temptation. While He was indeed tempted, NT tells us He was without sin. Hence, the effect of being "dead to sin" cannot be a removal of an existing sensitivity to temptation.
- ii) John Stott also argued that such an interpretation would be incongruent with Paul's urging his readers not to let sin reign in their body (v12) or offer our body as instruments of wickedness (v13).
- iii) The last objection is that it does not conform to the majority of Christian experience. Most often than not, we continue to fight off temptations that come our way even after baptism. Indeed throughout history and the writing of spiritual giants, we see that not all Christian are truly "dead to sin" in the sense of being insensitive to its temptation. Paul himself in Rom 7 shows a continued struggle with temptation to sin.

John Stott argues that “died to sin” refers to the consequence of sin being met. Paul says in Rom 6:23 that the wages of sin is death; a theme echoed throughout the OT that Jews are to choose to follow God and live, or disobey Him and die.

Applied to Jesus, “The death he died, he died to sin once for all” would mean that His death has the power to fully meet the ultimate demand for sin; not for Himself, but for all who believe in His power and work. Thereafter, sin’s claim for repayment has been extinguished. This is also true of believers of Christ. Although we cannot die for our own sin (since our death do not carry similar value as the death of the Son of God!), we nonetheless through God’s grace had been given access to its benefit, and thus released also from the demands of sin.

V6-7 is crucial in this understanding. “For we know that our old self has been crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.”

John Stott argues that “old self” and “body of sin” refers not so much to our “sinful nature” or self centred-nature” as most have come to understand, but rather “our former self” before coming to faith, our old person who was part of Adam and not Christ. Stott believes that this reading is more consistent with the term used for “done away with” which has a wide range of meaning, but since it is also used elsewhere in the NT (Heb 2:14) to refer to the devil, “done way with” cannot be eliminated. Stott also pointed out that the word crucified in Rom 6 should not be confused with the same word used in Gal 5:24. In the former, it refers to something done to the Christian (ie he has been crucified) and refers to a legal death that occurs only once. The latter however, is something the Christian does (ie those who belong to Christ have crucified) and refers to his moral death which must occur daily or continuously in imitation of Christ. Stott further notes that Greek word for “free from sin” is better translated as “justified” rather than set free.

In essence then, Paul is saying that God’s purpose is to justify us from our sins (ie redeem us from its consequences) through faith in Christ. To do this, our entire former self (not just the sinful part of it) has been put to death in identification with Christ’s death and resurrection. In doing so, we have gained a new identity and master in Christ of whom we are now “in slavery”; and from which obedience will bring forth eternal life.

3.4 Law is Good but impotent (Rom 7:1 – 25)

So far Paul’s writing regarding the law has not been positive. He has made it plain that the law does not offer salvation but reveals sin (3:20), condemns the sinner (3:19), brings wrath (4:15) and was given even so that trespasses may increase (5:20). To the Jewish listener, these were shocking and culminate to “you are not under law, but under grace.” (6:14).

There are many parallels between Roman 6 (freedom from sin) and Roman 7 (freedom from law) :-

- we died to sin (6:2), we also died to the law (7:4)
- died to sin by union with Christ death (6:3), died to the law through the body of Christ (7:4)
- justified and freed from sin (6:7, 18), released from the law (7:6)
- shared in Christ resurrection (6:4-5), belong to him who is raised from dead (7:4)
- live in newness of life (6:4), serve in newness of Spirit (7:6)
- the fruit we reap leads to holiness (6:22), bear from to God (7:4)

Paul is drawing a parallel between "died to sin" and "died to law", both meaning essentially the same – that the consequence and penalty for sin, which the law spelt out, has been extinguish through the death of Christ. And as we share in His resurrection, we also have a new lease of life; one that is to obedience to Christ. Paul argument is that if we have received this gift of life of grace through faith, we should not turn back to our former way of life. Not that we are incapable of sin ever again, but that knowing and having faith in the work of Christ, it is untenable that we should consider going back.

While the law and obedience to it do not offer salvation, it is not itself sinful. The law is like a mirror showing us the true state of our being before God. It is not irrelevant even after we have received God's grace because as "slaves" of God to righteousness. As the law reflects the character of God and His will for how His people should live in righteousness, fulfilling the law is the rightful task of the believer - not as a way to gain acceptance, but as a reflection of his faith in God and willingness to please Him.

But we all know and experience the difficulties in observing the law (ie doing good). Paul attributes this struggle with sin (v7-21) not to the law but to the old sinful nature within. He vividly describes the inner conflict that many face even after coming to the faith, and delighting in the law. The law cannot help anyone to fulfil it. He states clearly that the essence of the law is Spiritual, not the mere rules which the Jews cherished in observing. Up till now, Paul has not introduce the role of the Holy Spirit, and in His absence, believers continue to struggle in-between as it were.

As chapter 6 teaches that the law cannot secure justification for Jews, chapter 7 teaches that the law is powerless in bringing sanctification in that it cannot assist us in fulfilling its requirements. As to justification, we are under grace not the law; as to sanctification, we are under the Spirit not the law. In chapter 8, Paul then reveals new way of life under the Spirit.

3.5 New life in the Spirit (Rom 8:1 – 39)

Chapter 8 can be divided into 3 segments.

V1-17 deals with the work of the Holy Spirit in liberating, indwelling, sanctifying, witnessing to and resurrecting the children of God. V18-27 deals with the future glory of God's children, and v28-39 emphasises the steadfastness of God's love for His children.

In v1-17, Paul concludes what he has been teaching in the previous chapters. He reiterates his earlier arguments that the law is powerless for salvation and sanctification; and only God can do both for us (v3). First, the assurance that those who have believed in Jesus are no longer condemned (ie to death) as they are now under a different "law" – the law of the Spirit only because of Christ's atonement for our sin. Second, we are able to fulfil the requirements of the law (ie sanctification) only by the Spirit (v4). In v1-4, Paul sets out the work of the Trinity – God the Father who sent His son, Christ the Son who died for our justification and the Holy Spirit who enables us to fulfil the law.

How can we be free from the law (ie no longer under law) yet fulfil it? Read with Chapter 7, Paul is saying that our freedom from the law is not the freedom to disobey it but rather from the consequence of our inability to fulfil its requirement. In accepting the grace of God through Christ, we also have the indwelling of the Spirit to empower us to fulfil the law; which pleases God. It is important that Christians understand that God's purpose in redeeming us is to make us holy, in conformity to the likeness of Christ (Rom 8:29). It does not stop only at the extinguishing of our liability for sin. The fulfilment of the moral requirements of God's law is the work of the believing Christian towards holiness. The key difference is that unlike the Jews during Paul's time, believers now have the freedom and the power to fulfil these laws. In Gal 5:6, Paul writes "For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."

Paul explains in v5-8 why obedience to the law is only possible for those who walk in the Spirit. Paul states that it is our nature that determines how we think, and our thinking has serious consequences on our relationship with Christ and hence destiny. Those whose minds are directed by their nature to things of the flesh will not submit to His law because the Spirit does not indwell them – how can it? since such a mind is hostile to God; and such cannot please Him. In v9, Paul further teaches that the distinguishing mark of a true Christian is the indwelling of the Spirit. Paul refers to this Spirit as "Spirit of God" and "Spirit of Christ". He also equates "Spirit of God lives in you" with "Christ is in you" (v10). Indeed the Holy Spirit can be said to be of God and of Christ, as the three parts of trinity are inseparable. And when the Spirit dwells within us, there too Christ dwells.

In v12-17, Paul teaches us that how the indwelling Spirit bear witness to our status as children of God. The Holy Spirit (i) leads us into holiness (ii) in our relationship with God, from fear to freedom, (iii) in our prayer to God and relationship as child to Him, and (iv) the Spirit is the first fruit of our inheritance. Paul introduces an intimate relationship with God that is different from the law-obeying ways of the Jews of his time. While the OT does describe some very personal relationships with God (particularly well expressed in Psalms), this adopted sonship that Paul teaches is nonetheless of a different nature since it included the gentiles and is mediated by the Spirit living within the individual believer. This however, was prophesied by Ezekiel that God will put His law in the hearts of His people, and Jesus promised that the Spirit will be with us and in us (John 14).

Having showed how the Spirit empowers us to fulfil the law (ie sanctification) and overcome the sinful nature, Paul turns to the future glory that comes to the children of God in v18-27. He teaches that while Christians do have peace with God (Rom 5:1) in the present, and can

rejoice in the life of the Spirit, they nonetheless face sufferings. The final work of God in bringing us back to Him, in holiness and new, resurrected body, has started but not yet completed. Caught in this "already but not yet" state, the hope of future glory and the realities of present sufferings are co-mingled. The children of God groan inwardly as they face the daily realities of a still unredeemed world. And not only the children of God, but the whole creation awaits this final glory. Paul reassures us that this glory we have in hope is far more than the current suffering, it is not comparable. Further, we are not alone in this waiting as the Spirit is present to help us even to pray on our behalf. It is with these in mind that the children of God can wait patiently.