

Romans 4:23-5:21

Introduction

Paul is seen as having won the debate concerning Abraham over the Jewish Teacher. A correct reading of Genesis 15:6 can lead to only one conclusion. Abraham is the father of many nations, which includes the Gentile. All people, Jew or Gentile, experience the blessings of covenant partner with God through trust in the faithfulness of God rather than through any Jewish law or ritual. Abraham is the ultimate example because he experienced those blessings of covenant partner with God before the law was given and before the covenant of circumcision was enacted.

The end of chapter 4 (vv. 23-25) is a transition into the next section. It makes the point that Genesis 15:6 was not just written for Abraham only. Surely, the text is a part of what makes his name great, as God had promised. But it had a purpose beyond Abraham, and that is for the benefit of future generations. The phrase “to whom it is to be accounted” or “to whom it shall be accounted” depending on translation, is stating the assurance of God’s acceptance of humanity (reckoning) that not only blesses in the here and now but also looks toward the final judgment. God will continue to sustain those who trust that He will give life to the dead just as Abraham trusted God would give life to his and Sarah’s dead bodies and trusted God would raise Isaac (Heb. 11:11,17-19). People, being blinded by their sinfulness, handed Jesus over to be killed (“because of our violations”). God would not let that be the last word. He raised Jesus because of His faithfulness to the covenant (“because of our justification”). Our salvation is as sure as the resurrection of Jesus.

Using some of the terms already seen in Romans (justified, faith, through Jesus, grace, boast, glory), Paul began speaking in Chapter 5 about the reality of what it means to live by faith in this new age of Christ and he looks to the future eschaton (end time). The new age having been inaugurated, the cosmos is heading toward the completion of the final purposes of God. God will complete what He began. Paul talks about what it means when experiencing suffering in 5:1-11, which will be addressed again at the end of chapter 8. In 5:12-21 Paul draws a sharp contrast between the age when sin and death dominated the landscape in Adam (1:18-3:20) and the age of grace and life in Jesus that has now conquered the power of sin and death (3:21-4:22).

Peace and Hope in the New Age: 5:1-5

The revelation of God’s reconciliation purposes for the cosmos has come about. God’s faithfulness has created covenant relationship between God and humanity. Through Jesus we have been given access to His grace through Jesus. The word “justify” is in the passive tense, again indicating it is something given, not earned.

The phrase, “in which we stand,” proclaims that this relationship with God has been fully accomplished by God and continues to be sustained by God. The picture could be that of one having access to the king or that of temple cultic language of approaching God, maybe related to the mercy seat image of 3:25. This is about being in the presence of God, and is something secured by the grace of God, not by any effort on humanity’s part. Paul called upon them to respond to the truth of their Covenant

relationship that has been secured by God by living lives that reflect the peace that God had given to them. It should read, "let us have peace."

The Jew boasted in the law and their supposed special status. Although not specifically discussed yet, the Gentiles in the church in Rome were boasting as well about their freedom from Jewish ritual. The only boasting that is legitimate is upon the hope (confident expectation) found in the glory of God. The word, "sharing" is not in the text. This is not about us sharing in God's glory but about our boasting (celebrating) in God's glory. The word translated "boast" also carries the idea of "celebration." God's "glory" goes back to the tabernacle and wilderness experience of Israel. The glory of God was God's presence in the midst of Israel. It was the glory of God that settled on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 24:16) and that settled upon and filled the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34). It was the glory of God that Israel saw in the cloud that led them in the wilderness (Ex. 16:10). So, the image of "access" and "glory" both carry the idea of being in the presence of God. Paul called upon them to celebrate their access into the presence of God that was brought about through Jesus.

Christians still live in a world of sin and death even though sin has been conquered. The story has already begun and those who live in that covenant relationship with God are now receiving the blessings of that relationship. But the story has not yet come to the final chapter. We have been redeemed from our slavery in Egypt (slavery of sin) and are journeying in the wilderness toward the Promised Land. God is in our midst as we travel and we have complete access to the mercy seat, but we have not yet crossed the Jordan. The completed restoration of fallen humanity is yet in the future when Jesus returns.

While on this journey, Christ-followers experience suffering from living Kingdom life while in the midst of a fallen world. The values of Christ-followers are in constant conflict with the world. But it is not overwhelming or defeating. It is not anything to be ashamed of or disappointed in because we have hope. "Hope" in Paul is not "wishful thinking" (i.e., I hope so); it is confident expectation. The essence of the word expresses strong confidence, not possible uncertainty. The covenant relationship that is currently being experienced as well as the yet to occur consummation of God's purposes for the creation out-weighs any suffering that might be experienced. God can actually use it to our benefit. Out of suffering God can bring about endurance (fortitude or patience). This was a highly prized characteristic in Paul's day. "Character" carries the sense of having been approved by the testing of fire. We can even celebrate in suffering because it can be proof that we are engaged in the conflict and because we know that at the consummation of all things God's glory will be revealed. The result of God's work in our life is hope and the basis for that hope is a love for God. This is not about something to be believed.

The Spirit of God was a mark of the new age (Ezek. 36:26-27; Isa. 32:15). Paul gives the picture of a cloudburst on a parched landscape in describing this aspect of the Spirit's role in God's purposes. A love for God ("God's love") has been poured into our hearts through the Spirit. In Ezekiel, the Spirit is sovereignly given by God, just as He removes the old heart and puts in the new one. The idea of pouring has reference to the prophecy of Joel 2:28 as well as the experience of Acts 2:32-33. The continuing experience of God's presence through the Spirit and the accompanying mysterious

power at work in the Christian's life is ongoing evidence of God's love that continues to be active in the Christ-follower.

God's Love Demonstrated Through Jesus' Death: 5:6-11

These verses expound on the love of God as introduced in the previous verses. The ultimate expression of God's love is the death of Jesus. A form of the word for "die" is used five times by Paul in these verses. Those for whom Jesus died are described as "weak," "ungodly," and "sinners," and "enemies." Everything these words mean are expressions of behavior that reject God and are against God's purposes. It is not conventional wisdom for someone to give his/her life for a "righteous" or "good" person. Dunn (pg. 267) suggests the possibility that the "righteous" is the Jew whose pride was in law and circumcision, and the "good" person is the Gentile who, not having the law, lived the spirit of the law. Whether that is true or not, the purpose of these statements is that God's love goes against conditional wisdom. There are no conditions that could be attributed to humanity that would thwart the love of God, not even our sinfulness. To the world, the cross is foolishness and weakness; to Paul it is the love of God (1 Cor. 1:18ff). God could not disregard sin. The solution was the death of His Son.

But how did Jesus' death show God's love? We saw in 3:21-26 that Jesus' death was designated by God as a "mercy seat," not as a "propitiation" or "atoning sacrifice." The common view that Jesus' death was decreed by God to appease some kind of cosmic justice portrays the Father as no better than the vengeful, bloodthirsty, pagan gods who demanded death to reclaim their honor. Paul's picture is the opposite: instead of dealing with those who dishonored Him (ungodly, weak, sinners, enemies) through death, God-in-Christ received and bore the humiliation and death to which his enemies handed him over—all without responding in curse or anger. Instead, he blessed: "Father, forgive them, they don't know what they are doing." Jesus' death is the Father's demonstration of the depth of his love toward his spiteful, rebellious children: he would rather die than kill them off. And the resurrection is the Father's proof that nothing, absolutely nothing, his creation can do to harm and reject him will ultimately succeed. God's love succeeds in the end. In this way, we are delivered from "the wrath of God."

"Much more" will be found four times in the rest of this chapter (5:9, 10, 15, 17). It is used to contrast the horrible predicament humanity was in prior to the cross and resurrection of Jesus and the overpowering ability of the death and resurrection of Jesus to deal with the problem. One seemingly hopeless situation for humanity is the coming wrath of God. The overwhelming solution is the blood of Jesus that created covenant relationship with God and saved humanity from God's wrath. Another predicament is that sin led humanity into rebellion against God ("enemies"). The overwhelming solution is that the death and resurrection of Jesus got rid of the sin problem and reconciled the two parties. Be careful not to try to make distinctions between "sinners," "enemies," "ungodly:" or between "justified," "saved," or "reconciled." They are different metaphors for the same concepts. The same would be true of trying to make different categories for Jesus' death and resurrection and trying to connect one aspect of salvation to either Jesus' death or resurrection. It is all one big picture. Dunn (pg 269) concludes this section by stating, "Paul encourages the Christian congregation to show their pride in their relationship with God, but the relationship has now been

substantially redefined - as a relationship characterized by the recognition of the need for reconciliation and determined by Christ's reconciling death and life, not a relationship characterized and determined by factors denoting national identity (works of law)."

The Two Ages in Adam and Christ: 5:12-21

Dunn (pg. 271) says of this section "the whole sweep of human history is embraced by the two epochs instituted by Adam and Christ. It is a summary of what has been said beginning in 1:18 running through 4:22.

The first man (Adam) introduced sin into the world and the result was that sin and death reigned. It is very easy to get caught up in a number of questions that this text has no interest in answering. How did sin spread? Did Adam's act remove personal responsibility for the sin that others committed? How can you say it was Adam when Eve appears to be the first to give into Satan? All those questions, and others, can result in "paralysis from analysis" and never end up with a satisfying conclusion because that is not the purpose of this text. The purpose is to show the universal dominance of sin and death in the before the second man Christ came and a new age began.

Five of the nine times Paul uses the word translated "rule" or "dominion" is found in these verses. There is a contrast between the age when death and sin reigned (vv. 14, 17, 21) and the age when grace and those who receive God's gift of righteousness reign (vv. 17, 21). The age where sin and death ruled was seen in 1:18-3:20 and the age when grace reigns was seen in 3:21-4:22.

There is also a contrast between the two who inaugurated those two ages. Adam inaugurated the age of sin and death and Jesus inaugurated the age of grace, justification, and life. Adam introduced the disease and Jesus provided the antidote. This section also continues the "much more" comments. As powerful as sin and death was, grace is much more powerful. Paul also continues to show that law is not the answer.

Some interpreters hold that the use of the name "Adam" and the use of the word "all" indicates Paul is referring to all humanity without exception. The contrast becomes a simple one: everything and everyone condemned "in Adam" is abundantly restored to right relationship "in Christ." Scholars do not agree whether Paul intends to teach the unconditional salvation of everyone by using this contrast between Adam and Christ; those who hold that he does so are in the minority.

Other interpreters believe Paul continued the Jew/Gentile discussion in these verses. From this perspective, the "all" statements are intended to communicate that the condemnation that reigned during the age of Adam included both Jew and Gentile, and the righteousness that reigns in the age of Christ is equally for both Jew and Gentile. Interpreters do not believe this view leads to a position that Paul is teaching the unconditional salvation of everyone.

Paul continued to bring the Mosaic Law into the discussion. It may be that he anticipated an objection that there could not be any sin attributed to anyone since there was no law before Moses. Paul's response is that death reigned, so sin must have reigned as well even though people may not have committed a sin related to a known direct command of God, as did Adam. Adam was a type of the one to come, Jesus.

The mark made by the stamp is the converse of the stamp itself. Adam brought sin and death. Jesus brought grace and life.

One significant matter to note: Some writers point to the phrase “those who receive the abundance of grace” in v. 17 to avoid the otherwise clear universalizing claims in this section. They claim that this verb indicates a condition, the action of receiving. However, the verb for “receive” in this passage is not used in its active sense of “to take,” but in its passive sense of “receive.” This is similar to the same use of this verb in 5:11: “through whom we have now received reconciliation.” In short, there is no conditionality: God has accomplished his work in Christ in a completely unilateral and unconditional way.

Conclusion

The world characterized by Adam was what appeared to be a helpless world of sin and death. Even God’s law, having been hijacked by sin, could do nothing to cure the disease. Rejecting God, humanity handed Jesus over to be killed. This was the ultimate expression of sin’s power over humanity. Their thinking about God was so distorted by their sin that they could not recognize God in their midst. But now, we live in a world characterized by the faithfulness of Jesus. Even the sinfulness of humanity could not thwart the purpose of God to fulfill His covenant relationship with the whole world. Because of His faithfulness, God would not let death rule the day, so he raised Jesus from the dead. Now we can rejoice in confident expectation because we have unhindered access to God. Having the assurance of covenant relationship through Jesus, we should live in such a way that expresses our joyful confidence in our present relationship with God and in such a way that expresses our confident expectation that God will fulfill every aspect of his purpose for the world at the consummation of all things. Living the life of the Kingdom of God brings suffering because of the conflict that is experience with the world’s values. But we should continue to live with joyful confidence, understanding that God can use those experiences to give us even more confidence in His faithfulness. Our confidence in suffering is enabled by a love for God that the Spirit has poured into our hearts.

