

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ROMANS

Living Under Grace (Rom 5-8)

i. Peace with God

Romans 5:1-11

As we return to Romans, having looked at chap 1-4 in the first quarter, we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in which Martin Luther and Romans played a crucial role. In his Preface to the letter Luther writes, "The epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament, and is purest gospel... as the daily bread of the soul. Therefore, let every Christian be familiar with it and exercise himself in it continually."

Romans 5:1-11 is a bridging part of Paul's letter, being a transition from the teaching of chapters 1-4 on justification by grace through faith ie. how a believer can be right with God through the substitutionary death of Christ in our place. The tone changes from one of instruction to exhortation, from first personal singular 'you' to first person plural 'we'. Paul is pastoral in his tone exhorting us to grasp and understand the radical outcome of the gospel in our lives. Several points are made in quick succession. Paul's argument is dense and far reaching, ranging from hope for the future (v2) to reconciliation with God (v11), from enjoying peace with God (v1) to experiencing the transformative power of God's love (v5), from glory in our sufferings (v3) to boasting in God (v11). The overall theme may be seen as 'Peace with God giving us great hope for the future' (vv1,2b).

Paul reminds us in v2 "through faith we have gained access by faith into the grace in which we now stand". An alternative reading is 'introduction', implying we need a third party to introduce us to God. However, as believers we have free access into God's presence because of what Christ has done for us. Many folk have an 'access card' allowing them entrance to an office whilst certain people may have 'access' to a benefactor or influential person. However, access to God is unrestricted for the believer. This is the privilege of the "grace in which we now stand".

Paul's observation on Christian suffering literally takes one's breath away. Far from being a negative experience to be stoically endured, suffering with Christ is a means of grace whereby our characters are refined and "the hope of glory" made more real. Moreover, this hope in the shame and honour culture of Paul's day "does not put us to shame" (v5). Unlike the Roman culture of the day which had a very tenuous and shadowy view of the after-life, Paul holds forth an explicit view of life after death. Believers have only one life, beginning with conception and extending through eternity. This hope, the hope of glory, is like a muscle which will not be strong if it is unused. The constant reminder of hope in the midst of apparently 'hopeless' circumstances brings 'ever deeper conviction of the reality and certainty of that for which we hope', as Douglas Moo observes in his commentary.

Christian hope, grounded in the gospel of God's free grace, is nurtured through "God's love poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (v5). Paul never thinks of God's love apart from the witness of the Spirit and the reality of the cross, and he never thinks of Christ's dying for us apart from the Father's giving of the Son, and the Holy Spirit enlightening our hearts and minds to appreciate and appropriate this great gift of sacrifice and love.

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