

Romans: Justification By Faith Flows from the Love of God

Romans 5:6-8

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If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Romans, chapter 5. As we continue to work our way through this great book of Romans, let me remind you where we have come from. In chapters 1 and 2 the apostle tells us what the problem is, what our predicament is. In chapter 3 he tells us what God's glorious solution is in Jesus Christ. And furthermore, having told us that Christ died for sinners in Romans, chapter 3, he says God declares sinners to be just freely because of what Jesus Christ has done. In Romans, chapter 4, he defends that from the Old Testament. And in Romans, chapter 5, he begins to talk about the consequences of that, the implications of that. So notice what he has done. In Romans 1 and 2 especially, he explains to us the reality and the necessity of justification by faith. In Romans, chapter 3, he tells us about the provision of justification by faith. In Romans, chapter 4, he tells us that justification by faith is scriptural. And in Romans, chapter 5 through 8, he explains how effective justification by faith is. He's telling us consequences or implications of this great truth, this great reality of justification by faith. It's not just a doctrine, it's something that impacts us every single day. We've already seen some of those implications if you'll allow your eyes to run over Romans 5, verses 1 through 5. You'll remember some of the things that we've seen already. Justification results in our experience in the peace of God. We have peace with God, having been justified, Paul said in verse 1. Secondly, justification results in our communion with God. The greatest grace a person can have eternal fellowship with the living God is brought about in justification. If we truly desire to glorify and enjoy God forever, it is realized and enjoyed in our justification by faith. We saw that as well in verse 2. Furthermore, in verse 2, we saw that justification means a certain future hope of glory. A certain future hope of glorification, the final hope belongs to us if we are justified. We not only have our sins dealt with, peace with God, we not only have a present experience of communion with God, we have a future expectation of glory all because of justification.

Paul's not done yet. He goes on. In the verses that we looked at most recently beginning in verse 3 and going into verse 4, to say that justification enables us to rejoice in tribulation. Not merely to endure tribulation, not merely rejoice in spite

of tribulation, but to rejoice because of tribulation. And furthermore, justification says to us that every tribulation which we experience now, God intends to make serve His purpose of sanctification in us. In other words, He turns what would be an enemy against us into a friend for His purposes because there is nothing that can be against us since He is for us, since He has justified us. It's a glorious thing. There's no meaningless suffering for the believer. Every drop of tribulation for the believer God has caught up in His purposes and will use for our good.

I remember many years ago in a college English class, having an English professor say to us, "Why is it that the Southern writers are the greatest writers of the American writers in the 20th century?" Now he wasn't a particularly religious man, but here was his answer. His answer was, "God, because Southern writers are still haunted by God. God has been forgotten in the rest of modern American literature." And he went on to say that there was no ultimate meaning in life, and how can you write if there is no meaning? Why reflect on what is meaningless? God makes all things meaningful, even tribulation and suffering are caught up into His purposes because we have been made right with Him in justification.

That brings us then to verse 6, and that's where we are going to start today as Paul continues this train of thought. He's not done yet as he expresses to us the consequences of what it means to be justified. Let's hear God's word in Romans 5, beginning in verse 6.

"For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 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 yet we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Amen, and thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired word. May He write His eternal hears upon our hearts. Let's pray.

Our Lord, we bow before You, and we ask that You would open our eyes to understand this truth. We pray that as believers that we would be rooted and grounded in the love of God displayed in the death of Jesus Christ. And as unbelievers we pray, oh God, that You would shock us with the unexpectedness and the magnitude of Your love. Enable us all then to praise You for that loving grace and to respond to it by faith. These things we ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

So, in the first five verses Paul has said that God's grace in justification puts things right between us and Him, past, present and future. He goes on to say even in our sufferings we are enabled to rejoice by justification. But He's not finished, He has something else to add to that. Not only do believers have the capacity to rejoice in suffering, they are also recipients, we could even call them receptacles of the lavish, the undeserved love of God. The whole focus of the passage before us is, of course, precisely that. The lavish and undeserved love of God. And I'd like you to see four or five things Paul says to us about that love.

In fact, I'd like you to sneak back to verse 5 because we're going to pick up there. We didn't get to verse 5. And Paul begins this thought, this focus, on God's love right in that verse. And he tells us first of all in verse 5 about the fatherly love of the judge. He also tells us about the agent of the father's love in verse 5. In verse 6 he introduces to the love of God for sinners. This undeserved love of God. In verse 7 he tells us that this love is unparalleled in human experience. In verse 8 he tells us that what Jesus did is the proof, the demonstration that God loves us. That's the question on many of our minds. We hear the words of "Jesus Loves Me, This I Know," and we ask the question to ourselves sometimes. "Well, how do I know that? I know the Bible tells me so, but there are a lot of Christians that wrestle with that. How do I really know that? How do I know that God loves me?" Paul is answering that question here. Let's hear what he has to say. First, let's hear God as he speaks to us in verse 5.

I. Justification means that we are the object and recipients of God's amazing love and apprehend it.

"Hope does not disappoint," He says. "Because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts. Justification means not only that we are forgiven sins, that we are acquitted, that we are accounted as if we were righteous; but it also means that we are objects and recipients of the Father's amazing love. Think of it in a courtroom. If you go before a judge guilty of a capital crime, you are convicted of that crime in the course of that trial. The judge does this. He sentences you, and then he dismisses you. And never again do you have a relationship with him. The apostle Paul says look at the amazing difference between our just Father who is a judge, and the way that an earthly judge deals with us when we are guilty. The earthly judge, if we are guilty, convicts us. The heavenly Father, when He finds us to be guilty, and we all are, gives us His son in our stead to bear the due penalty of sin, and then He acquits us. But He's not done. He doesn't dismiss us from the courtroom. He adopts us into His family. And He lavishes on us the love of God. That's what Paul says there in verse 5. The love of God has been poured out within our hearts. He has lavished on us his love.

We said, perhaps the last time, this is the first time in the book of Romans that the love of God has been explicitly mentioned. Oh, ever since at least chapter 3, Paul has been telling us about the love of God. But here he explicitly focuses on the love of God, and he's talking not about our love for God, he's talking about God's love for us. That's clear, by the way, in verses 6 through 8, when he illustrates what he's talking about here in verse 5. And if you don't get it from 6 through 8 in general, look specifically in verse 8, and the very first words. He says there, "God demonstrates His own love for us." Clearly this is God's love for us, not our love for God, which has been shed within our hearts. The reason we can glory in suffering, the reason that we can be assured of a hope that will not

disappoint is because the love of God is certain. It has been poured out within our hearts. By the way, look back at verse 2, and then verse 4 and then verses 5 through 8. Notice the progression from faith to hope to love. You heard that triad before in Paul. You'll hear it, for instance, in I Corinthians 13. Paul likes to speak about faith, hope and love together, and here we see a procession of faith, belief in God. Hope being established in a certain hope, and then thirdly, love. The experience of love for us. Justification means that we are the objects of the love of God.

II. The Holy Spirit is the agent of God's love.

Now Paul, in the rest of this passage, is going to explain that glorious reality as a consequence of our justification. He tells us also in verse 5 a second thing. The Holy Spirit is the agent of that love. It is the Holy Spirit given to us who grounds us in that love. Justification is joined with this incalculable gift, the gift of the Holy Spirit. And it's the Holy Spirit who ministers in us to root us in God's love. Let me demonstrate that to you from another passage in Paul. Turn with me if you would to Ephesians, chapter 3 beginning in verse 14, Paul says this. "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name; that He would grant you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His spirit in the inner man so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And that you being rooted and grounded in love may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge; that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God." The one thing that I want you to see in that glorious passage, which is worth fifty sermons, is just this point: that the Holy Spirit is given to do what? To root us and ground us in the apprehension of God's love's for us. He is the agent that God implants in our hearts that we might experience and know the love, which God has for us in Jesus Christ. Jim Phillips puts it this way: "The Holy Spirit is the executor of the Godhead. It is He who effectually applies the work of Christ to individual hearts, making it real to them. Without the Holy Spirit salvation remains merely something to hear about, never to experience. It is He alone who makes it ours. All that Paul proceeds to teach in the subsequent chapters presupposes this truth."

Perhaps you're an unbeliever today, and you're having a hard time getting your head around this gospel, and you can't quite accept and embrace it, perhaps an appropriate prayer for you would be "Holy Spirit, open my eyes, enable my heart to understand the gospel and to see the love of Christ for sinners." It's the Holy Spirit that gives us the ability to see the greatness of God's love and grace. He alone grounds us in that reality. Paul means that God's love has been sealed and applied to us in the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul's not talking about some secret, second, subsequent, mystical blessing. He's talking about something that God does in every believer by the Holy Spirit. As he justifies you, He vests with in you

His Spirit that you might know the love of God, which is in Jesus Christ. What an amazing thing, this justification. Then he goes on, he's not done, he begins to explain this further.

III. God's love has been shed abroad not merely in the death of Christ, but the death of Christ for sinners.

We see a third thing in verse 6. Paul here in verse 6 gives an argument. In verse 7 he gives an illustration, and in 8 he gives a conclusion or he makes a deduction from the argument. Here's the argument in verse 6. His argument is Christ died for us while we were helpless and hopeless, while we were weak and sinful. While we were unbelieving and undeserving. In other words, he's telling us in verse 6 that God's love has been shed abroad not merely in the death of His Son, not merely in the death of Christ, but His love has been shed abroad, but His love has been shed abroad in the death of Christ for sinners. It's not just nice people that Jesus has died for. In fact it's not nice people at all. Jesus didn't die for the righteous. He didn't die for good people. Why? There are no good people, there are no righteous people. He died for sinners. And that's Paul emphatic point here in verse 6. Notice he uses two words, helpless and ungodly. What do you want on your obituary? There's been a lot of talk about what's going to be the first entry in the encyclopedia about our former president, you know. Well, what's going to be the first entry in the divine obituary for you?

Well, here's Paul's description of you, helpless and ungodly. That's you apart from Christ. That's you apart from grace. That's what you are. That sums you up. Helpless and ungodly. Helpless in the sense that apart from God, apart from Christ, apart from grace, we are under the power of sin. We are unable to free ourselves from it. We don't want to free ourselves from it. We enjoy it. We're unable to repent. We're unable to see the gloriousness of the offer that's being made to us. We're helpless. We're weak. We're ungodly. We're separated from God. We're in rebellion against him. We're not manifesting His image. We're created in His image, but we're not manifesting that image in the way that we live. That's how Paul describes us. He describes us from two perspectives as those who are captive to sin and to those who are out of a right relationship with God. That's His summing us up. That's us apart from Christ.

And he tells us that Christ died for people like that. That's who Christ died for, people who are weak, people who are helpless, people who are captive, people who are sinful, people who are ungodly, people who had no relationship with God. Jesus loves me, this I know. How do I know? You know because Christ died. That's how you know. He died for the ungodly. Think, my friends, think just for a second. Think of your sin at its worst point, or least at its worst point for you, because every time I think I know the worst about myself, God shows me something else. But think for a moment. Think about that thing or those things perhaps that you have worked hard even for those closest to you not to know.

Those things that you think, you know, if my wife, if my husband knew that, they'd leave me in a second. When you're honest, in those few moments that you're willing to be honest with yourself, it's precisely at those points that Christ loves you, that Christ dies for you. He knows the worst of you. It's not as if fifteen years later He's going to discover 'O, you mean that person is that way? Ah, what big mistake I've made.' He already knows you at your worst point. He died for the ungodly at the very worst point. At that point believer, He loved you still in Jesus Christ.

The gospel is not just 'God loves you.' You see, 'God loves you' might convey the idea that well, we're fairly loveable people. Pretty nice guy, he's reasonable, it's a nice thing for Him to do. It's not even 'God's loves you at the cost of His Son.' God loves you in this magnificent way. That's true. It's 'God loves you, sinner, at the cost of His Son.' Thomas Boston once said, "If anyone knew my heart, I wouldn't have four friends left in Scotland. And it's precisely there that Christ dies for the ungodly. He doesn't die for those who've got everything together. They're clean, they are well scrubbed, they have prepared themselves. He doesn't say, 'I'm going to die for everyone who's going to help themselves. I'm going to die for everybody who at least makes the effort to do what they ought to do. He says, 'I die for the ungodly.' Christ died for the ungodly. God's love has been shed abroad not merely in the death of Christ, but in the death of Christ for sinners. Paul is saying, "Do you want to see the love of God? See it in who Jesus dies for." He dies for people who don't deserve it, people who are totally unworthy of it. He's not done.

IV. God's redemptive love cannot be presumed upon.

In verse 7 he gives an illustration of this. His illustration points to the rarity of vicarious sacrifice on behalf of virtuous people at the human level. From time to time in our experience and perhaps in our reading we have heard about people who have nobly given themselves on behalf of another person. Perhaps it has been someone serving in the military who has been willing to lay down his or her life for the country. Perhaps it's a spouse who saves the life of his or her spouse through some heroic act or saves the children. But in each of these cases Paul points out that we are doing it for someone who is to us good. Paul is saying here that we cannot even compare that kind of love with the love that God has shown to us in Jesus Christ; and we certainly cannot presume on God's redemptive love since even human self sacrifice is rare, and we are undeserving. Paul is not making some sort of a nitpicking distinction between a righteous man and a good man as if nobody would die for a righteous, but some people would die for a good man. That's not his point. His point is simply this. That at the very highest levels of human nature, at the very highest levels of human behavior, it's almost altruistic. It is where we hear of someone giving their life for another. When we do, it is always the case that that person is giving their life for something that they consider to be good and righteous. A man laying down his life for his country. A

man laying down his life for his family. A person of noble and upstanding character, and it's precisely that point of discontinuity between the death of Christ and the death of people in a vicarious situation that Paul is drawing our attention to.

Paul is going to argue in verse 8 again that Christ did not die for good and righteous people, He died for criminals. He died for pagans. He died for sinners. Christ's love for us. God's love for us in Jesus Christ is not what the philosophers call the love of complacency. In other words, God doesn't look at us and say, "Oh, how lovely. How wonderful. Oh, I just couldn't go on without those human beings. They are just so excellent, so fine. There's something in them that compels My love for them." That's the love of complacency. That's the love that attracts young men to young women and hopefully vice versa. We delight in something in someone else that attracts us to the other person. That's not the love of God. The love of God is what the philosophers would call to love is spontaneity. It dwells up from within him. It's not conditioned on something in us. In fact, if it were conditioned on something in us, we wouldn't have received it in the first place; because we're unlovely, we're ungodly, we're weak and helpless. God's love for us in Christ is not based upon something in us or about us. It's based wholly and solely on something in Him and about Him. And it's something, my friends, that you and I will spend an eternity, and we will never understand it to the bottom. The love of God, how deep, how wide, how surpassing all our knowledge it is. Even in glory, we'll never understand it until the end. And Paul is saying, "That's the kind of love that God has for us. It's not like any other kind of love. It's rare," Paul says, "that a human would lay down his life for a righteous and noble person." Then how much more amazing, how much more unbelievable is it that God would give His Son for those who don't deserve it, for those who are sinners. The unparalleled love of God. But that's what He's talking about in verse 7, but He's still not finished.

V. God's unique love is expressed and proven in the death of Christ for unworthy sinners.

He brings it home, the conclusion of His argument is found in verse 8. He says, "The proof, the manifestation of God's love for us is seen in the death of Christ for the ungodly." God's unique love is expressed in and proven by the death of Christ for unworthy sinners. Romans 5:8 is the John 3:16 of Paul's writings. If John had been written when Paul was writing this, it's almost like Paul would have had it open to John 3:16, sort of rephrasing it, putting it in a slightly different way, but getting it precisely the same point. When he says 'demonstrate' in verse 8, He means that it is proven by argument. God's love is proven in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. By the way, Paul is not saying that Jesus died to show us that He loved us or that God loved us. Jesus' death is far more significant than merely being a manifestation or an example, even the greatest example of God's love. Christ died, as we've already said, in order to atone for

our sins, to propitiate God's wrath, to cover our sins, to expiate our guilt, to make us be able to stand before God accepted. But as a consequent in that, we see God's love for us. He did not die merely to show God's love for us, but in dying to save us from our sins, He has shown us God's love for us.

Furthermore, I want you to note that Paul does not say, 'in this is love. God had only wrath for you, but because Christ died, Christ was able to entice His heavenly Father to love you.' That's not what Paul says. In Romans 5, chapter verse 8, Paul is not saying that Christ's death made God love us. The picture is not of the Lord Jesus on the cross when he says, "Father, forgive them," praying to some reluctant deity. He finds it so hard to bless His people who just wants to blast them into oblivion and has no love in His heart for them, and Jesus is somehow pleading with the heavenly Father, "Oh Father, love your people, please." That's not the picture at all. The cross is the expression of God's prior love for His people. If the Father had not loved His people, the cross would have never occurred. The cross doesn't make God the Father love His people. It is the expression, it is the consequence of God the Father's love for His people.

Paul is saying that this death of Christ is the very manifestation of the Father's heart of love for us. His love is unprecedented, and it's unparalleled, and it is yours if you believe on Him. It's an amazing thing.

Now maybe some of you are still wrestling with that. "Jesus Loves Me, This I Know." How do I know that. And maybe some of you are saying, "I have a hard time feeling that. I have a hard time accepting that. I have a hard time getting my head around that." I understand that. I've met a lot of Christians who have wrestled with that. But it's a reality, my friend, for every believer. Gordon Reed tells the story of a man who many years ago got on a riverboat in Cincinnati, Ohio, to make his way to New Orleans. He didn't have a lot of money. He spent almost all of his money to buy a ticket to get on the riverboat. He didn't have any money for food, except for a little bit while he was going to be on this fairly long journey. And so he bought himself a supply of crackers and cheese. He was embarrassed by his poverty, and so he hid himself from the other passengers so he hid himself from the other passengers at mealtime. He knew that he would never be able to afford to eat in the ornate dining room on the riverboat. And so for days at a time when it come mealtimes, he would hide himself and eat his crackers and cheese. About the time he got to Natchez, he bumped into a fellow passenger who befriended him, and at mealtime he was going to creep off and eat his crackers and cheese, and his friend said, "Where are you going? Aren't you coming to the dining hall." He said, "Oh no, I could never afford to go to the dining hall." And his friend said, "Take out your ticket." And his friend took out his ticket, and he said, "Now read it." And at the bottom of the ticket it said, "All meals included." Brister Ware tells me it's the same way on the train today. You buy a bed, you get your meals.

Some people forget that. My friends, if you're justified, it's not just that you can

be. It is that you are awash in the love of God. Have you read your ticket? Christ died for the ungodly. Now eat the feast. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, what wondrous love is this that the king of bliss died for the saving of our souls, and yet oh Lord, we live as such paupers that we don't realize the wealth of the love of Christ, which has been given to us. Help us this day to embrace it and to walk in it and to live in it and to walk in it and to breathe in it and to praise You for it, in Jesus' name, Amen.

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