



Smyrna Baptist Church
BUILDING FAMILIES ON CHRIST THE CORNERSTONE

A
Righteousness
from God

Paul's Letter to the Romans (Chapter 5)

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ONLY ONE

To Those Unaware

In the days leading up to Hurricane Katrina making landfall, many people in the city of New Orleans took for granted that they would not be harmed in the midst of the storm. They assumed it would not hit their city. They thought that it would veer off to the west or to the east, even as the days became nearer and nearer. The giant storm swirled in the Gulf of Mexico for days and days nearing the coast. Others thought that the huge, powerful monster storm would weaken before it hit shore. They thought, "It may come but it won't be that bad." Others, thought that they were strong enough to weather it. Some had no way out of the city. They were without transportation. In a sense they were powerless.

If I had gone to New Orleans before the storm hit, and offered a ride out of the city, few would have been willing to take me up on the offer. Once the storm hit, however, I had no trouble offering rides out of New Orleans. I personally carried out four van loads of New Orleans residents in my van. They all told me the same thing. They didn't think it would get THAT bad.

That is how many people are living today with regard to the imminent Day of Judgment. They do not tremble before the wrath of God. Though they are storing up for themselves wrath "on the day of wrath" they neither tremble nor flee. Until a man has met the guilt of his soul face to face and stared at the dark stain upon his soul that marks him for destruction will he ever seek a way of escape. Until a person has seen the gleam of the Sword of Judgment raised against him in the Law of God, he will content himself with trifling about God, Christ, repentance, and eternal life. They tell themselves that this storm is still far off, it does concern them; that it is meant for someone else; that it will either miss them or be bearable. Yet, all are powerless when it hits. God will be avenged upon his enemies. Those rebels ignoring the law of God will be unable to ignore his wrath against sin.

The Hope of Peace

1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.
Romans 5:1-4

The gospel message only makes sense to those aware of their offense to God. Those who assume themselves to be buddies with "the big fella" or "the man upstairs" have no knowledge of either their peril or guilt. But God has given the law so that we may know our sin and be led to the Savior. Chapter five begins with a great declaration based upon the argument of chapter four, namely, that we have been justified before God through faith. The great declaration is "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Most modern teaching about man and God is a mish-mash of "warm fuzzys" about God's love for all people no matter what they have done, are doing, or intend to do. He is just a kindly, toothless old soul grinning and winking at the silly mishaps of his grandchildren. No one wants to countenance the Biblical

declaration that all are under sin; that each has turned aside to his own way. That we have in our attitude, action, and will allied ourselves with the enemies of our Almighty Creator. Almost no one realizes nor admits, "I am an enemy of God." Everyone in his own mind is God's friend. Few know that God will grind sinners in the mill of his justice with astonishing fierceness. It ought to make our knees weak.

Does this offend you? Will He not deal with you thus? Have you not considered that God turned his fury and wrath against Jerusalem the Beloved City:

For thus says the Lord God, "How much more when I send My four severe plagues against Jerusalem: sword, famine, wild beasts, and plague to cut off man and beast from it!" Ezekiel 14:21

If this is how he dealt with Jerusalem when they turned aside for a generation, what will be the outcome for you who have spent your whole life despising His Word and breaking His law. Is it any wonder that it is called the great Day of the Lord?

Notice that the first mention of the love of God follows four chapters of teaching about guilt and offense against God. In chapter five, love is mentioned in connection with God's action in reconciling his enemies to himself. We have "gained access by faith." We can come to Him, whom we have offended. We "rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" whereas, apart from Christ, if we were truly aware of our situation, we would tremble in the dread of the wrath of God. The Gospel is good news! So great is the reversal of our situation that we can even "rejoice in our sufferings." These present predicaments gain us an even greater certainty of life to come. When we realize our impending judgment has been transformed into impending, eternal reward, we can face suffering, rejoicing in perseverance being produced in us. We realize that perseverance enables us to develop character. Character enables us to act more and more like the Savior who justifies us with a righteousness from God. We store up for ourselves "treasures in heaven" as we act with the character of Christ. This makes our expectation of heaven even greater.

Thus, our hope--already great--is increased. "He has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit." We, then, are rewarded by the appropriation by God's spirit of God's love. We receive the holy, sin-cleansing, soul-justifying, righteousness-bestowing, Father love. Those who are deluded with thoughts of God's feathery, gentle love no nothing of the true love of God--His fierce, holy, self-sacrificing love that converts the rebellious hearts of condemned enemies into the rejoicing hearts of His own dear children. You can have your soft-handed idol, with all his licentious indifference toward your sin. Give me the love of God shown at Calvary and poured out into my heart by his Spirit.

POWERLESS AND UNGODLY

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.
Romans 5:6

Have you ever been hit up by a pan-handler for some money? Last week in Memphis, two times someone asked me for money. Both times it was not only difficult for me to give to them, it was difficult for me to even want to give to them. I was suspicious of their motives. I was leery of their plans with my money. My initial thoughts were first, "Is this person going to rob me? Why doesn't he just get a job and earn his own money? Why should I give anything to him?" Basically, my thoughts all centered around one idea: these people don't deserve to be given anything. I didn't formulate that in detail in my thoughts, but that was the basic, underlying thought. How much money would you be willing to give to a pan-handler? A

twenty? Fifty? Maybe it's Christmas and you feel generous: You slide him a hundred.

Now ask yourself: would I die for that person? Why not? Yet that is exactly what Christ has done for those pan-handlers and for you. They have nothing of their own. They have no particular reason to be given anything. They are powerless to purchase anything, what's more they are ungodly, and will probably squander what is given to them. You, the benevolent, are just as powerless, likewise ungodly, and just as unlikely a candidate to receive the greatest treasure in all creation.

God knew it would come to this. The world would be swallowed up in sin. Therefore, from the beginning he had planned to redeem out of this world those who would be joined to Him by faith in Christ. Jesus is the Lamb, "slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). You are chosen "in him before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). God had orchestrated the events of history down to the time of the Christ—the appointed time—"just the right time." God directed the events that led Israel into the Promised Land for one ultimate purpose. It was not because that land was the greatest in all the earth. It was not that the land was any more fertile or beautiful. God led Israel to the Promised Land because he had sworn on an oath to Abraham to give the land to his descendants. But why did he swear that oath in the first place? Because he had appointed a hill in Judah, outside the city of Jerusalem, from the foundation of the world as an altar of sacrifice where the Lamb of God would be slain at "just the right time" to "take away the sins of the world."

You could no more have brought yourself out of the quicksand of sin and judgment than a tree can uproot itself in the day of drought and wildfire. We are not merely weakened by sin. Humanity has been left "powerless." We are not only a little less than we would have been. We are without any moral or spiritual force to extract ourselves from sin. We are like a little mouse caught in a sticky trap. The more it struggles to get free, the less it is free. It is simply in worse condition than before. It can only wait until its feeble heart finally faints in exhaustion.

The verse above also says that we are not only powerless, but ungodly. That is a powerful and condemning charge. Ask most anyone if they are ungodly, and he will reply: "Certainly not." Ungodly. No, we are decent people. Not ungodly. We are upstanding citizens, not ungodly. We are respectful folks, not ungodly. Ungodly? Bah. But the conscience admits what pride will not. Bring the light of the law around to shine upon your heart. Then is the gospel proved true: "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19).

Jesus, the Christ, died for powerless, ungodly people at the God-appointed time. In fact, he died for powerless, ungodly you at just the right time. God has been orchestrating the events of your life to lead you to Himself. Your wilderness of sin has brought you to the conviction of your guilt. Your guilt before Him has brought you in trembling search for a Savior. And God has brought you now within the glad-sounds of His good-news:

7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! 10 For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! 11 Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.
Romans 5:7-11

Repent. Confess before the Almighty your sin. Believe the Gospel, and be delivered...today.