

Passing the Baton – Part III

Romans 5:5b-11

October 2, 2022

Most of us live in a safe and conflict-free environment, thinking that only special people can endure great challenges for the sake of the gospel, including mocking, rejection and persecution. The idea may be foreign to us, but Christian missionaries or pastors or anyone who is totally surrendered for the sake of the gospel will tell us that this is the normal Christian life. Paul exhorts us in 2 Corinthians 5:15 that since Christ “died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.” Living for Christ means continuing His work: reconciling people to God, and this involves risk; often great risk. Today Christians are being martyred all over the world for the sake of Christ.

As Paul continued the exposition of reconciliation in his letter to the Corinthian church we are reminding us that:

1. Anyone in Christ is a new creation (v. 17)
2. This new creation is the work of God through Christ, who reconciled us to God (v. 18)
3. This ministry of reconciliation has been given to us (vv. 18-19)
4. We are ambassadors for Christ with God making His appeal through us (v. 20)
5. Christ’s great work of reconciliation was taking our sin upon Himself and giving us His righteousness (v. 21)

Our ministry of reconciliation is to help others come into a right relationship with God, i.e., a state of righteousness. All Christians should be engaged in this ministry, even though it comes with a high cost. However, we must remember that the high cost to us is insignificant to the cost the Father paid: the sacrifice of His Son at Calvary to purchase us. In passing the baton to the next generation we need to be convinced that the ministry of reconciliation is worth the cost. In Romans 5:1-11 Paul claims that there is glory in peace (v.1), hope (v.2), suffering (vv.3-5a), and reconciliation (vv.5b-11). Paul could endure sufferings because of the peace in his own reconciliation, his hope of heaven, and his joy in the ministry of reconciliation.

In our busy lives, how much time do we spend thinking about heaven? Probably not much. Paul was probably far busier than we -- with, preaching, teaching, writing, evangelizing, praying for churches and individuals – yet his writings reflect that heaven was frequently on his mind. See for example: Romans 8:18, 23; 2 Corinthians 5:1,6,8; Philippians 1:21-23; Philippians 3:20 and 2 Timothy 4:6-8. We too can count suffering as joy (James 1:2) if we keep in mind what Paul said in Romans 8:18, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” Though in a different context, Jesus said the sorrow

that His disciples would experience when He departed could be compared to the sorrow experienced by a woman giving birth (John 16:21). We need to teach the same message: the joy that follows ridicule, rejection, or persecution makes the sorrow worthwhile. The baton we pass to the next generation needs to include the fact that we should not fear death because the joy of heaven far exceeds any tribulations on earth.

Previous sermons on Romans 5:1-5a have revealed the following outline.

- I. **Peace (v. 1)**
- II. **Hope (v. 2)**
- III. **Suffering (vv. 3-5a)**

Today we consider the fourth theme of this section of Scripture: reconciliation.

IV. Reconciliation (vv. 5b-11)

Reconciliation is the work of God through Christ that restores the relationship that was broken by sin. At its core, reconciliation is love. Before Adam sinned, he and Eve had an unbroken fellowship with God. Before becoming a Christian, all people are in Adam, that is, he is our Federal Head – he represents us. After coming to faith in Christ, we have Christ as our new Federal Head – He represents us. Many people find it hard to accept the fact that before coming to faith in Christ, we were *enemies* of God (Romans 5:10) and, in today's Scripture, Paul tells us that we are weak, ungodly and sinners. We tend to think too highly of ourselves. In Romans 3:10-11 Paul paraphrases Psalm 14:1-3 – no one is righteous, no not one, no one does good. He points out that in Adam we died (1 Corinthians 15:22) and Ephesians 2:1-2 confirms that we were dead in the trespasses and sins in which we once walked. We can have no basis for boasting in our goodness (Ephesians 2:9).

- **Walk in love (vv. 5b-8)**

Unconditional love motivates God to reconcile sinners. Verse 5b says that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." God intends that the love He has poured into us flow out to others. We also are to be engaged in the ministry of reconciliation. We can't do this alone; the ministry of reconciliation is dependent on God's Holy Spirit. Jesus promised that the Father would send them a Helper (The Holy Spirit) who would be with them forever (John 14:15-16), and rivers of living water would flow out of the hearts of those who believe in Him (John 7:38). This source of this water is not in the believer; the source is God – we are simply a channel through which the living water flows to a lost and dying world.

People need each other. In Romans 1:11-12, Paul said, “For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.” We need to be encouraged by other believers and we need to encourage them. We keep returning to the central message of Paul’s letter, as expressed in verses 16 and 17 of Chapter 1: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’” One of the reasons why we need encouragement is expressed in Romans 8:16-17, “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” Then in writing to Timothy, Paul declares that “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” (2 Timothy 3:12) We need each other to endure the persecution that we know will come if we are serious about living for Christ.

In our study of the Gospel of John, Jesus told us that He had appointed us to bear fruit (John 15:16). In Paul’s listing of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, love comes first. In 1 Corinthians 13:13, Paul states that faith, hope and love are fruits that endure, with the greatest being love. God’s love comes when we are weak and powerless, when we are sinners, when we are ungodly, when we are His enemies. Why would God do this? 1 John 4:8 and 4:16 proclaim that *God is love*—that is why God loves sinners. 1 John 4:11 challenges us: “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” God loved us and died for us when we hated Him. Think about the people who love you. Would you die for them? Would you die for those who hate you? In Jesus’s sermon on the mountain, he said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” (Matthew 5:43-44) God loved us when we were unlovable, and we must also love the unlovable. If Jesus was ministering on earth today, would He be found in mega-churches or slums?

Paul writes to the Ephesian church telling them that they were dead in sins and trespasses, and by nature children of *wrath*, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved.” (Ephesians 2:1-6) Starting in Romans 1:18 and up through Romans 4:15, Paul speaks about God’s wrath being poured out against sinners, but then in Romans 5:9 he explains that some sinners are chosen (elected) to be saved from God’s wrath. In Romans 9:13-16 Paul wrote, “As it is written, ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’ What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! For he says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’” So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.” This is a difficult concept for many. We

don't know why God would choose some and not others, but we know that He does (Not everyone goes to heaven.) and we do know that God is love and He is perfectly just in all He does. God exercises wrath as He sees fit. We are to exercise love! If reconciliation is important to us, the love that is poured into our hearts must flow out to others. When we remember what Christ has done for us, transforming lowly sinners into saints, we will be driven to share the gospel in love with those outside of Christ; this is one aspect of walking in love.

Though in constant danger from many sources (See 2 Corinthians 11:22-29), Paul was at complete peace. The baton that we pass to the next generation includes peace. We saw that there two distinct typed of peace: peace of God and peace with God. The first is a subjective peace that may fluctuate with circumstances whereas the second is objective peace, a peace that is based on the work and promises of God. God does not change (Malachi 3:6) and neither do His promises. The next generation needs to see our confidence in God and His provision – even if His provision includes persecution.

The fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control provides emotional encouragement. If love is hindered, we feel distant from God. If we have sinned against a brother or sister in Christ, we feel awkward being around them, and love is hindered. We also feel awkward around God, knowing that He is with us in His Holy Spirit. Understand that God's love for His children is never hindered. If we are a child of God, His love for us is perfect (complete). His love will neither increase nor decrease because of our sin, but we know that we can grieve The Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). If you have unconfessed sin in your life, don't try to sweep it under the rug. Your feelings of awkwardness around God will not go away until you come clean. A significant factor in the ministry of reconciliation is helping others get back into fellowship with God. Paul advised us on how to do this in Galatians 6:1-2, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." We should confront a brother or sister in Christ with their sin, but we must be certain that our challenge is based on fact, and in love, not condemnation.

- **Abide in love (vv. 9-10)**

When Paul wrote to the Ephesian church, he prayed that they would be strengthened in their inner being, that Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith, that they would be rooted and grounded in love, that they would comprehend the breadth, length, height, and depth of Christ's love, and that they would be filled with the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:16-19) When Jesus dictated a letter to this church through the Apostle John (Revelation 2:1-7), He chastised

them for having lost their first love. They had lost their sincere love of God and, hence, were not able to love the saints either. Paul wanted the Ephesians to know in depth the love of Christ as demonstrated by the suffering He endured for us. If we have a love of God and a desire to be a reconciler, then we can minister effectively to those who feel disconnected from God.

The promise of reconciliation is justification, sanctification, and glorification. Believers have been saved (justification), are being saved (sanctification) and will be saved (glorification) – have been saved from the penalty of sin, are being saved from the power of sin, and will be saved from the temptation of sin. Justification and glorification are solely the work of God.

Sanctification is a cooperative process whereby we become more like Christ as we rely on the Holy Spirit to combat the sin in our life. It is important to keep in mind 1 Corinthians 10:13, “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

When we recognize a sin in our life we must confess it, trust that God will enable us to repent, and believe that He has removed that sin as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). We all have a besetting sin, a sin that seems to constantly attack us, and this may cause us to doubt our salvation. We may also doubt when we compare our spiritual progress with another person in similar circumstances. Doubts are caused by our sin (internal) and by Satan (external) when he calls us to question God. We may doubt when trials come in our life. We may question the goodness of God in allowing these trials to come to us. Passing the baton demands that we give the next generation a proper biblical understanding of trials and suffering. This will help quell the doubts that they will certainly face from an unbelieving world.

What must we do when confronted by doubts? Cast our cares on Jesus (1 Peter 5:7). If the doubts are due to our sin, we find great comfort in Jesus’s parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector praying in the temple (Luke 18:10-14). The Pharisee made a self-righteous boasting about his merits while the tax collector prayed “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” He is the one who went home justified. This is the example we must follow: admit our sin and ask God to be merciful. If the doubts are planted by Satan, we need to remember that he is toothless tiger, a defeated foe.

Abiding in love is also abiding in Christ, abiding in our salvation, and abiding in our reconciliation. Jesus spoke about abiding in Him in John 15. Abiding in Christ results in much spiritual fruit (v. 5), and this glorifies the Father (v. 8). Our abiding in Christ is reflected in our service and in our teaching. Minimally we must be teaching our children, a very important aspect of passing the baton, but we should also be teaching others the oracles (truths) of God.

The author of Hebrews expresses his frustration that the believers were not able to teach because they are babes in Christ; they could not even discern good and evil. (Hebrews 5:11-14) What is the result? One commentator said: "Despite their initial enthusiasm as a Christian, a certain sluggishness has crept into their faith which presents itself as an unwillingness or even an inability to communicate truth. They may now be unwilling to work out the deeper implications of the gospel and respond with faith and obedience. One sign of the slackness in their life is their inability or unwillingness to be a teacher. After a certain time, anyone in the faith ought to be able to explain that faith to others. When a slackness settles in, there is no room for solid food, and they must feed on milk once again. In this instance, it is a serious case that arrested spiritual growth had developed." Here we have someone who has been a Christian for a while and needs to communicate truth yet has no desire to communicate truth or who lacks the confidence to do so. Every believer should be able to teach others the essential truths of the Christian faith. If you are not moving forward in your faith, you are moving backward; there is no stagnating.

If you think you are not equipped to share the gospel, you need to understand that the ability does not come from within. Peter tells us that "His [God's] divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness." (2 Peter 1:3) Too often believers feel inadequate to help those who struggle with depression or with spiritual problems, so we send them to a therapist. While a professional might be appropriate in some cases, all believers should be able to sit down with such a person and explore together what the Scriptures say about their problem. Sometimes, the person just needs the encouragement of knowing that someone else cares and loves them. Another part of passing the baton is encouraging others in their faith and being willing and able to help them deal with the problems of life. Remind them of their justification; remind them of the great love of God. If their issue is sin, share 1 John 2:1 with them, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Jesus is our defense attorney against the accusations of Satan. If they seem not to be true believers, share the gospel with them. But, if we are still feeding on milk rather than solid food and don't know the Scriptures, we can't do this; the baton gets dropped. Become a teacher in someone else's life.

- **Joy in love (v. 11)**

Paul says, "More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." We rejoice in the fact that God is who He says He is. We need to celebrate God and, as we celebrate God, we should be living a life that is constantly bringing attention to the reconciliation we have with Him, constantly living a life of celebration. This is what we should do when we come together on Sunday mornings. It is a time of

celebration; we are reminded of our reconciliation, reminded of what God has done for us, reminded of the hope we have, reminded of the peace we have, reminded of the suffering we have. As we rejoice in the Lord, we simply invite others to join with us in the celebration. This is the message of Psalm 34:3, "Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!" This is the normal Christian life; we just walk along side of others and joy in the Lord. "For our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name." (Psalm 33:21) How can we have a perspective on life that will encourage us to make difficult decisions for the gospel and endure difficult circumstance for the gospel ministry? Since we have been justified, rejoice in God, give glory to God, give glory in your peace, in your hope, in your suffering and in your reconciliation.

Selah:

1. What does walking-in-love mean to you?
2. How would someone know that you are abiding in Christ' love?
3. What is the source of your greatest joy?