

The Benefits of God's Grace

Romans 5:1-11

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A common refrain we hear today when someone is asked to do something is, "What's in it for me?" It is a sad commentary on our society. It says we are rather selfish and find little joy in helping or serving others. Often, someone applying for a job will ask about salary and vacation time before they ask what the job entails. Those are the same people who are surprised when they don't get hired. Even people getting married tend to look at what they hope to get from a marriage well before they ask what they can bring to the marriage.

This same thing happens when people look at the gospel. They want to know, "Why should I believe in Jesus?" "How is this going to benefit me?" When the first question they should be asking is: Is what Christianity teaches true? And if it is, how do I become part of this family of believers?

For four chapters, it seems like Paul has spent all his time showing us that we DESERVE nothing. God does not have to give us anything. He doesn't need us. We need Him desperately. Paul has emphasized that we cannot earn our salvation. We are completely dependent on God's mercy and His grace.

However, there are some real benefits once we have humbled ourselves and come to Him seeking what He alone can give. In the first four chapters, we have been told what is needed in our lives and that only through faith in Christ can we get what we so desperately need. As we begin chapter 5 we are told how God blesses those who turn and trust and follow Him. In Romans 5:1-11 we will look at four benefits of faith in Christ and we will be reminded once again about how those benefits come to us.

Peace with God

Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us.

Ever since the sin in the Garden of Eden, mankind has been opposing God. In fact, God removed Adam and Eve from the Garden and put a guard there so they could not return. All of history up until the time of Christ was characterized by man's striving against God. People wanted God's benefits but did not want Him. At one time, all of us did the same thing. In Ephesians 2 Paul says, "By our very nature we were subject to God's anger." By nature, we are opponents of God.

However, once we are made right with God this all changes. We now know peace with God because of Christ's work as our atoning sacrifice. (As our substitute facing the just judgment for our sin). Peace has been declared, the war is over.

Notice the text says, "we have been made right in God's sight. . ." That is past tense. We don't have to wait for Heaven for forgiveness new life, and a restored relationship with God. It is immediate. As soon as we genuinely seek, trust, and surrender to Him, we are made right in God's sight. We saw this last week. Our sin is taken by Christ and His righteousness is put on us. The stain is removed and our record is clean. You may still be hanging on to guilt and regret but

you don't need to do so. God has marked your account "paid in full." We need to understand this concept of the immediate forgiveness of sin and restoration of our relationship with God before this peace can ever be part of our lives. As long as we are churning about our past sin we cannot know peace.

Peace as used here means the absence of war or conflict. Metaphorically, it means "peace of mind, tranquility, arising from reconciliation with God and a sense of His divine favor." In John 14:27 Jesus said "I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid."

We can fret about many things in life, but we don't need to. Our sins have been forgiven; our slate has been wiped clean, and our relationship with God has been restored. The conflicts and evil of the world are significant, but the biggest conflict in our lives, whether we realize it or not, has been with the Lord. These other conflicts in the world are no longer a threat because we belong to the One who is over all things.

Access to God (v. 2)

I cannot imagine how wonderful it was to be Adam and Eve. We are told they not only talked with God but also walked with Him. They had an access that was unknown by every other creature. But when sin entered, access was cut off. God is holy and will not compromise with evil.

All throughout the Old Testament we see the difficulty of gaining access to God. The Israelites were instructed not to touch the Ark of the Covenant as it was transported throughout the wilderness wanderings. The idea was that the touch of sinful man would defile the Ark more than if it was dropped on the ground. (Which is why Uzzah was killed when he tried to steady the Ark when the oxen stumbled in 2 Samuel 6). When Moses went up to Mt Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments, Israel was instructed not even to touch the mountain, or they would die. People were kept from God. The distance felt great.

In Ephesians 3 we read these words from Paul

I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, ¹⁰so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹²in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

In verse 2 we read "Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand." This place of "undeserved privilege" is translated "access" in Ephesians, and I think it gives a clearer picture of what is being described. We now have access to God.

One of the things that was the most fun about hosting Christian concerts was the chance to get to know the artists on a personal level. We got to meet them as people and not just a stage presence. Because we were the hosts, we had access to these artists. Some of you may have gotten backstage passes to meet an artist or ballplayer. This is access. Barriers are removed.

If you had someone who was a stranger off the street ask to enter your home, you would resist. But, if your child came back from college with a stranger who was their friend, you would welcome them warmly. Why? Because they were your child's friend. In like manner we have access with God because Jesus brings us to Him. We can talk with Him, call upon Him and meet with Him anytime we want.

Joy and Hope in the Trials of Life.

Paul next writes,

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Let's face it, this is a hard one. The idea of rejoicing in trials is not something we would call a *benefit* of our salvation. We generally groan under trials, we don't rejoice in them. Paul says we should. The word for "rejoice" usually describes boasting or celebration. The word for "Sufferings" refers to trouble from external factors like wars, famine, disease and heartache. The reason Paul says we can rejoice in these horrible times is because we know God is at work through and in these times. He uses them to make us or our witness stronger. He builds character in us through these times. People see a believer's faithfulness in the time of trial, and it speaks much more powerfully than any sermon that can be delivered.

It is a known fact that struggle, failure, and disappointment (when overcome) provides some of the richest lessons we learn in life. Our character and faith deepen when we persevere in these times and emerge whole. No one signs up for this "class," but as we look back, we usually see the most profound lessons of our lives come from these situations.

Why can we rejoice?

- We rejoice over physical trials not only that there are people who can help us but also because we are looking forward to the day when we will be given a new incorruptible body because of the resurrection of Jesus.
- We rejoice over losses because we know those who have trusted Christ die and go to be with the Lord (which is better by far), and we will see them again.
- We rejoice because in the time of suffering we will meet people we would not meet any other way and we get the chance to point them to the One who can make their life new.
- We rejoice because the times of suffering give us the opportunity to exercise our faith in ways we cannot exercise it when things are going well.
- We rejoice that the time of suffering will knock off some of our hard edges and help us to grow softer as well as deeper.
- We rejoice in financial stress because we will get to see the Lord supply all our needs.

For the non-believer tough times usually make them angry, militant, cynical, and calloused. They often feel a sense of crisis and despair. They may withdraw and often turn further from the Lord.

We have the foundational truth that we know God loves us. We also know He has promised to never leave us or forsake us. And we know He has promised that nothing can ever take us from His hand. This is the basis of our joy, even in the time of suffering.

Hope

The last benefit we see in this section is “hope.” The Bible describes hope with a metaphor: hope is the anchor of our soul. It gives us stability even in the tempest. Biblical hope differs from the hope we often see in our world. The world around us takes a deep breath and hopes everything will turn out all right. Biblical hope might be better thought of as confidence. We are confident because we trust in the Lord's word and promises.

A child has this kind of hope when a parent tells them to jump into their arms and promises to catch them. The child is confident the parent will catch them because the parent have always been trustworthy in the past. In like manner, we trust God's promises

- We are confident of support from the God who loves us.
- We are confident of life beyond the grave because of the resurrection of Jesus.
- We are confident the Lord will return again just as the disciples saw Him go into Heaven.
- We are confident the Lord is working in and through us in ways we cannot possibly imagine.
- We are confident living according to God's standards is far superior to living according to the ways of men because on those occasions we have done so, we have seen this.
- We are confident nothing can separate us from His love because that is what He said.

You have probably met people who always seem to have a positive attitude. No matter what happens. They are so positive that sometimes you just want to slap them. But, in reality, isn't this the way believers should be? We know our lives are not adrift. We know God is doing something in our lives that will bring him honor and in the end will bring overwhelming joy. There should be a sense in which we should be looking at obstacles with excitement, wondering what God is up to, and what will He accomplish through these difficult times. This deep hope and confidence changes our whole approach to life and its difficulties. We are unique in this outlook because we belong to Lord God Almighty, who has demonstrated His love for us over and over. And this is what Paul looks at next.

A Staggering Love

⁶For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—
⁸but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Verse 6 is a reminder of what Paul has told us before. First, notice that Christ did not die for us when we were at our best. He died for us, He loved us, when we were at our worst. He uses the terms “weak” and “ungodly.” It was our Lord who took the initiative toward us. This is incredibly humbling and leads us to ask, “Why me, Lord?”

We are told that He came at “just the right time.” The time of Jesus was a unique time in history. Peace reigned in the Roman Empire. Because of the Romans, the roads system was excellent, facilitating the spread of the gospel message. The world of the Bible spoke a common language, (Greek) which enabled the Word of God to be communicated to people in a way and pace that could not have happened in the

days that came before. The Lord had all the pieces in place. If you look it up, Jesus fulfilled scores of prophecies. History seemed to come to a head with the birth of Christ in Bethlehem.

Paul next shows us what a remarkable thing it was that God did for us. He appeals to our experience. He says few of us would die for another. Perhaps you would do so for your spouse, your children or your grandchildren. Paul says we might even do it for someone we considered especially good or valuable to society. We know that the entire Secret Service would give their lives to protect the President of the United States because of what that office represents. Soldiers would give their lives for their brothers in an act of heroism. However, Paul points out, we would not willingly give our lives for someone who hated us or tormented us.

But this is not the kind of sacrifice the Lord made. He died for us while we were still sinners, antagonists, enemies. He died for us even though we are hot-tempered, moody, materialistic, and very stubborn. God looked past all those things and saw a potential in us that we do not see in ourselves.

Paul reminds us that God's love made it possible for us to be declared innocent (justified) and saved from God's wrath (which we deserved). This reality gives us the confidence that we will be saved by His life. We will live beyond the grave. We have been reconciled to the One who is above all things. And because this we can rejoice. And this leads to our conclusions from this passage.

Conclusions

First, **we should always stand in awe of God's Love for us.** Thinking about His love should stagger and move us. Perhaps you are like me, it is hard to sing the lyrics of some songs because of the staggering truth they convey. For example, the line from "How Great Thou Art"

And when I think that God His Son not sparing
Sent Him to die I scarce can take it.
That on the cross my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin.

And then there are the powerful lyrics to "The power of the cross." Here's the verse that always gets me,

Oh to see my name written in the wounds
For through Your suff'ring I am free
Death is crushed to death life is mine to live
Won through Your selfless love
This the pow'r of the cross
Son of God slain for us
What a love what a cost
We stand forgiven at the cross

If you grasp the depth of meaning in these words, there is no room for boasting.

Second, **we should be the most joy-filled people in the world.** While the rest of the world is running around like Chicken Little screaming that the world is going to end if we don't pass certain laws, get a good return from our stocks, avoid any threat of war, have our candidate win a particular election, or

bludgeon others to agree with us on everything. We know who is on the throne over all things. We know that God works in EVERY situation in our lives. God is guiding the course of history to bring Him glory and honor.

Even in the worst of times, we rejoice that God does not waste our pain, instead, He redeems that pain and uses it to accomplish His purpose in us and in those around us. The gospel is good news, even on bad days. We would be much more effective in our witness if we let our face in on the good news so the world could see our confidence even in the toughest of times.

Third, **we should face our society's turmoil with calm and hope.** This is especially noteworthy in an election year, when crime rates are spiking, and foundational truths (gender, marriage, and the right to life) are being debated and altered.

Being a Christian doesn't mean we bury our heads in the sand or completely withdraw from life. We should look at issues and take part in our civic responsibility. To that end, we can campaign, run for office, and support a particular candidate. Where we must be different is we have an eternal perspective on things. No candidate, issue, or political persuasion holds our future in its hands . . . only the Lord holds our future. He is the One whom we serve above all others. It is our job to make the best decisions possible regarding politics and social involvement while at the same time reminding us that this world is not our home. We are citizens in another land.

Finally, we should love more fervently than anyone else on the planet. We know how valuable each human being is. The Son of God was sent to save anyone who has faith in Him, giving everyone inherent value.

Think about a mom who goes into labor. She endures the pain, sometimes for a long time. When that baby is born, it doesn't matter whether other people see flaws or believe the child is beautiful (which is such a superficial evaluation of a human being). That mother and father will treat their child as the most beautiful baby they have seen. That is because they see that child through the eyes of love. They, if you will, see that child with the eyes of God. And we should look at those around us in the same way. No matter who the individual is, or what we think that person has done to disqualify themselves from respect and honor, we need to remember one thing: this is a person for whom Jesus came to give His life.

It is a sad reality that the church in the present is known more for what we are against than what we are for. We are seen as angry rather than loving. This shows we have lost our way. It is not our job to shame or marginalize anyone—even people we believe are heading down the wrong path or hold a vastly different view from us. Here's what we need to remember: we were that person going down the wrong path at one time! People will not be won by Christ with a clenched fist, raised voice, or ridiculed and shamed. People are won by Christ when they see His attitude and love in how we treat them.

So there you have it. When people ask what is so great about the gospel? Or if they ask, "Why should I become a Christian? What's in it for me?" You can take them to Romans 5 and read them these verses. We can show them how much God loves them and then tell them about the peace, access (or relationship) with God, joy (yes, even in hard times), and the hope resulting from Christ's transforming love. And hopefully, they will say, "If Jesus can do in me, what He has obviously done in you, then tell me more.

