

Communion

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[0 : 0 0] Well, please turn back in your Bibles to Romans chapter 5 and the passage that we read there at the beginning of the chapter, and we're going to read again verses 6 to 11 and spend a wee bit of time looking at these together. I've got the verses on the screens, but I should just mention that when I prepared the slides, I prepared them from the ESV, so if you're looking at the NIV, the wording will be slightly different, but the meaning is exactly the same. So we're going to focus on verses 6 to 11. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him? For if, while 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?

Not only this is so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. The great theme of this letter is the gospel. In Paul's letter to the Romans, he's explaining to these Christians living in Rome how the good news of Jesus Christ works. And last night we looked together at the great verses in chapter 1, where Paul says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel, because it's the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes. And that was the great theme of Paul's life. He was not ashamed of the gospel. In fact, he was the very opposite. He lived his whole life standing up for the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ. And so he starts the letter with these great words in chapter 1, and then in the rest of the letter of Romans, Paul gives a great explanation as to how that gospel works. And in doing so, Paul presents a very logical and coherent argument. And between chapters 1 through to chapter 5, he's presenting some key truths to the Christians in Rome and to us as well. We can summarize these first five chapters of Rome in three very basic headings. Paul starts off by talking about our situation before our conversion. So halfway through chapter 1, he starts to explain why we need to be saved, why we need the gospel. He emphasizes that before our conversion, we are all confronted with a huge amount of problems. So we are unrighteous, we are under God's law, under the scrutiny of God's law. As a result, we're liable to judgment, and we fall far, far short of the glory of God. In other words, we're sinners. And Paul sums it up really powerfully at the early part of chapter 3 when he says, no one is righteous, no, not one.

Then Paul explains what happens at conversion. He talks about how before the conversion we are unrighteous, unrighteous, under the law and liable to judgment. He then talks about what happens at conversion. Now that didn't come up with the slide I want. All my slides have gone. Oh, there we are.

That's it there. Excellent. I was pressing the wrong button. There we are. At conversion. There we are. And he says, at conversion, we're justified. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we are declared righteous.

This is because Jesus has died in our place, and that death has served to turn away the wrath of God. It's an atoning sacrifice that restores our relationship with him. A great exchange has taken place. So our sin is accounted to Jesus. His righteousness is accounted to us. And as a result, our status is transformed, absolutely transformed. Instead of being condemned, we are justified.

[4 : 1 8] All because Jesus was condemned in our place. So he talks about what happens before conversion. He talks about what happens at conversion. And then he goes on to talk about after conversion.

He goes on to say that as a result of our justification, we have all sorts of extraordinary privileges. So we have peace with God, which we read at the beginning of chapter 5. We also have access to

God. We have hope. We have hope. And God, the Holy Spirit himself, is dwelling in our hearts and pouring out God's love into us. It's a really important thing to remember that although justification is a really, really important part of the gospel, it's not the conclusion of the gospel. If anything, it is just the start for those who are justified, for those who put their trust in Jesus, an abundance of amazing blessings poured out as a result. So Paul takes us on this journey in chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 in Romans. He looks at our situation before conversion, at conversion, and then after conversion.

That takes us up to chapter 5, verse 5. But Paul still wants to tell us more.

And that's what I want us to focus on today. And we're going to do so just under two very simple headings. Paul wants to tell us something about our past, and he wants to tell us something about our future. So first of all, something about our past. In this chapter, Paul has been describing some of the amazing blessings that we have as Christians. You can see that in verses 1 to 5.

That's what we now are. That's what we now have, if we are those who are putting our trust in Jesus. But then, in verses 6 to 8, he goes back into the past again, and he starts to talk about what we were.

And as he does so, Paul is giving us an answer to a vital question. When did God start loving us? If you look at that diagram, before, at, after, we need to ask the question, when does God start to love us? At what stage does God love us?

[6 : 47] Well, it's definitely clear that he loves us after conversion, doesn't it? Because we've got peace with him. So instead of being God's enemies, we're now his friends. We have access to him. He's given us wonderful promises that give us hope. He himself has come to dwell in our hearts. And that's one of the astounding blessings of being a Christian, that we are children who are dearly loved by their father.

God definitely loves us at that point after conversion. But that's not when God starts to love us. So we can go back a step to the moment of our conversion.

Maybe that's when God starts to love us. Because you can definitely see here that God loves us. By trusting in Jesus, we are united to him in his death on the cross. That's where God has made the great provision of his son for our salvation. And that's where we are united to him. And through faith, we simply depend on everything that God in his love has done for us. But that's still not when God started loving you. Because the great point that Paul is making in these verses is that God's love for us does not begin after conversion. It doesn't begin at conversion.

It starts long, long, long before we ever come to faith. And here we are seeing that the great foundation of the gospel from beginning to end is the love of God. And it's reminding us of a very, very important point.

It's easy to think that God loves us because of the cross. So we think to ourselves, well, at the cross, our sin is covered. Our debt is paid. And because reconciliation is made at the cross between us and God, as a result, God can stop being our enemies and start being our friends. He can stop hating us and start loving us all because of the cross. It's easy to think that God loves us because of the cross. But that's not what the Bible teaches. It's not that Jesus died on the cross and then as a result, God loves us. The truth is the other way around. The truth is that God loves us. And as a result, Jesus had to go to the cross and die for our sins. And that's what Paul emphasizes in these verses. And he talks about our pre-conversion state in three ways. He talks about first how we are weak, and he talks about weak or powerless. He talks about how we are ungodly, and he talks about how we are sinners. He says there in verse six that we were still powerless. That can also be translated that we're still weak. And it basically conveys the idea of being feeble or ill or sick. And so in terms of our resources before God, we're weak and powerless. In terms of our ability to reach his standards, we don't have the strength. We're not able to do it. And in terms of our moral condition, we're sick.

[10 : 17] We're helpless and destitute. Paul says at the same time that we are ungodly as well. That basically means that we live without any regard for God. So not only are people powerless and weak before God, they're also uninterested in him. We don't live our lives referring to God or focused on God or dedicated to him. We're just not interested in being committed to him in any way.

We've got little time for him and no reverence towards him. Instead, we're quite happy to indulge in all sorts of ungodless, all sorts of godless living. So we're powerless, we're ungodly. And Paul also emphasizes that we are sinners. Not only are we weak, not only are we living in regret with regard for God, but we are actually in active rebellion against him. So God has his standards of righteousness, this perfect standard of righteousness, and we don't reach it. In many ways, we

push against it.

And we don't want to conform to God's ways. We miss the mark, we fall short, and we're guilty sinners. Paul is saying we're weak, ungodly sinners. We have to pause and ask ourselves and say, is Paul right? Is that a fair assessment of humanity? Well, you only have to look at the world around you to see that that's true. And we see that in terms of our powerlessness, humanity has not conquered sin. We haven't broken the power of sin. You look at the world around us, it's still wrecked by addiction. There's still corruption throughout every part of the world, even in the most advanced countries. And people are still horribly cruel to one another. Paul's absolutely right. The human race is still sick and weak. In terms of ungodliness, you see that we're still, as a nation, in so many ways, living without thought for God or reverence towards him. And in terms of being sinners, as we said last night, it's one of the easiest doctrines of the Bible to prove. It's all around us. We are weak, ungodly, ungodly, and sinful. And all of these realities wreck our lives. So our weakness and powerlessness makes us prone to hurt others and exposes us to be hurt by them, ourselves. Ungodliness means that people are living in a world where they just do what's right in their own eyes. And often that means just doing things that benefit themselves. And our sin means that instead of following God's perfect ways for humanity, we end up doing all sorts of awful things to ourselves and to others. Now that's a bit of a bleak summary of humanity and of the situation. But it's the reality we see around us. And all of that makes us very unlovable.

[13:42] So our weakness makes us unattractive. Our ungodliness makes us incompatible with God.

Our sin makes us enemies of God. And in the midst of all of that mess, what does God think of you? The answer is He loves you. And that's what's absolutely extraordinary about the gospel. Even though sin has caused havoc in our lives, even though it's given countless reasons why we are unlovable, even though it's wrecked our relationship with God, and even though sin is incredibly powerful in terms of mucking up your life and mine and the life of the world around us, yet at the same time, sin is absolutely powerless in terms of quenching God's love for you.

And so that's why Paul can say it was while we were still weak and powerless, it's while we were ungodly, while we were sinners, God still loved us.

And He showed that love by sending His Son to die for us. And that's why the cross is not the cause of God's love.

[15:18] The cross is the proof of God's love for you. And Paul makes that very, very clear. He says that God shows His love to us, or He demonstrates His love towards us in verse 8.

I forgot my glasses, so I can't actually read the screen there. I have to turn around. Shows, it says in the ESV, and demonstrates, it says in the NIV. Both are conveying the same truth.

It's conveying the idea that God's love is shown in terms of something that He's done, making something known by action. Literally, the word means to stand beside.

So, in other words, if you ask the question, where does God stand in terms of His love for you? The answer is that He stands at the cross, and He says, this is the proof that I love you.

The cross demonstrates and proves the reality of God's love for you. It's an amazing reminder that God doesn't just say He loves us. He makes that love known by action.

[16:34] So, does the proof of God's love lie in your feelings, in terms of feeling that God's really pleased with you, that you're doing really well in your Christian life? Does the proof of God's love lie in your feelings?

No. Does it lie in your qualities, in that you can come to this church and do loads of stuff, and you're able to do wonderful different things, because you've got all sorts of different gifts? No. Does the proof of God's love lie in your actions, in the stuff that you do day to day, in terms of being good enough to earn His love?

No. The proof of God's love lies in the greatest act of love that history has ever seen. The proof of God's love is at the cross.

So, where does God stand in terms of His love for you? He stands at the cross. And as we remember that cross in the Lord's Supper today, we are being reminded of that amazing proof of God's love.

That's where God stands in terms of His love for you. But the vital question is this. Where do you stand in terms of your love for Him?

[17:49] And what we need to recognize is that if God is standing by the cross as His demonstration of love for you, then if we want to love God, and if we want to have a relationship

with Him, then the only place we can meet Him is at that cross.

That's why our salvation rests on the finished work of Jesus Christ. That's where God is showing you His love. That's where God is standing waiting for you.

And that's where, by faith, we all need to go. And the brilliant thing is that if you're weak, if you're ungodly, if you're a sinner, none of these things mean for one second that you can't be saved by that cross.

Because it's while we were weak, it's for the ungodly, it's while we were still sinners, that Christ died for you. And all of this is astonishing because in the eyes of the world, hardly anyone is worth dying for.

As Paul says, very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, but perhaps for a good person one would even dare to die.

[19 : 08] But in God's eyes, you are so precious, so valuable, and so loved, that God the Son came to die for you.

Paul is telling us something amazing about our past. We were weak, we were ungodly, we were sinful, and in so many ways we still are. But despite all of that, you are also loved by God.

Then in verses 9 and 10, Paul wants to tell us something about our future. And in doing so, he does something really interesting. When we talk about following Jesus, when we talk about being a Christian, we'll very often say, I have been saved.

So, somebody might say, I was saved 10 years ago, or I was saved as a child, or I was saved through so-and-so's preaching, I was saved as a student.

We'll often say, I have been saved. And that's, in many ways, the key statement that we need to be able to make to come to the Lord's table, to say, I am a believer.

[20 : 24] I have been saved. Very often, we'll use that language. We'll say, I was saved. But as a Christian, for those of you who are Christians here today, do you ever say to yourself, or think to yourself, I will be saved.

Now, I don't, looking at myself, I don't know if I've ever really said that. And I don't think I tend to hear anyone else say that. People don't tend to say, I'm a Christian, and I will be saved.

We don't tend to use that language. And yet, if you look at verses 9 and 10, that's exactly what Paul says. Paul is very clearly saying that as Christians, we shall be saved.

And we need to ask ourselves, well, what exactly does that mean? Well, here Paul is highlighting the fact that although our salvation brings many wonderful blessings now, alongside that, there are still future blessings that are yet to be realized.

Often we describe that in terms of what we call an already-not-yet balance in terms of our salvation. And the New Testament makes it already-not-yet balance very clear throughout all of its teaching.

[22 : 10] At one level, we're already saved. We have peace with God. We have access to Him. We have the Holy Spirit with us. But at another level, there's a not-yet aspect to it.

And that's why we have hope for the future. And Paul highlights two things in particular that he wants us to focus on.

He tells us, first of all, that we shall be saved from the wrath of God. Now, back in chapter 1, Paul presents a clear argument that our sin and our unrighteousness provoke the wrath of God.

And that's, sometimes when we talk about the wrath of God, we think that makes God sound like he's bad. But the opposite is the truth. It makes it sound, it shows us that God is good.

The fact that God is provoked by that which is wrong. The fact that injustice and cruelty and exploitation and hurt. The fact that that makes God angry is a good thing.

[23 : 20] It's a very good thing. And our sin provokes the wrath of God. Because we're the opposite of what God wants us to be every time we have sin.

We sin. And there's an already not yet element to this whole doctrine of God's wrath. Already, God has given us up to the lusts of our hearts, to dishonorable passions, to a broken and debased mind. Chapter 1 talks about this. In other words, as the Bible often makes clear, God will judge humanity by simply allowing us to have things our own way.

And that's often how God allowed his judgment to be expressed throughout Scripture. People would rebel against God.

God would warn them against it. But yet, again and again and again, they would push God away.

And ultimately, the result of God would say, okay, I will leave you to yourselves. And that's a very, very solemn thing.

[24 : 32] That if we keep pushing God away, then he will eventually let us have our own way. And the consequences of that are always devastating.

So there's an already aspect to God's wrath. Humanity is left to do its own thing. But there's also a not yet aspect to it as well.

That's highlighted for us very powerfully in Romans 2. And I'll just read these verses out. Because of your hard and impenitent heart, you're storing up wrath for yourselves on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

He will render to each one according to his works. To those who by patience and well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

This is something that we all have to recognize. That we are accountable to God. And that our sin leaves us liable to God's judgment.

[25 : 44] Now, that's not something that we want to think about or talk about that much. But what we're being reminded of is just how serious and how dangerous sin is.

It's a great reminder that sin doesn't just wreck our lives now. It will also wreck our eternity. But the amazing truth of the gospel and the amazing hope of the gospel is that if you trust in Jesus, you will be saved from all of that.

God's desire is that no one should perish. God's promise is that whoever, whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. That means that if you put your trust in Jesus, that day of judgment that Romans 2 is talking about is not going to be a day when you're condemned.

It's a day when you will be saved. God is providing us with an amazing way of salvation. And looking forward, we can talk as those, not just who are saved, but who will be saved.

Keeps us safe through Jesus Christ. We shall be saved from the wrath of God. But he also says that we shall be saved by his life.

[27 : 05] And this is another important balance that's been presented to us in the New Testament. There's not just, there's an already not yet aspect to our salvation. There's also what we could call a from to aspect to our salvation.

In other words, we're taken and saved from something and we are brought into something new. We're saved from something awful, from wrath and condemnation.

But we are brought into something amazing. We are given eternal life through Jesus Christ. And here Paul is reminding us that our salvation is not just about being united to Jesus in his death.

It's also about being united to Jesus in his resurrection. Paul goes on to talk a bit more about that in the next chapter. In chapter 6, he says that if we've been united to him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united to him in a resurrection like his.

And that means that just as we benefit from the crucifixion where Jesus takes our sin, takes our sin in our place, so too we benefit from the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[28 : 17] Just as he rose from the dead never to die again, so through faith in him, we now have resurrection life that can never be taken away. Paul's reminding us that we have this amazing future.

The fullness of that reality is something that is coming into our experience. And that makes perfect sense if you look at your life right now. Because if you look at your body, it's still subject to the power of death.

Paul, in fact, calls his body a body of death. And we experience that every day. Every day our bodies get older. For many, that means their bodies get weaker and frailer and more painful.

We suffer more. We deteriorate more. We can feel very, very vulnerable. And ultimately, we're all going to face physical death.

But the amazing news of the gospel is that we are not just united to Jesus' death. We are also united to his resurrection.

[29 : 23] So just as he was raised to life, so too shall we be raised to life. That's why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, This perishable body must be perishable.

This mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, And the mortal puts on immortality. Then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus

Christ.

That's why in the new creation, it says, He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, And death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore.

For the former things have passed away. In so many ways, our bodies are like a time bomb that are just ticking away.

[30 : 23] And there's nothing that we can do to break the power that death has over us. We're powerless. But God isn't. God is not powerless.

He's broken the power of death. And as Christians, even though your earthly body will die, Ultimately, you will be saved from all the consequences of death.

And the reason you'll be saved is because of the resurrection life of Jesus. And so as a Christian, yes, you are saved, but also you will be saved.

You will be saved from the wrath of God. You will be brought into eternal resurrection life through Jesus Christ. And it's all an amazing reminder that if your trust is in Jesus, The best is yet to come. The best is yet to come. And Paul is emphasizing that as a result, we should be confident. We should be so confident as Christians.

[31 : 28] In verses 9 and 10, Paul uses what's called an afortiori argument. Now that probably sounds very fancy, but it just means like a how much more argument.

So he's basically saying, if while we were unrighteous, we were justified. If while we were still sinners, we were reconciled. How much more that we are justified and we are reconciled, Will we certainly be saved from the wrath of God?

Brought into eternal life. It's an amazing reminder that the gospel does not come with conditions. It doesn't come with a big list that says, you must do this, you must do that, you must do this, you must do that.

The gospel does not come with conditions. The gospel comes with guarantees. Because when God saves someone, he saves someone with an eternal guarantee.

And if you trust in Jesus, then your justification is guaranteed. Your reconciliation to God is guaranteed. Your peace with God is guaranteed.

[32 : 43] Your access to God is guaranteed. Your salvation from wrath is guaranteed. Your eternal life is guaranteed. And perhaps most amazingly of all, the love of God for you is guaranteed forever.

And all of this should lead to one result. It should lead to abounding joy in God. That's why Christians should be the most positive, happy, excited, enthusiastic, joyful people on this planet. Because we have got such good, good news. Very, very often when we come to the Lord's table, we come with a real sense of solemnity. And that's important, and that's good, because we've been reminded that Jesus has died for us.

But at the same time, we should come to the Lord's Supper just bursting with joy. Because of everything that it means. The fact that no matter how weak you were, or how ungodly you were, or how sinful you were, God still loved you enough to send his son to die for you.

And now you have this amazing new life now, but also an incredible hope for the future. It's absolutely amazing. And so that's why, that's part of the reason why we have wine.

[34 : 07] Wine is, it's not just the same color as blood. It's also the drink of celebration. Because we come together at the Lord's table to rejoice in everything that Jesus has done for us.

In fact, we come to the Lord's table to boast in the Savior that we have. Paul speaks about that in verse 11. He says, not only this, we boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, boasting is a really interesting word to use, because sometimes we think that boasting is like a bad thing. And often it is. So what does Paul mean when he says that we should boast in the Lord?

Well, if you think about it, boasting just means to talk about something that's amazing. Now, very often we make that about ourselves. So it's maybe our possessions or our achievements or our knowledge.

We try to boast and we try to impress other people. And it kind of arises from that strange combination of pride and insecurity that humanity battles with, where we have this high view of ourselves, and yet at the same time we need the approval of other people to make us really believe it.

[35 : 19] That's not the kind of boasting that we mean here. That's a harmful kind of boasting that hurts ourselves and hurts others. But as Christians, we can boast in a different way.

Because if boasting simply means to talk about something amazing, then boy, do we have something amazing to talk about. And as we come to the Lord's table just now, we are coming as those who are boasting in Jesus Christ and who want to publicly say just how amazing it is to know Jesus and to follow him and to have him as our Savior.

We don't boast in an arrogant way because the gospel only shows us how much we have failed. But we boast in Jesus Christ. And we want to live our lives declaring to the world that amazing news that we have God the Father demonstrating his love for us.

We have God the Son willing to die for us. We have God the Holy Spirit pouring his love into our hearts. That is the best news ever. And I want and I hope you want to spend every day and week and year of your life boasting in that good news.

Let's pray. Dear God, our Father, we thank you so much for your amazing love for us.

[36 : 52] A love that we didn't earn, a love that's not based on our lovableness, a love that goes far, far further back than our minds could ever take in. We thank you that long before we ever loved you, you loved us.

And we thank you for the amazing transformation that you've brought into our lives. And we thank you also for the hope that you give us for the future. That not only are we those who are saved, but we are those who will be saved.

And we pray that that will be true of us all. That every one of us would put our faith in you for salvation. And we want to make you our boast, Lord.

We pray that you'd forgive us for every time we boast in other things. We pray that above all we would boast in you. And that we would live our lives openly, willingly, declaring how much we love you.

And how good you have been to us. And we pray that as we share in the Lord's Supper together now, that that would be a means of blessing to us all, drawing us closer to one another and closer to you, as we remember our Saviour's death.

[38 : 05] So please continue to be with us now, and may your blessing be upon us. In Jesus' name. Amen.