

IN DEBT BUT RICH

Romans 5:1–11

Dr. George O. Wood

Romans 5:1–11—in Christ’s debt, but rich through Christ. As we open Romans 5, we find first the word “therefore.” I’m a person who loves to draft resolutions. I like to put all of the whereases in front of a resolution, because when you know where the whereases are going, you can make the word “therefore” all that more powerful. “Therefore, be it resolved.” “Therefore” is a logical word. It is a word that means the case that one has been building now turns and is implemented into action. It is as though that word at the beginning of Romans 5:1 is preceded by these whereases. Whereas, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Whereas, that truth has been illustrated in the non-Jewish world. And whereas, that truth has also been illustrated in the religious world. Whereas, at the right time Christ died for us and gave to us His righteousness on the cross through which we receive His salvation by faith. And whereas, that principle of faith is demonstrated in the life of Abraham. And whereas, demonstrating through the life of Abraham, manifesting that this principle of faith is no new thing on the horizon, but is as old as mankind. Whereas, we are therefore justified by believing in Jesus Christ through faith even as Abraham. Therefore, what do we have in Christ, therefore, since we are justified by faith.

And Romans 1–11 spells out some important ramifications in our life as to what we have. So thrilling to realize that we are an answer to the prayer of Christ. We are standing today as if we are saved, as a real result of God’s effort toward us. The Cross has had some effect. It has not been in vain. We have been justified. And since Christ has wanted us so much to go to the cross for us, and since He has made that tremendous investment on our behalf, it is thrilling to His heart to realize that that investment which He has made has not been in vain. We have been justified by faith.

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Will this life of faith work? Paul again is having to counter this imaginary objector which we have looked at in the book of Romans. Will this life of faith work? What does it produce? Does it grant any kind of confidence or security in regard to our walk? “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1, NIV).

I. The first benefit of justification which we have for being declared righteous in God’s presence is peace with God.

If you’ve been following along in the Book of Romans, you see what a tremendous contrast this is to giving up the knowledge of God, which Paul notes in Romans 1:18–32, especially. He notes that in our abandonment from God—in our life of sin—we become given over to the wrath of God, which is the contrast to God’s peace. The wrath of God is seen by Paul in two different ways. It’s seen as the present working out in this life of taking, or of being forced to take, the harvest of the bitter seed we have sown in our lives. It is also something future. It is God’s eternal determination to separate himself from all that is sinful. The wrath of God is the opposite from the peace of God. When we’re without God, this wrath is spilling over into our lives. It begins with immoral relationships, which seem to us to promise great satisfaction and pleasure. But when pummeled to their depth, they only release bitter fruit. It spills over into sexual perversity, which the apostle notes in Romans 1, and finally it becomes an outright social cancer of sin that becomes so disruptive, and depressive, and violent, and full of strife and selfish ambition, that the wrath of God is seen in the dislocation of any kind of harmony in our lives or our walk with others or our relationship with God.

It is this wrath of God, this being placed in the wrath of God in this life in which we live. It’s like being in a stream, and it’s flowing into the great ocean of God’s wrath, which is eternity. But in the gospel, God’s picked us out of the stream of wrath, into the stream of His peace—which

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empties into the ocean of His peace in heaven. We have peace with God, not wrath. The Apostle John recognizes that the fundamental fear of all human beings is not what they often suppose it to be. It is, according to Revelation 6, the fear of God's wrath. So that in the age in which the ocean of God's wrath is emptied—and if we are without Christ—we become forever separated from God. John recognizes that moment as one in which the kings, and the great men, and the poor men, and all classes of people on this earth, will cry out for the rocks and the caves and the hills to fall on them to save them from the presence of His wrath. In other words, when men are truly confronted with the presence of God and elect whether they would rather face death or God, they would much rather face death than God. So this removes the aspect of death being our greatest fear. The greatest fear is to come into the presence of God unprepared. And the peace of God removes that wrath. For the peace of God means that no longer is their enmity between us and God. We are no longer afraid of meeting God. The fear of God's meeting us is gone. The fear, therefore, of our being ready when the Lord returns—the fear which cringes in terror of the prospect of seeing the Lord Jesus Christ—this is now removed.

We have no fear even when we face the circumstances. There's a trembling at times, but the basic fear is gone because God has declared His basic peace in our lives. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul didn't need to keep on saying that. He could have simply said, "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace." He uses that term, "through our Lord Jesus Christ," again and again to emphasize how crucial it is to repeat the theme that all of this is won by Christ's efforts on our behalf. God is at peace with us.

This was not so in His wrath. I think we understand this balance between God's love and His wrath—God's peace and God's wrath—when we consider what a parent can have with a grown child who has gotten into something which is very harmful. I think of the tragic case of the girl

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who had gotten into the Hare Krishna cult. Her parents recognized that her entrance into this cult had been one that really destroyed her rational and mental faculties. The more they loved their daughter, the more they hated the thing she was in. In fact, it seems that the more one truly loves, the more pure one's hatred will be toward the thing which is violating or deteriorating the individual.

Now in Jesus Christ, God has achieved with us a reconciliation because Christ died on our behalf, took the penalty, which we would have born, and achieved peace. Therefore, we have peace. I would simply say—in looking at your own life—this is truth, as a Christian, to really grab hold of. God has granted us peace with himself. It's not the peace *of* God. It's peace *with* God.

II. The second thing that Paul says is a benefit of being placed into Christ is that we have access into this grace in which we stand.

We have obtained access. It is something which has already happened and is still going on. It's an entry.

A couple of years ago when we were in Paris, we had a day and a half to see the town. Outside of Notre Dame Cathedral, I remember meeting another American from Oklahoma. He was in a hurry, and we were in a hurry. I quipped the joke I'd heard already of: "The man and his wife went to Notre Dame Cathedral. The man said, 'We've only got five minutes to hit this place. You take the outside and I'll take the inside.'" Typical American approach to tourism. But one of the things we did while we were there was, we went outside of Paris to the town of Versailles to the beautiful palace. I remember standing in the room where Marie Antoinette, in regard to the French citizenry when they were crying for bread, contemptuously said, "Let them eat cake." Standing in that room with all of its opulence, one could understand why she was saying a thing like that. She could hardly imagine anyone not having something. But the public was just

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allowed to go through certain of the rooms. The public did not have access to the majority of the rooms. I saw that there was a tour group behind a tour guide who had a magic key. I noticed them coming in and out of rooms that were closed to the public. I thought, “There’s got to be some way I can get in this group.” I dropped myself into their presence. I thought, “I’ll follow along and see what happens.” I got a very interesting ten-minute lecture in a room that was a public room. Then as I followed them and as they were going into some of the private chambers of the French king and queens, as I came toward one of the rooms, the gal who was leading the tour stopped me and said, “You’re not a member of this group, are you?” I said, “No, but I’d sure like to be. What’s the cost?” She said, “I’m sorry. You have to have made previous arrangements at least three weeks in advance, and this is a special group. This is an off-limits tour only for those who’ve made advance reservation.” She went in and closed the room on me. I never saw the real inside of the Versailles palace. Very simple reason: I did not have access.

Paul, in talking about what we have as a result of being made right with God, says we’ve got access into God. There is no part of God’s nature, no part of God’s property, that is off-limits to us because now we stand in His grace. It is not something that we are looking forward to getting into, but already in Christ we have been granted the access—and we’re continuing to stand there, knowing that as we stand there, more and more rooms are going to keep flying open in God’s nature that are going to be revealed to us. God has granted us access into grace. And there we stand.

III. Paul says the third thing which God is doing here for us is that He is causing us to rejoice.

The word “rejoice” here really means to boast, or to exalt, or to glory. We rejoice, he says, in the hope of sharing the glory of God—joy, this third quality of being justified by faith. We rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. In other words, as we look into the future, we recognize

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that because of what Christ has done for us in the past on the cross, there is an unlimited horizon for us as the people of God. We have a hope, and we will share, one day, Christ's glory with Him in our resurrected form. It is something which we press toward.

One really gets a feeling for this when he reads Acts 7. Stephen is facing martyrdom. The stones are ready to descend upon him. He would look at the people standing about him, and all he would see were angry faces. He would become the first believer to die for his faith. It was a horrible moment. But in that horrible moment, Acts 7:55 tells us that "Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God'" (NIV).

This is what Paul means when he says, "We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:2, NIV). It is this thing which he had learned from watching Stephen's eyes and countenance, when he, as the prosecutor, had stood holding the garments of those stoning Stephen. He had seen this man look up—and beyond what is the normal, immediate situation—into the heavens, and see the glory of God. And that glory—that beautiful vision which he had of God—was greater than anything which was currently surrounding him. It is as though, when we face that prospect of being eternally with God, we have been in this life with blindfold around our eyes. And all of a sudden when we come into His presence, the blindfold is dropped and we see the most glorious, beautiful scene that no sunset or sunrise or beautiful natural setting could ever describe. It's all of the emotions, all of the visions, all of the beautiful pictures you could pick up in life all rolled together, collected in one—the glory of God.

I recall one Christmas Eve when we were getting ready to give our children bicycles for Christmas, something they really wanted. And you can't very well wrap a bicycle up in a box. We're not that crazy! Put a ribbon on it, and that's enough. But we want the children to be

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surprised, so we sneaked into the garage and put them together, and at the right time we brought them in with the children's eyes closed. At the cue, their eyes opened. And as their eyes opened, they saw something, for them, which was glory. This is how we look at the glory of God.

Our future is fixed, and it's certain when we're in God. Paul says something here, however, which goes beyond glorying in our future hope. "Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings" (Romans 5:3, NIV). Rejoicing in sufferings? Here, Paul is sharing a secret with us of really being in right relationship with God—of being able to get a hold of the sufferings which we face. The word here for suffering is the word "tribulation." It is a word which, in the Latin, was used to describe a threshing instrument made out of iron sledges which was drawn over wheat. Those iron sledges, as they fell upon the wheat, separated the grain and the chaff. It was a cutting instrument. In biblical times, tribulation was especially noted in the crushing of olives or the crushing of grapes. It was that which brought pressure. So the word here means: "We rejoice in our suffering. We rejoice in our tribulation. We rejoice in our pressures. We rejoice in those excruciating tensions of life—which seem to come against us to draw everything out of us, they are so grinding and, in many ways, brutalizing. We rejoice in them."

The very fact that we rejoice means we're not handling these things in a stoic manner. ("Grin and bear it. I'll take it. I guess I have to.") It doesn't mean, either, that we're taking it with a false front. If we really understand what justification is, we can, therefore—out of that well-being of satisfaction of our relationship to God—handle the crushing afflictions which come. We rejoice, Saint Paul says, in our sufferings.

A. We rejoice in our sufferings not simply for the sake of the suffering itself—because that is not pleasant. But we rejoice in sufferings because we recognize what suffering is going to do.

"Suffering produces perseverance" (Romans 5:3, NIV).

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There are two words in the Greek language for patience. One of them is translated often in the revised version as “endurance,” or as “perseverance.” And the other is simply translated “patience.” But there are two different qualities. One word for patience is the word that describes the person who kind of has a long fuse. He can take an awful lot for a long period of time versus the person who has the short fuse. But another kind of word for patience is a deeper word. It is the word that is used here, the word translated “perseverance.” It literally means “to remain under.” It is descriptive of an individual who, when praying to God about some particular thing, recognizes that “God can remove that situation, or He can give me the strength to bear it.” It is the kind of thing which Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane: “Remove this cup from me. But nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done.” That “nevertheless” is endurance. It is staying power, willingness, and ability to remain constant under pressure. Endurance. Suffering, Saint Paul says, produces endurance.

The recognition that suffering indeed accomplishes endurance is the biblical way of saying that, as Christians, we do not have, at our fingertips, always the ability to get an instant miracle. There would be no need for endurance if every time we ran into suffering, we could snap our fingers and say, “Remove this, Lord.” This is one objection that I have towards some elements of charismatic theology, especially as they’re often represented in popular literature and popular television. It is almost a way of saying, “Whatever is wrong, whatever is pressing you in your life, use the right formula of faith, use the right ingredient, use the right technique, get the right testimony behind you, and it’s gone. It’s vanished away.” If that can happen, then there’s no need for this word “endurance.” For endurance describes that staying power of what suffering is accomplished. And indeed, endurance is only developed through pressure. I don’t go out, by the way, praying for endurance. I pray for joy and love and peace. But endurance, I know what I’ve got to go through to get it.

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B. Suffering produces endurance. Staying power. And endurance produces character. What is that? The word here means “one who is approved,” or “one who has passed the test.” It is descriptive of something that has been tried and has been found to be what it is supposed to be. Have you seen commercials on television that advertise tires, double-belted steel radial tires? This tire is the best to get, because this tire has stood the test. It has character. That’s the word Paul is using here. The person who is untried, there are dimensions to their life are not fully known. Job is a person who, out of suffering, produced endurance. And out of that, character formed. We see what kind of a person emerges.

I kind of think, in many respects, when suffering or adversity comes along, it does indeed reveal what is in us. It does not create something that is not there. If I’m carrying a cup of coffee in my hand and walking along, and I bump into someone, out of my cup is going to spill what is in it. This is the way it is with adversity, often, in our life. If we have been carrying around anger and vengefulness and the like, and someone or a circumstance bumps into us, out comes anger and retaliation and recrimination and self-pity and the like, because it was there in the container all along.

C. Paul is saying get a hold of what this justification by faith produces. It produces endurance, and endurance produces character, the kind of person you’re going to be. And character produces hope.

Why does it produce hope? It produces hope because we see as we go through some of these terribly excruciating experiences that when we trust God in them, God is indeed bringing us through. We find, instead of looking any more at metaphysical questions—like, “Why did this happen to me?”—we’re able, when we’re going through a deep, crushing time, to say, “God, what are You doing now, and what response do You want me to take toward this situation?” We see—after we’ve worked ourselves out of a couple of situations or God has worked us out—that

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He is indeed bringing good in everything, a theme Paul will later pick up in Romans 8. This produces hope. It's not until I've had an experience in my life where I was utterly crushed and thought that everything in terms of what I wanted had been lost. It was not until I had gone through that and saw what the Lord was developing in me, and the kinds of qualities He wanted in me through that, that I began to have hope. So now when I face into a crisis situation of pressure, I know that when I'm facing that affliction or that suffering, that the suffering is not an end in itself. There is a way past the suffering. This is going to produce something tremendous in me. This is going to produce in me endurance, and endurance is going to make my character better. And because of that, I have hope. So right from the outset when I go through the trial, hope is at the end.

"I must rest content, knowing that on the potter's wheel of time, I have had my chance to mold the clay, young life. Impressionable, waiting to be shaped, waiting to be rounded out and used. Unskilled potter that I was, I often marred the surface. Or so I thought, but later was surprised to find that in the kiln of life, maturity had smoothed away the mark, and in its place I saw the knowledge I had sought to give, glazed with experience. And though the vessel long had been in use, these students of so many years before assured me I had left my imprint there."

Maturity had smoothed away the mark. This is what Paul is speaking of here. That the trials which we pass through develop a refining character in our life. Therefore—even more in our glory of our hope of meeting Christ—we now glory in our sufferings, knowing that out of those, if we will allow Him to, God is developing something marvelous in our life—a treasure, a priceless possession, an ability to cope. One that is swallowed up in hope.

IV. Paul then tells us that a fourth result of our being justified is that the love of God has been poured into our hearts.

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“God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Romans 5:5, NIV). This phrase “poured...into our hearts” is the same word which is used in Acts 2 to describe the coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, where Peter stands up and says, “This which has been poured out is what the prophet Joel spoke about.” It is a plentiful infusion of God’s love. It’s been poured into our hearts. It’s experiential, therefore. We ourselves can feel it, and it is through God’s Spirit that this love of God comes to us.

But Paul is never content to let something simply rest in the field of experience. He’s always rooting it to something objective that has happened beyond the level of our experience. So in verses 6 through 11, he really develops what he says in verse 5. We know that the love of God has been poured out in our hearts. We know because: “At just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6, NIV). There’s a tremendous statement. It lays to rest any idea on our part that Christ would have only died for us because we had made the first twenty yards down the road in our progress of our relationship to God—because we’d taken the first twenty yards ourselves, the Lord saw fit to save us because He saw we were trying good and hard. The ramification of that is if God only saved us if we’ve been trying good and hard, then if we forever relax that effort, then what’s going to happen to us?

Paul says to take away all those considerations. “While we were yet ungodly, while we were yet helpless, while we were yet enemies,” is a phrase he goes on to develop: Christ died for us. Then he compared it on a human spirit. “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man 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” (Romans 5:7-8, NIV). The way to contrast those two is suppose at the piano there is a concert performer who gives a very correct rendition of something and plays it very exactly, but without any flare or without any relating to an audience. That person is, say, a righteous pianist. But a good pianist is one who draws us into it. By

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looking at them, you can tell that they're enjoying what they're doing and there's a winsomeness, a quality to what is transpiring.

Paul says there are people who are morally correct. They're upstanding and outstanding citizens and all that. But they don't win your love. They're not all that melting into your life. You just don't feel that much towards them. There are great people that are righteous. Maybe someone might die for someone like that. But for a good person, one who is really projecting themselves in love, one might dare to die.

But the marvelous grace of God is while we were neither righteous nor good, Christ died for us. Therefore, Paul makes this tremendous conclusion, "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him" (Romans 5:9, NIV). Notice that phrase "much more." It occurs not only in verse 9, but in verse 10. Verse 10 is actually a restatement of verse 9 using different words: "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!" (NIV).

What's Paul saying? What's this "much more"? He is addressing a fear that sometimes we have in respect to the love of God. Will I really make it in my Christian life? Will I ever see God? Am I really forgiven? Paul is saying, "If God has really justified us in Jesus Christ so that we are saved, that has been—from God's point of view—a more difficult test than bringing us finally and forever into His presence." So having done the greater, He is able to do the lesser. Having saved us through Christ offering himself on the cross—having done the greater—He is able to usher us fully and finally into God's presence. Much more shall we be saved.

When I was ten, I had one of the most traumatic experiences of my life. It marked a real turning in the road of my own spiritual pilgrimage. We were at the time living in a little town in Oklahoma. Dad was pastoring a church, and I had heard a lot of sermons on the Second Coming

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of the Lord. Most of them frightened me. As I study the Scripture, more I realize that in respect to the New Testament, sermons on the Second Coming of the Lord are never a fright to the Christian. They're always an encouragement. But somehow it had come across to me as a fright. So I was scared to death what would happen if the Lord would come.

Evidently this fear in the conscious level percolated down into the subconscious level. One night I had this awful dream that the Lord had come and I had been left behind. I remember waking up in sheer terror. I remember this terrible sinking feeling of recognition that my parents would be gone and I was alone now, a ten-year-old kid. I was alone. The only thing that all of a sudden bailed me out was that the 1951 Hudson was going to be mine! But even that little ray of sunshine was nothing compared to the tremendous fear I had. I recall laying in bed shaking, finally getting the courage to tiptoe out of bed over to my parents' bedroom and looking through the door to see if they were there. It was too dark. I could see nothing. I didn't want to wake them up, because to wake them up would have been to tell them that I wasn't ready. I didn't want to go over and see, either, because if they weren't there then it would be worse. I thought, "I'll just wait until the crack of dawn and go back." I stayed awake the rest of the night until the sun began to slip over the horizon, and then I tiptoed back into my parents' room and I saw them there. I breathed this huge sigh of relief.

But what had happened in the hours I had prayed, "Lord, if You haven't come, I want to serve You." I really meant that from my heart. I believe my conversion experience in its genesis form took place in that moment, when out of the sheer terror of meeting God unprepared, I turned my life over to Him. That terror did not easily go away, because for many years as a Christian I lived in terror of the prospect of the coming of the Lord—lest I do one wrong thing, be doing the one wrong thing at His coming that would remove me from being ready. As if when I was unsaved, one righteous act made me a Christian, so when I am saved one unrighteous act makes me not a

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Christian. We'll get into this fuller when we develop Romans more. We stand in grace. So that Paul says as we look forward to the prospect of meeting God, God has done the greater work for us in the Cross, and we need not fear.

I had a sequel to that childhood dream several years ago. I dreamed the Lord had returned. It was kind of at a discouraging moment in my life when this dream occurred. I remember the feeling as I recognized the event was happening. The angels were gathering in heaven and the music was starting. The trumpet was readying itself, and the Lord was coming, and I thought, "This is it!" I said to myself at that moment, "Will I go up now?" Then I started to go up. I can't describe the feeling. I was way up in the sky looking down, and all I could say was, "I made it!"

Paul is saying here in the Scripture you don't need to have a dream to know that. I can say, because of Christ, I made it. Much more, then, shall we be saved in His life. Therefore Paul comes to a conclusion in verse 11: "Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God..." (NIV). He has rejoiced in the hope of glory. He has rejoiced in sufferings. Now, he says, when it's all put together—when you understand what peace and access and joy and love is—what can you do but boast and exult in God himself? Not anything God has given, but just God himself. We rejoice in God, through whom we have received our reconciliation. We have been brought nearer to God—we who were far off.

Closing Prayer

We do make our boast, Lord, in You. For we are very conscious, as we continue to survey this letter of Paul, that there is nothing of ourselves that has earned our standing with You. It is totally by Your great grace. Having this certainty of the hope of meeting You makes us, then, available and ready and able to cope with the pressures of life which we go through. It may very well be, Lord, that there are friends here today who—in coping with afflictions and pressures—have wondered what good was being developed. And through Your Word today, You are helping

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them to see something what they themselves may not have seen on their own. Through that affliction, a real endurance is being created, a staying power. Instead of fleeing from the problems, instead of fleeing from the illness, there is an ability to stay put. And in staying, develop winsome qualities of character, which turn out producing hope. We thank You, therefore, for the wonderful work of grace in our life which allows us to face every experience—no matter how exultant or how trying—with a knowledge that we are secure in our standing in You. We have been brought into grace and been given access into Your heart. We rejoice in You. So, Lord, we just simply lift our voice to exalt and glory in You. We praise You today through Jesus. Amen.