

Righteousness Experienced

We did some experimenting last week. Thank you for your feedback; it was all positive. So... we'll continue the experiment this week.

We'll leave a few minutes at the end of this message for Q&A, and we'll use the hashtag #NSromans for social media.

Like I said, we won't do this sort of thing every Sunday... but since we have a couple of special Sunday's coming up that will take us out of our Romans series (Mother's Day and Pentecost Sunday), let's go ahead and stick with the experiment this week.

This is our fourth message in our series from Romans. I think I've mentioned a few times that the New Testament Book of Romans is considered to be among the Bible's most important theological texts.

We get different things from different parts of the Bible. Here are a few categories to consider (not an exhaustive list of categories)

- Narrative – Books that are mostly history, telling us what happened (including Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, Judges, the Gospels)
- Poetic & Wisdom Literature – Books that go deep into our emotions and thoughts, like Psalms and Proverbs
- Prophetic – Books that focus on what God says to people and circumstances (Isaiah and such)
- Theological – Books that help us understand God and His ways. Romans is one of those theological books

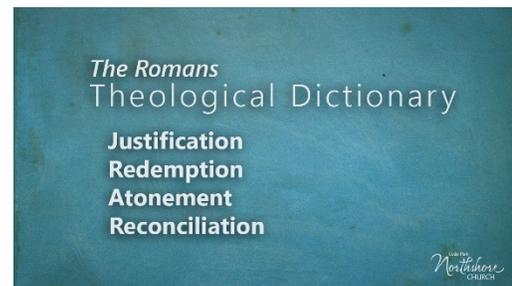
There are other categories and ways to think about parts of the Bible, and most books, while being predominantly of one category, often have elements of several categories. We'll find bits of narrative, poetic, and even



prophetic in Romans. But Romans is predominantly a theological text... a text aimed at our understanding.

So, we are finding important theological words and concepts in Romans; so far those theological words have included:

- **Justification:** Justified has the same root as justice. This is a **legal** term. It carries with it this idea of *imputed* righteousness... complete righteousness (fully-accomplished salvation) given to us by grace (not by our qualifications or work or sacrifice).
- **Redemption:** Redemption is a term associated with **commerce**. Someone had to be paid; Jesus paid the price.
- **Atonement:** Atonement is a **religious** term. Hearing about atonement, the Jews would have immediately thought of the annual Day of Atonement specified in Leviticus 16. It involved the shedding of blood to pay for sin, as well as the removal of sin through the scapegoat that would be expelled from the camp. Jesus both paid for sin, removed it from our account, and works through the Holy Spirit to remove sin from our lives.



And now there is another important word here in Romans 5, one to add to our increasing dictionary: reconciliation.

Reconciliation is a **relational** word. The primary definition of the word reconciliation, the way the word is used most often, has to do with reconciling persons, repairing and reinstating a broken relationship. We use the word in other ways as well, sometimes in terms of reconciling ideas or concepts, or even reconciling financial accounts... but even in those other cases we are talking about restoring harmony to those accounts or ideas. We are talking about restoring alignment with accounts and bringing compatibility with ideas.

Romans 5 begins by establishing this key theological concept of reconciliation:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.¹

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

romans 5:1,2

Northshore Church

You might be wondering... so where is that word reconciliation? While the word isn't there, yet, the concept is plainly evident. The point is that when we believe Jesus, putting our hope and trust in Him, we receive justification by grace through Jesus... and that results in ***peace with God***. This state of ***peace with God*** is simply another way of saying that our relationship with God is reconciled. We actually see the word *reconcile* as we read on.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰ For if, 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!

¹¹ Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. ²

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 is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

romans 5:6-11

Northshore Church

We said that reconciliation is a relational word; reconciliation is also a technical word. Reconciliation implies a purposeful process; it almost always means identifying the root of the problem and fixing it.

Think in terms of reconciling financial accounts. If you've ever tried to balance accounts (whether your own banking, or maybe some accounts at work), you know that the problem isn't truly solved until you find that one place where the accounts fell out of alignment... a mistaken entry or a math error needs to be identified and fixed in order to truly reconcile accounts.

¹ The New International Version. (2011). (Ro 5:1-2). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

² The New International Version. (2011). (Ro 5:6-11). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

The same is true when reconciling relationships. In the case of our relationship with God, in order for there to be reconciliation the problem needed to be identified and dealt with... and that problem is sin.

The last half of Romans 5 dives deep into the sin problem, identifying that sin has existed in humanity from the beginning... through the first human: Adam. And as sin existed in that one man, the grace of God gives us life through faith in one man: Jesus Christ.

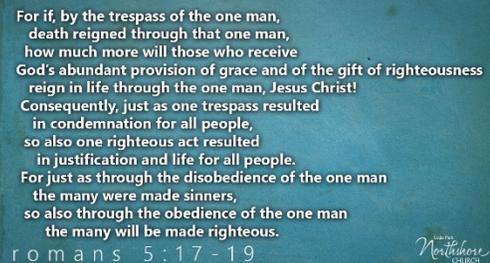
¹⁷ For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!³

We could take time to *hang out* in the theological *cul-de-sac* exposed there, specifically: is sin an individual person's problem, or a problem wired into the human race from the beginning? Do we each carry the blame, or do we place the blame on Adam and Eve? Are we sinners or victims of sin? Do we need a savior because of Adam's sin, or our individual sin? You can probably guess my answer to these questions: yes!

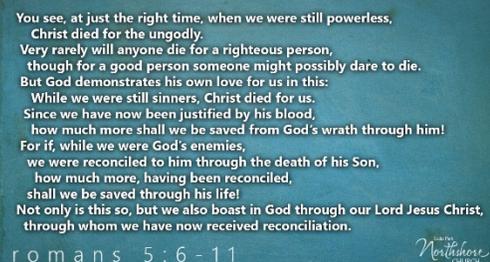
In my experience, the best approach on many of these questions is to live in tension and paradox. This is another one of those questions where an either-or answer is insufficient; we are best served by a both-and, even if that creates some tension and dissonance.

We have a sin problem, both as individual sinners and as members of the human race, and that sin ruins our relationship with God.

In verse 10 it explains that reconciliation happened while we were God's **enemies**. That is not hyperbole for effect; it isn't that we had some sort of mildly dinged or slightly bruised relationship with God. Sin utterly destroyed humanity's relationship with God, just as our individual sin entirely separates us from our Holy God.



For if, by the trespass of the one man,
death reigned through that one man,
how much more will those who receive
God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness
reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!
Consequently, just as one trespass resulted
in condemnation for all people,
so also one righteous act resulted
in justification and life for all people.
For just as through the disobedience of the one man
the many were made sinners,
so also through the obedience of the one man
the many will be made righteous.
romans 5:17-19



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 is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
through whom we have now received reconciliation.
romans 5:6-11

³ The New International Version. (2011). (Ro 5:17). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁴

We did not have peace with God. Sin was entirely our problem... yet the reconciliation was entirely God's solution.

Once again, only in the Gospel does this sort of upside-down approach make any sense.

When we experience broken relationships among us mere humans, most often it is a matter of bad behavior on both sides. The breaking of the relationship might have been *mostly* one party's fault, but rarely is it just a matter of one person's doing... and reconciliation requires restitution and apologies and forgiveness from both sides.

But this is not the case with our relationship with God. The sin problem is our problem. God carries no blame at all... yet God provides all of the restitution. We owed a debt we could not pay, and Christ paid all of the debt He did not owe... and in that we have reconciliation.

⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁵

The Scripture holds out the possibility of occasional, extraordinary acts of generosity by people in certain circumstances. I ran across such a story this week; nobody died in this story, but it remains pretty incredible.

It was reported by a number of news agencies, perhaps you saw it; this version is from the military publication *Stars and Stripes*.



The judge pictured is Lou Olivera, and the one pictured below is Sgt. Joseph Serna, a decorated war hero, formerly a Special Forces soldier who served multiple combat tours in his nearly two-decade-long service in the Army.

⁴ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Ro 5:8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁵ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Ro 5:6-7). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

But it turned out that what made Serna an exemplary soldier, serving with valor, did not necessarily translate into civilian life. And while his experiences facing down death in the Middle East did not take his life or even leave visible marks, they did damage his heart and mind and soul. As many do, he *self-medicated* with alcohol and such... which led him into Judge Olivera's courtroom on multiple occasions.

On this recent occasion, Serna was facing charges related to drunk driving. In the course of the proceedings it became evident that Serna had lied to the judge previously, faking a sobriety test. However these other charges might have been resolved, the **lying** regarding this sobriety test violated Serna's probation; he had perjured himself in Olivera's court. The relationship was broken.

There was no way around it; Olivera was compelled to demand jail time for Serna. So he did, sentencing Serna to the minimum: 24 hours in jail. But that wasn't the end of the story. First, Judge Olivera drove to Serna's home and then personally delivered him to jail. And then the judge surrendered his own personal belongings and had himself booked into jail, serving the sentence alongside Serna in a one-person cell.

Olivera said that he was concerned that whatever progress Serna had made might have been lost during that night in jail, especially with the PTSD that tortured Serna. The judge thought the confinement might trigger a significant relapse. So he paid the price alongside Serna, talking to him throughout the stay, seeing him through to the end without incident.

Isn't that a marvelous story? We might see some parallels to our passage in today, even though what happened in Olivera's court is only a faint shadow of what happened for us in the court of Jesus.

- Serena's infraction was relatively minor; in our case, sin demands a death sentence
- Justice demanded only a day from Serena; God's Holiness demands eternal separation from sin
- Olivera could identify with Serena; he had served in the military as well. The Bible tells us that Jesus shared in all of our temptations and challenges, fully identifying with each of us and all of us.

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 is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
through whom we have now received reconciliation.

romans 5:6-11

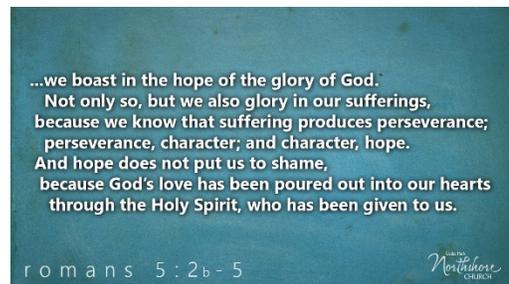
with the
Northshore
CHURCH

- Judge Olivera merely accompanied Serena for his sentence; Serena still paid the penalty... he just wasn't alone. In our case Jesus didn't merely accompany us in our punishment, Jesus entirely took our place.

This is the complete and full reconciliation that is ours. We are justified by Jesus, fully reconciled to God, now enjoying peace with God. And we are walking in that reconciliation, day-by-day, enjoying and understanding that relationship with God.

As a closing thought, note how that day-by-day reconciliation is explained near the beginning of the chapter.

we boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. ⁶



We said that sometimes we think in terms of reconciling ideas or concepts. This passage may lead us to a question that carries dissonance in need of reconciliation. The question goes something like this: **Why do bad things happen to good people?** Do you see it there? If we have been reconciled, found righteous before a Holy God, then what is up with the suffering identified in verse 3? Wouldn't it be great if the reconciled, righteous life resulted in no more suffering? We know that to be not true.

But here is what we do know. For the righteous, reconciled life, suffering serves a great purpose. In other circumstances, suffering is often *an end in itself...* just suffering... the result of disease or exploitation or crime, but more often our suffering is the result of self-inflicted wounds.

But in the righteous, reconciled life, suffering produces perseverance, and character, and hope... our faith in God results in more, richer, deeper faith in God if we will allow Him to use our suffering. God does not waste pain.

So today, receive this reconciliation.

⁶ The New International Version. (2011). (Ro 5:2-5). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Perhaps you find yourself far from God or somehow *not right* with God. No matter what you've tried, it seems to always fail. The call of Scripture today is to stop trying and start trusting. Believe Jesus today, find peace with God, and be reconciled.

Maybe you're suffering today... a victim of disease, or the cruelty of others, or maybe you're suffering from self-inflicted wounds. Could today be a day to believe... a day to allow God to turn our suffering into perseverance, character, and hope?

Our Father, **we believe**... help us in our unbelief. Help us to take hold of the reconciliation you provide, knowing in a more deep and real way that we have peace with You by the grace and work of Jesus Christ... by faith alone. Give us courage to allow you to work powerfully in our lives, even through suffering. And we pray in the confidence and name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.



Let's take a few minutes and open the floor for questions related to today's message from Romans 5, or even the other messages from Romans over the past few weeks.

