

Romans 5

by John Nelson Darby

Romans 5 emphasizes the believer's justification and peace with God through faith in Christ's death and resurrection, highlighting the transformative power of grace amidst tribulation.

Scripture: Romans 5:1

Topics: "Grace", "Justification"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the profound simplicity and clarity of Scripture, particularly in Romans 5, which reveals the essential truths about our relationship with God. He explains how through faith in Christ's death and resurrection, believers are justified and can experience peace with God, access to grace, and hope of glory. Darby contrasts the disobedience of Adam with the obedience of Christ, highlighting that while sin entered through one man, grace and righteousness come through another. He reassures believers that their justification is secure and that God's love, poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit, enables them to rejoice even in tribulations. Ultimately, Darby encourages a deep trust in God's grace, which reigns over sin and leads to a transformed life.

Transcript

How the heart must rejoice in the wonderful way in which scripture is made so plain, as to all that is of greatest importance to our souls! While our minds might be wondering and reasoning about many things that may be, scripture is simple and definite as to what is; although there are depths in it which we cannot fathom. All the simple truths which are necessary to our finding forgiveness and joy, being at peace with God, are contained in this chapter, as the result of what we have been already considering. The general subject of the epistle shews how God and man can be together - how man can come in peace to God. The object of the epistle is not to bring out truths connected with the church as such, but the relationship of individual souls with God.

43 In chapter 3 we saw the way in which the blood satisfied God, to save us from judgment. Christ came down and made propitiation for our sins in His blood, and having gone through all that sin deserved, He rose from the dead, and entered, an accepted man, into the presence of God; and now all that was His by right is made ours in Him. At the close of chapter 3 the instruction as to the blood, as the ground of acceptance, is finished; and the epistle goes on with the result of this, and passes to the resurrection of Christ as God's public seal on the work so far.

Chapter 4 shews righteousness imputed through faith, but identifies it thus far with forgiveness; Abraham believed God, who could - we in God who has - raised up Jesus. Having exhibited the intervention of God in power in His love to bring Christ up out of the place in which He was for us, and so set us before God in righteousness, according to the efficacy of that which He has wrought (proved in the place He holds in resurrection) we have thus peace with God. We are indeed sitting together in Christ in heavenly places, but this is Ephesian truth, not entered on here; only we are said to live by Him, and it is assumed we are in Him. We stand in perfect favour, and rejoice in hope of glory.

This chapter 5 follows out the subject of our acceptance, as founded on the death and resurrection of Christ, shewing fully our condition before God. This, as founded on what precedes, closes with verse 11, and then begins quite a new subject; the contrast of our connection with the first and last Adam. This latter part treats of sin, not of sins; of man's disobedience, and one Man's obedience. Chapter 4:25 is properly in connection with the first eleven verses of chapter 5.

Remark, that it is not said, He was raised because of our justification, as is often said, and it is in a certain aspect a truth, but here it is, "for our justification"; and the next verse shews this, for God never separates justification from faith. We cannot have justification without having our souls brought into living connection with God by the exercise of individual faith. The first result of this faith will be peace with God; the second, we have access into the grace, that present divine favour wherein we stand; and third, we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. All the past connected with the old man, all our sins and offences being put away, and a new place given before God, instead of the judgment we deserved, there is perfect peace. Secondly, we have present personal introduction into the full favour of God, but not all yet in possession; therefore we rejoice in hope. Christ has borne all that deserved judgment, and entirely left our sins behind as regards the believer, who can never come into judgment before God for them, although of course there will be the Father's chastening for sin. But it is impossible that judgment can be the portion of those whose sins Christ has wholly borne away, entering and placing them, in virtue of it, in a new place of righteousness before God. As impossible as it is that Christ's work should be inadequate, or that God should punish the same sin twice over, so impossible is it for God to punish the sins of those who believe. If any one had to be shut out of heaven, so to speak, it must have been Christ, because He had taken the sins; but He was accepted, received up to glory; therefore the matter must be settled for me, if I believe; Heb. 9:27, 28. He did not hold back: our sins in all their horribleness were laid upon Him (as on the day of atonement the high priest confessed the sins of the people), when judgment was fully passed upon Him. The judgment of my sins has all been settled between the all-seeing God and His spotless Son. There we have not a hope merely, but settled peace. "He by himself purged our sins, and sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high." He must have failed, or else I have perfect peace; and I know He did not fail.

44 Romans 5:1. The reference to faith here often deceives people, who would make their faith the object, and so turn back upon themselves for something to give them peace. Peace never rests upon experience. There will be experience, but peace is the answer of God to all the exercises of my conscience. I cannot trust my own heart, but I can trust God's heart, and it is in believing what this is that I find peace. The more Christ is worthy of being loved, if I bring my own selfishness into it, the more horrible must it be to God: "as dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour." I cannot trust my own heart or its feelings, for it is deceitful above all things; but I can trust Christ's - He has never deceived me. True, I shall have experiences - must have them, but I am not justified by experiences: it is the answer of God to them that gives peace. There may be joy at times, when there is not settled peace, but it rests on feeling. There is a joy which flows from a knowledge of forgiveness of sins, and this is justly called peace.

But the solid security of the soul flows from the second subject of this epistle, beginning verse 12, not that Christ died for our sins, but that we have died with Him. Peace means that which is settled. Faith looks at its object, not on itself, and through our Lord Jesus Christ.

45 We are not called on to believe that we do believe, but to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, by whom we have access, and are brought into perfect present favour, every cloud that could hide God's love removed, and can rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. "Thy favour is better than life, therefore I can praise thee while I live"; so that in the midst of wilderness weariness we can rejoice. There is a striking description in Revelation 4 of the scene in heaven - the twenty-four elders seated on their thrones in the presence of God revealed in this Sinai character. When terrible judgments are about to fall on the earth, they are sitting in perfect peace; and when it is said, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty," instead of it making them tremble and fear, "they worship him that liveth for ever and ever."

"Rejoicing in hope of the glory of God." How could I think of being there, if it was not all of grace? He has not only given us blessings, but associated us with the Blessor. "The glory thou hast given me, I have given them." Here is the Christian position as such, and then all brought out: for the past, the works of the old man, peace; for the present, favour; for the future, glory. What more do I want? What more can I have? Yes, there is more, "not only so"; there are present realities for the saint to learn in the wilderness - tribulation. The more faithful the saint is, the more trouble he will have; the more blessings he has, the more trial, because there is much to be removed that would hinder the blessing when given. What need, then, in all the tribulation of the way, to know that my peace is settled; that the matter of my justification is a finished thing! Else, when I come into the trial, I shall be likely to think, How can I suppose now that I have God's favour. All seems against me, and I shall not be able to "glory in tribulation."

But see what the result of tribulation is - "tribulation worketh patience." I need my will to be broken, I shall expect to get a thing and never have it; I may have to cry to God three weeks, and fast, as Daniel: I have to learn patience, and in it learn the rashness of my heart that would expect everything at once. And so "patience works experience." A man in earnest to do right will, if his will be at work, be in a hurry, but he will have to find out that he must wait for God's help, as Moses had to do, who kills an Egyptian in his haste without God's bidding, and Pharaoh hearing of it, off he goes. He has, in blessed true-heartedness, chosen to leave the court of Pharaoh's daughter, where he had been brought up, and to take his place with the afflicted brickmakers. But though sincere and devoted, and with a right intention, giving up the high position in which providence had placed him, his flesh had to be broken down, and this was through forty years' tribulation in the wilderness, keeping his father-in-law's sheep. He was learning experience, and experience works hope; because what hindered and dimmed the hope is broken away by the process; earthly hope has died away, and the heavenly become more real and bright; and because in it I learn what God is. Moses had more knowledge of what the people were to be delivered for, when he went to Pharaoh by God's sending; he knew nothing of the Canaan they were to go to when he slew the Egyptian.

46 "Hope maketh not ashamed." In learning experience it may be I struggle against God; but we shall find it is of no use to struggle in tribulation against God's hand, for He will hold us there until we submit; but in the end it will cause me to hope, "because the love of God is shed abroad in my heart." This gives me the key to all the tribulation, and enables me to glory in it. It is the fruit of God's own love. I confide in Him. How do I get this? By the Holy Ghost which is within me, "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost." It is not mine but His, God's love shed abroad; God, who is love, is in me, God's own love: this brings us back to a strength of hope which nothing can shake. Notice, it is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, who maketh intercession for us.

A man may say in the face of all this, But suppose I do not feel it? Well, then, you are going back from faith, and looking to your feelings. How do I know that I have it? Am I perfect? No; the love is enjoyed within, but God has graciously put the proof of it without me; I know it, because I believe that Christ died for the ungodly. I am simply an ungodly one and have no strength at all, no feeling at all, and Christ died when I had no feeling at all. Christ died when- I had no strength, and could do nothing at all. The greatest thing in heaven was given for the worst thing on earth, a sinner. I am a sinner, therefore Christ died for me. "For scarcely for a righteous man would one die." This is what distinguishes God's love from man's: while man must have some motive on which to act, something to draw out his love, God's love, on the contrary, springs from Himself; for God could find no motive in us, we were hateful.

47 How different is the Holy Ghost's reasoning from that of the natural man, or even it may be of the quickened soul, who, judging of God by himself, would say, He must judge me, for I know I deserve it! But "God commendeth his love . . . much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." The Holy Ghost reasons downwards from what God is in grace, to the full effect of that grace; not upwards as man does, from his responsibility to what God will be. The Holy Ghost unfolds what God is, to meet the wants of my soul. True it is, the sinner deserves judgment, he needs not merely to be made better (that will not do), he wants a Saviour. Here is reasoning God will allow, He will allow it till we have got a Saviour; but here, when the Holy Ghost reasons from what God has done for the sinner, it is quite another thing.

It is much harder to learn that we are without strength than that we are ungodly. If a dead Christ is made a Saviour, a living Christ will be a friend to you. A dying Christ for you (the weakest thing, as it appears in nature, though it was God's strength), and now how will He not do all you want of Him in His life? If He died for you when your sins were on you, how much more will He care for you now your sins are gone! A living Christ cannot be to destroy you, if a dying Christ has saved you (mark, not only the power of the argument, but its grace in taking away all torment from the heart, for "fear hath torment").

Verse 11. "Not only so, but we also joy in God," not only joy and happiness for ourselves in our security and in what He has given, but we can joy in God. We first rejoice in the things given, but do not rest here, we rejoice in Him who gives them, and delight in the things that God is in Himself. He is holy; He is love; He is great in goodness. I can boast in Him who has so loved us, and say what a God I have, what a God to me. Holiness would naturally terrify us: but we are in the light, and we can sit down with joy in the presence of Him who is the source of all our blessings.

48 If my will is not broken, it is true I cannot joy in God, I cannot even joy in tribulations; because He has to deal with me in such a way as to break my will, and we never like that process; but afterwards, when we are walking with Him, when He has broken it down, we can joy in Him. And so if I stray in practical walk, I do not doubt my salvation, but I cannot joy in God, though we know joy is there; we only joy in God when walking with Him. If I stray I can reflect about the joy, but I must take a double step in getting back: I must judge the sin according to the judgment of sins on the cross, where the sin I have committed is put away, and return to God's unchanging grace, before I can again joy in God.

This closes the whole subject of our sins, and God's justifying us from them by the death and resurrection of Christ, and the blessed fruits which flow from it, which, as to the revelation of God, go higher than the demonstration of my state in Christ, which follows to the end of chapter 8. The Holy Ghost is going to shew in whom we get our place before God, and draws now the contrast between our headship in the first and in the last Adam, thus laying a great foundation for the principles He is going to bring out, and in which,

having treated our sins and individual responsibility, He treats the question of sin, and the nature common to us all.

Verses 13-17 are in a parenthesis, and the notice of this makes the passage clear; read verse 18 in connection with verse 12. He heads all up in the obedient Man and the disobedient man. There is no longer the distinction between the Jews and Gentiles as families, nor even between man and man, each one of whom has his own sins and responsibility, but the living ones are all headed up in Christ, the unbelieving ones not, but in Adam only. We have no allusion to the bride, or union of that character here, but it is the individuals all seen in their Head. We get then the doctrine of these two men, from verses 12-18, sources of life to all connected with them, and the obedience of one, and the disobedience of the other, constituting us righteous or sinners, though each of us may have added his own sins.

But before turning more particularly to that, we will look at the contrast of grace with the law, of which the whole passage treats: "until the law sin was in the world," but the times of this ignorance God winked at, inasmuch as He did not treat with them as breakers of the law, when there was no law; but when there was law, they were governed by the law, and therefore Israel had the rod held over them, they were to be chastened for breaking the law, and banished ultimately into captivity. But the Gentiles have sinned without law, and He will judge the secrets of men by Christ Jesus; law never made sin, the sin was going on all the time from Adam to Moses, but law made the transgression. The sign of sins was present when there was no law, for death was there. My child may have a bad habit of running about the streets, but if I command him not, it is another thing, it is disobedience then, but before it was only a wrong thing that needed to be corrected. Though not after the similitude of Adam's transgression; that is, though not disobedience to a positive commandment men are sinners still, though they have not broken a given law. (It is a quotation from Hosea 6:6, "They, like Adam, have transgressed my covenant.") Sin was always there, death was always there to prove it, but law was not always there. "Imputed," in the phrase "sin is not imputed where there is no law," is a different word from "imputed" for righteousness, and the like. It signifies a positive existing act reckoned to the account of a person, as in Philemon 1:18.

49 The argument in this passage is, you are not going to shut up God to the Jews: sin was in the world before Moses, and the sin is not larger than God. If sin had been there God must go there. Christ did not come only for those under law; we must go up to the two heads, Adam and Christ, and so take in those who sinned without law, even between Adam and Moses. Grace overrides it all, "law entered that the offence might abound" - you (Jews) have added offence to offence, you need it all the more, for you have been guilty of positive transgression, but the free gift is of many offences. Verse 17. If God comes in, you will reign in life, not only sin having reigned, now life will reign, but you will reign in life. God's heart comes in, and it is greater in its effects than all the evil there has been. Verse 18. See the generality of all this upon all to condemnation, not in result, but in desert, for grace comes in to deliver.

50 By one righteousness the free gift came towards all, not in the sense of application, the meaning in each case is to or towards all (Greek eis), not upon all (Greek epi). As the one offence did not rest in its effect on Adam only, but run over to all, so the effect of the one work of righteousness did not end in Christ, but passed on toward all, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." Verse 19. When it is a matter of application, it is the "many," not "all," that is, the many respectively connected with each head, therefore I can go to all to preach the gospel - to every creature, saying to the sinner, the blood is on the mercy-seat; but to the believer I can say, You are righteous, "so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."

What comfort there is in the simplicity of scripture!

In the next chapter we get, as the certain effect of this newness of life, the principle of death and resurrection brought forward. But if you do not see the need of your having righteousness in Christ you do not know yourselves, you do not know the holiness of God's heart, and the unholiness of your own. Christ's death may be considered as in itself glorifying God, apart from its results; but we have the double effect or aspect of the death of Christ shewn in the two goats, one of which was the Lord's lot, and the other was for the bearing away into a land of forgetfulness the sins of the people; the first was for the glory of God, the second for the sins of the sinner, in the conscience of what he had done - both were needed. I have sinned, says the awakened conscience; but all my sins were laid on Christ, says the believer.

Verse 20. The entering in of law was that the offence might abound; wherefore the law? not to make sin abound, but to make sin exceeding sinful, and that the offence might abound, "but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound," and abounding grace has been shewn, for God gave His own well-beloved Son: and sin was suffered to rise up to its full wickedness, even in putting Christ to death, and then to shew how powerless sin is in the presence of God's grace, that very thing, in which its greatest evil was shewn as hatred against God, is that which puts it all away; God's grace rolls over it all, yet thus in righteousness. He has thus shewn the utter impotency of sin in His presence.

It is not said righteousness reigned: if it had, it would have been for the eternal condemnation of all (righteousness will reign when He comes in judgment), but now grace reigns through righteousness, grace goes on in spite of all the neglect in men's hearts to it - it reigns; it does not give up its ways and purposes; grace reigns over sin, man is unable to get the mastery over Christ's love but Christ's love overcomes man - it overcame everything that lay in the way of His fulfilling His Father's will, and His obedience overcame everything; grace reigned on the cross, yet righteousness was there; grace reigns in the subjection of our hearts - where sin did reign, grace reigns. Grace means love working where there is evil. How? By the obedience of One: hence, it is through righteousness.

51 Then if there is the reign of grace in the heart, there must be practical holiness, a righteousness consistent with it; if God's love works in the heart, it is to produce in it something like Himself. His love is such as has never been seen before in heaven or on earth. His perfect love and grace, and righteousness bring out what God is, Christ is grace reigning: and God has the upper hand even as to our sins, and has put them away.

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