

“While We Still Were Sinners”

Romans 5:1-8

15 June 2008

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Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

Prayer.

Since we are justified by faith,
Made right with God
Not by our works
But by our belief,
We have peace.
We now have peace,
With God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Peace is an equilibrium,
A mutual respect and honor,
Built on enduring faithfulness
And reverence for justice.
Peace does not imply equality,
Such that while we may enjoy peace with
God
We are not comparable.
We are not in the same league;
Nearly impossible to mention both
God and humankind
in the same breath.

Peace with God
Is an end to our earthly burdens

Chaining us to power, authority, and
economics.
Peace with God
Is the hope of the unbeliever.
It is what drives the pilgrim’s progress,
It is the motive of every disciple.
Peace with God
Is more than an end to the struggle.
It is the voluntary surrender of the self.
Peace with God
Is an end to the barriers that separate us.
It is an advance in our relationship
A more intimate embrace
In our dance with the divine.

Through Jesus Christ
We have been given access to this grace.
The door has been left unlocked and ajar.
In the black and white world
Of heaven or hell,
Righteousness or condemnation,
All were condemned.
All are fallen.
All fall short.
But,
God would not let us go.

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God does not let us go.
That which God created
In God's perfect image
Was not going to be allowed
to swirl down the drain.
All that God creates
Needs a little something
To compensate for our human imperfection.
That solution is Jesus;
His suffering and death upon the cross
And his resurrection from the grave.
Through Christ we have access
To the justifying grace of God.
Jesus opens the door
And invites us to enter.

Just as God does not leave us,
Neither will we succumb.
As disciples of Jesus,
Educated in his ways
And
Discerning his will,
We stand up and speak out!
We stand up and speak out
Because we are people on fire for the Lord.
We stand up and speak out
Because we are people living in the grace of
God.
We stand up and speak out
Because if we didn't,
it would kill us.

We boast in our hope.
There are no certainties
Other than Christ.
So, our hope is grounded in
God's faithful attention
to holding up
His end of the Covenant:
"I will be your God,"
He promised,
"You will be my people.
And I will forever bless you
And your offspring."
Though we've disappointed
And let God down,

God has remained faithful
To us.
Our experience gives us hope.
As we review our life history,
Can't we all see
With the clarity of hindsight
The unflawed faithful attention of
Our God,
Especially in our moments
of greatest need?

While we boast in our hope,
We also boast in our suffering.
As we experience the despair of suffering,
And if we are patience,
We begin to have revealed
The grace that God is giving us
In the midst of suffering;
The grace that God gives us
As the result of suffering.
Oh, how this flies contrary
in the face of convention.
It is as if we are taught that
If blessing is the sign of God's approval,
Then suffering must be a sign of God's
disapproval.
Occasionally, God has been known to
Be the source of suffering;
A wrath that is most characteristic
Of an Old Testament, angry and jealous
God.
But hasn't God warmed to humanity since
then?
Hasn't Jesus proved to be the tipping point,
A sign that God is much more the source of
Relationship, love, forgiveness, peace and
justice
Than a sign of a vengeful and condemning
God?
Jesus marks a new leaf
Such that we can no longer make the
connection
Between suffering and God's will.
Let me be clear:
Suffering continues to take place,
But experience tells us

we should no longer attribute it to
The condemnation or disapproval of God.
Suffering is the result of
The unintended consequences of
Living in a physical, biological, chemically
based world.
Suffering is the result of our poor judgment,
Or the poor judgment of those with whom
we related.
Suffering is the result of emotional frailty or
unrelieved stress.

While God isn't the cause,
God is ready and waiting to step in with
healing;
The balm of Gilead
That becomes the blessing of restoration
and resurrection.
God is ready and waiting to step in with life,
With redemption,
With healing.
As is with crisis
Suffering brings danger and opportunity.
The danger of suffering is the pain inflicted,
The danger of losing hope
Or the danger of losing faith.
But blessings lie within the opportunities
Suffering presents.
The grace of God,
Otherwise unrealized and beyond our ability
to conceptualize,
The grace of God
Can flow
Making rivers in the midst of desert
Making rough places plain
Revealing the glory of the Lord
And the limitless love for His children.

Enduring suffering
Builds character.
Enduring suffering
We are able to discover
the hope that God has already given.
When we endure suffering
We are splashed with God's grace.

Hope is the vessel
Into which is poured the love of God.
Hope is the vessel
Crafted from the cross
Created for us
While we still were sinners.
Hope is the vessel
Which only God can fill,
Which only God can satisfy.

Dearly beloved,
The Apostle Paul's fondness
For the church in Rome
Comes through to us today.
His love is only a foretaste
Of the eternal, excessive, undeserved love
That God has for you.
Amen.