

Prayers

To God

What can I give You today, Lord God? My work, my words, my deeds? Yes these, but so much more; I give You my thoughts, my feelings and my intentions, and also my life, my mind, my heart and my soul! But nothing I can give matches the wonder of all You have given me, for You have given up the life of Your Son Jesus so that I might be saved and have life! Glory Alleluia! AMEN

For Self

Make a list of two or three friends who are important to you

Pray for each friend according to what you know of their circumstances

Pray about your relationship with these friends, that God will use your friendships in the best possible way, and for greater good.

For others

Pray for the politicians of the world who are struggling to find ways of dealing with the threats of violence.

Ask God to raise up people of purpose and integrity who will lead our nations to deal with the threats of violence and establish peace in our world

Pray that our world will not be hoodwinked into a peace that is no peace, in which the rich are OK but the poor suffer

Meditation

I looked, as everyone sang their worship to the Lord,
And gave of themselves as the Spirit led:

Some sang with full voice to praise His name,
Wrapped up in the spiritual power of the songs;

Some moved their bodies in time with the music,
And lifted their hands in honour of His glory;

Some sang with feeling, receiving the eternal truths,
God has placed within our hymns and songs;

Some sat and worshipped despite evident suffering,
Soaked in the healing balm of their worship;

Some worshipped in tongues, in a spirit of praise,
Submitting their souls as an offering to God.

The wonder of worship is God's gracious response,
And the blessing of each heart that submits.

Bible Passage

Romans 5:6-11

⁶ For at the right time, and while we were still helpless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Now, even though someone might risk death for a person who is good, why would anyone die for someone who is righteous? ⁸ Yet God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us!

⁹ Since then we have now been put right with God by His blood, how much more will we be saved by Him from the wrath! ¹⁰ For if we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son when we were enemies, how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by His life! ¹¹ And as well as this, we rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have this reconciliation

Bible study Review

This wonderful chapter of Romans continues as Paul says more about what it means to be in a right relationship with God. He has already told us that we find this through Christ alone, who enables us to have peace with God (5:1), a sure hope of sharing God's glory (5:2), the gift of the Holy Spirit and an eternal future (5:3-5). In this passage he now begins to explain how this happens, through Christ's death on the Cross and in His resurrection. Not surprisingly, we begin to learn even more about these great gifts of God.

This brief passage is compact and can appear difficult to understand. People often find it hard because on the one hand, Paul is clearly excited about the amazing benefits of God's salvation, yet he explains that it all comes about because of Jesus' death, and we do not usually reckon that anything good comes from death. Nevertheless, this goes to the very heart of the Gospel. Paul has already explained that God had always intended salvation from sin to be the direct consequence of Jesus' death (3:25), so he now goes into more detail.

To begin with, he highlights the sovereign authority of God in bring salvation into the world; he says, '*for at the right time, and while we were yet helpless, Christ died for the ungodly.*' (5:6). We might think that this refers simply Jesus' death for sinners, but our passage hints at more. In using the phrase '*when we were still helpless*', Paul could well be speaking about his fellow Jews; he argued that contrary to their own beliefs, they were '*helpless*' and unable to keep the Law in the exact way demanded by Pharisees. Although levelled at the Jews, this point nevertheless reminds us that no one can escape the power of sin outside of God's pathway through Jesus. The other phrase, '*at the right time ... Christ died for the ungodly*' could then mean that Jesus died at a uniquely favourable time in history, when the message of God's love could be spread throughout the world to the Gentiles, by means of the Roman Empire at its peak.

Paul goes on to talk about what it means for one person to die for another. Of course, this is not a 'normal' part of human experience; we do not expect people to go as far as death just to defend even a good friend. Though he adds an understandable comment that it is not unknown for people to risk their lives for others - but this is the exception not the rule, and this is his point. In God's world, the death of Jesus is the rule not the exception, and Jesus has

died for all, sacrificially, so that they might find salvation; '*God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*' (5:8). Paul had previously described the rampant nature of sin in a godless world (1:18f.), but he now wants his readers to understand the rampant and incredible nature of what Jesus has done. Jesus' sacrifice is big enough to account for all this sin and offer a route to a relationship with God for all who will accept it.

Gloriously, there is more, as we see by the words Paul uses in verse 9 and 10; '*if ... then how much more ...*' First, he emphasises the fact that those who have a right relationship with God through Jesus' death, that is, through His 'blood', have surely escaped His wrath. They have avoided the dire just anger of God at all our inherent and often barely understood rebellion against His authority. In Paul's day, people would speak about the '*wrath of God*' as we might speak about fate, without really knowing what it is, yet fearing its power. With this in mind, we are given a powerful message that for those who have faith in Jesus there is liberty and freedom from fear. This is the Good News of God!

The next verse adds a subtle twist (5:10), declaring that if death means reconciliation with God, then Christ's resurrected life means much more! He does not say what, but implies the great blessings of faith and the Spirit, found in other great writings of Paul such as the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5) or the spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12). So salvation is not just about being saved from sin, it is about being released into a new life with Christ, with infinite potential! What a douse for rejoicing (5:11)!

In the coming chapters of Romans, Paul will say more about new life in Christ, but this is where he introduces the idea. It is a message of joy to be reinforced in every generation; God loves people not simply to save them from his wrath, but because He has so much more for them than they can imagine; He wants us to be 'saved' by His life so we find our lives!

Going Deeper

Why did Jesus have to die?

In verses 6 and 7, Paul appears to write in answer to the questions; '*Why should God send Jesus to die for us at the time when He did?*' and '*In what way is Jesus' death unique?*' There is a great deal of evidence (particularly in Corinthians) that Paul often wrote to answer specific questions put to him through a messenger, and it could be that when Paul launches into something in a way that does not seem obvious to us, he is doing just this. Some would argue he may have had a list of such questions in front of him as he dictated his letters!

What was the significance of the timing of Jesus' death. Some background may help. Most Jewish people remembered the sacrifice of Jewish people during the Maccabean revolt (around 168 BC). At that time, some people had given themselves to martyrdom for the cause of the Jewish faith, notably the 'Hassidim' ('Men of the Covenant'), who fought against their oppressive Greek rulers. Yet their sacrifice led to the positive result, which was the institution of a version of Jewish 'home rule', still in place at the time of Jesus. So Paul is saying here that where people might look for some earthly reason for the timing of Jesus' death (as they could find a reason for the death of the Maccabean martyrs), they do so in vain. The death of Jesus happened in order to save all people everywhere, and it was the right time according to God's plan, and not to create any human benefit. The death of Jesus is on a different level on historic importance than any other great event of history.

Paul deals equally lightly with the second question about what was different about Jesus' death in comparison to that of other 'martyrs'. We will discover later in Romans (chapter 6) that Paul has a great deal to say about the meaning of Jesus' death, but from a human perspective, there is no useful comparison to be made. Despite there being a considerable degree of uncertainty about how to translate verse 7, it seems certain that Paul was saying that it was indeed known for people to die for all manner of good people or good causes, including the cause of the 'righteous' (possibly a reference to the 'Hassidim' who died in the manner described above); and the Greek of the verse is quite ambiguous in the second half of the sentence, making it uncertain as to whether it is talking about death on behalf of good people, or for good causes. The implication is that Jesus' death is quite a different matter, and that is what comes out next in our passage.

Faith in the death of Jesus and God's intentions for its saving effects

Paul explains as much as he intends about Jesus' death in verse 8, where he combines what he said earlier in the letter about this ('God intended that through faith, His blood should be the means of the forgiveness of sins' - 3:25), with the passion and enthusiasm of the present passage (chapter 5). So, in saying 'But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (5:8), Paul appeals to the emotions rather than to the intellect. This, of course, is a famous passage that is well used as a text for preaching, but it contains no real explanation of how the death of Jesus works to achieve this result; it is a statement of passion and conviction. It is incredible, it is remarkable, and it is unheard of in human history that one person should die and His death be considered as dealing with the sins of everyone! His is His words were probably self evident to those who understood the meaning of death in the Jewish sacrificial system (which is used by Paul and other New Testament writers in passages which do explain Jesus' death, for example in Romans 6:5f. and Hebrews 10), but they were really an appeal to pure faith, and to trust in God. Further explanations follow later in the letter!

Salvation by faith, not a matter of death, but of life!

It is most likely that Paul did not dwell on the subject of Jesus' death at this point because he had another purpose in mind, which was to talk about the positive effects of what Jesus had done, rather than dwell on His death. Certainly, he says, our salvation has been won through the awful but triumphant death of Jesus, but Paul emphasises that through Christ's death we are made free! This comes across in verse 9, where Paul talks not about Jesus' death, but His 'blood', thereby guiding our thoughts towards the outpouring of His life for everyone. Indeed, the first positive effect of Jesus' 'blood' is to save us from 'wrath' (5:9). Wrath, as described in Romans 1:18f., and it is the natural process whereby in this world, sins compound in the lives of people so that they cannot escape the evil consequences of their sinful actions. Through faith in Jesus, people are set free from this bondage! (5:9).

Then, Paul emphasises the transformation that faith works by indicating that if Jesus, through His death, has 'reconciled' us to God from a state of sin, 'how much more ... will we be saved by His life?' (5:10). In this enigmatic phrase, Paul hints that God has good things in store for us. Salvation from sin is of course an incredible privilege and a remarkable work of God by itself, but it is the starting place of greater things; indeed, Paul implies, the beginning of new life!

In each of verses 9, 10 and 11, Paul uses a form of words that is typical of his writing, and typical of the way that he attempts to say that God's love for us goes beyond our expectations and beyond anything we can conceive. If you were to do a 'word search' on the expression

'how much more', you would discover that Jesus used it many times in his teaching (Matt 12:12, Matt 25:29, Luke 12:7 etc), and Paul took it up in this way, as well (Eph 3:20, Phil 1:9, 1 Thess 3:12 etc.). It is not often that we find links between the teaching of Jesus and Paul, but this characteristic encouragement to go beyond our expectations when dealing with the things of God is a true connection. In the last verse of our passage, Paul uses it to encourage his readers to rejoice even more, because of the reconciliation that has been achieved between men and women and God. Surely, he says, there are no bounds to the joy we should express that evil and death have been defeated, and the consequences of the fall of humanity have been overcome. How can we ever cease to praise God for acting in this way to save us, when we clearly could not save ourselves!

Application

Discipleship issues

Explanations and wonder

It seems that in this passage of Romans, Paul is caught between explaining things and letting himself go in expressing the wonder of what God has done in Jesus. After his powerful explanation of the effects of our faith in achieving 'peace with God' (5:1-5), Paul needed to say more about Jesus' death on the Cross. Now the passage we have studied is notoriously difficult to unravel, but I suggest that it is best understood as offering one significant thought. Salvation is just not a matter of escaping God's wrath, but the beginning of a relationship with God that is later described by Paul as 'new life'.

The excitement of 'new life'

Sometimes our religious life does not have the excitement and zeal of what we might call 'new life'. Something that is new is exhilarating and fresh, and it drives people to do things they would not have otherwise considered. New life is not old life, and we only have to think about these two phrases to be stirred into thinking positively about what our 'new life in Christ' might be. Now, Paul will say more about this soon, but when he delivers a 'taster' such as this, it should make us want to find out more. It can be hard to make an average church congregation think that there is anything on offer they have not already heard about many times before, but God constantly calls His people to accept that He has more for them.

Is it not possible for us to celebrate with sheer joy the fact that what God has done for us promises far more than we can ever rationalise or contemplate? A sense of excitement at the truth of the Gospel runs throughout this passage, and if it does not run throughout our church life and our personal discipleship as well, then surely something vital is missing from our faith! How glorious it is to be saved from the consequences of sin! How wonderful to know that the Lord has new life for us that lies beyond what we experience now, whatever our level of Christian experience! How amazing to know that our reconciliation with God through Jesus will lead us to an eternal life with infinite possibilities in the care and love of Almighty God! Despite the often awkward translations of these verses in many Bible versions, this is the excitement that drove Paul as he wrote.

Ideas for what to do

- Are you someone who accepts things on trust, or who needs to have a reason before you will do something or act on it? It can be helpful to think about these things in prayer, so that we do not become closed to the possibilities of grace working in us.
- Pray for all who find it hard to accept things on trust, especially things of faith. If you know any who are like this, pray for them individually, and ask the Lord to help them see that faith is not a risk, it is a reasonable route to personal security and a real relationship with God.

Questions for groups

1. *Under what circumstances would you be prepared to die for someone?*
 2. *Share within your group what words you would use to describe your feelings about the fact that Jesus has died so that you can be set free.*
 3. *Discuss in your group how is it that we know we are reconciled with God, and saved from 'wrath'*
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Final Prayer

Almighty God, Your grace is sufficient in every situation. When we feel oppressed by the circumstances in which we find ourselves, remind us that in You, we have a hope that reaches far beyond our present problems; and in Your mercy, grant us peace. Thank You, Almighty God; AMEN