

Record of Sermons delivered during the month of
March 2020

(added progressively after each Sunday)

(see following pages)

Romans 4:1-25

But for Us Also

Rom 4:23/4

²³ **But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone,**
²⁴ **but for ours also.**

Last week we began to consider the throng of 'seekers' stumbling through the side-ditch (and failing) beside the narrow road of life that leads to salvation. These are some of them (unlike those to be arrayed in white robes) who flee from their sensing God's final wrath for them, but have not (as yet) been called by the Spirit. They have heard and understand part of the 'outward call' of the Gospel, but their hearts, their flawed human natures, are not ready to be called by the Spirit (the inward call) and given faith in the saving work of Christ. The work that is already done, for any who truly believe and are made capable to turn away from the old life, to in fact repent. As they try to escape God's justice, like the pagan who tries to placate his false sense of a god by the sacrifice of his most treasured child, they cling to the DIY recipe for salvation. They must do, do, do, not realising that Christ has already 'done'. Retaining their own self-centredness they look to get right with God by the feeble things that they can do, rather than trusting the mighty work of grace God has already done. This is the, 'I'll work it out my own way. I want to be in charge. I want to be like God myself.' method which is also called *legalism*. Efforts to attain the goal of reinstatement with God by conformity to a legal pattern, such as the Jewish doctrine of 'works' or personal merit. Efforts which have been shown throughout salvation history to be inadequate and therefore futile. There is no justification possible through the mere observance of any form of legal code. There **is** justification, through faith alone in Christ alone.

We mentioned that some established Churches erroneously recommend such legalism. While saying that salvation is by the grace of God through the atonement of Christ; that Christ's sinless life, sacrificial death, vindicating resurrection and glorious ascension are grounds for God's gift of righteousness, they ADD the 'works' of faulty sinners, in order that God's grace can be completed! They imply that Christ's finished work is insufficient to save even one person, without the aid of Church-directed human works. But by requiring any flawed-human to generate, in their own strength, works acceptable to God, they make it impossible for even one person to be saved. Since 'fallen' humans can do nothing acceptable to God (they in fact don't even want to). Even faith itself is not a **ground** (a because of) of salvation. It is a **means** (a conduit, entrusting oneself to Christ). In Galatians 2:16, Paul uses different Greek prepositions – both translated as 'by' in the NIV, but more correctly in the ESV! The first, *ek*, refers to the inability of natural man to gain justification 'by' works. Here the preposition has the added (in the Greek) purpose of drawing attention to origin – such justification would have its origin in a person's 'works', that is, the translation could be: 'out of works of the law'.¹ However when referring to the effective means of justification, Paul uses *dia* which has the effect of pointing to the agency (source) of that justification –

that is **through** Christ. Faith then is that which is centred on Christ. Justification does not proceed from faith, any more than by works, but Justification is appropriated (received) through faith.

Perhaps we might say, "Well just to be sure, let's take out a bit of insurance. We'll accept God's grace, believe and repent, and then we'll add some good works for 'good measure'." Sounds a very fair thing. If a merchant offered a little extra, just to be sure, as it were, like a 'baker's dozen', just to make sure of full value, most would find this acceptable, even praiseworthy. But it doesn't work if the original action is a gift and not a transaction of trade. What do you think of a person who wants to pay you for a gift, just in case.

Paul, in Romans is strongly defending the gospel of grace alone. A righteousness of God, conferred by God, that is a free gift. In chapter 4 he is particularly concerned about the developing Christian Churches of his day, who were being drawn away from faith alone to add back the works of observance and ritual of the Old covenant that were so familiar to the Jewish Christians. His earlier letter, to the Galatian Churches, referred specifically to their turning back to their old ways. Rather than continuing in the new freedom that faith alone brings. Note how in the following verses he shows that returning to the old bondage would **cancel** the benefit of the gospel:

¹⁸ *For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor.*

... ²¹ *I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness⁽¹⁾ were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.*

Footnote 1. Galatians 2:21 Or *justification*

[Paul is actually raising a charge against those who were being led astray by the Judaisers, even as Barnabas was. However so as not to be seen as too dictatorial or officious, he uses himself as a hypothetical target for his criticism.] He says that if he had destroyed the expectation that he could achieve God's righteousness by obedience to the law, customs and rituals of the Law (the Jewish observances) to receive the free gift of grace through the blood and righteousness of Christ only to then rebuild that works expectation, then he truly would be a law breaker. At first his transgression would have been passive. He knew no better. But having received and believed the gospel, as the Galatian Christians and Jewish Christians in Rome had at first, then to deliberately go back to what one knew to be false was deliberate sin. Behaving as if justification through faith in Christ's sacrifice was unnecessary. So that Christ had died for nothing!

In Galatia, behind the broad issue of the failure of Justification by 'works' was the rest of the Jewish traditions. The rite of male circumcision, the dietary rules and the Sabbath observance. The Jewish Christians of the 'circumcision party' sought to thrust all this on the Gentile Christians. Instead of the simple, free, Justification by faith in Jesus. The particular issue discussed in Galatians 2, relates to hospitality at the meal table – table fellowship. Instead of common hospitality with Jew and Gentile alike, this was being fractured by a demand that if a Gentile Christian had not taken on the act of circumcision (as a ground for justification) then other Christians (generally Jewish) should not sit down with them in a meal. Even Peter and Barnabas succumbed to this!

So as Paul prepares to visit Rome he wants any continuation or introduction of these distortions of Christian fellowship and unity, together with any misunderstanding of the doctrine of Justification by faith alone, to be set aside.

From verse 9 he specifically deals with the issue of compulsory circumcision for Gentile Christians **as a ground for their salvation**. Having already used the prime ancestor, Abraham, to show Justification (or the deeming of righteousness) by faith, he now asks, "When did Abraham's circumcision occur? Before he was justified or after? It was after!" Abraham at the time he was justified was just like any Gentile, he was uncircumcised. If it were, the rite of circumcision, then, that set a Jew apart from a Gentile, then Abraham at that time, was simply a Gentile. What then was the purpose of his circumcision? It was a sign, a seal, a visible symbolic recognition that Abraham was already deemed righteous by God. In much the same way as baptism is. Neither is a **ground** for justification.

The Jews held Abraham as the father of their race and their religion. But here Paul is showing that even before Abraham received the sign of Jewishness he was the father of a different meaning of descendant. He was the father of those uncircumcised (like he had been) who had the faith that he had. And also, as he became a circumcised Jew, he was the father of those who were circumcised but who also had that same faith, that he had. Both Jew and Gentile coming into a state of being right in God's eyes in the same way. By faith in Christ alone.

Abraham was also the father of the promise. The promise of a great Nation. But more than this: Descendants more numerous than the stars, blessing to all Nations, through one special 'seed' (singular) the Saviour of mankind – Jew and Gentile – through Jesus the Messiah (Gal 3:16). It is important to note that the first record of God's promise to Abram – when he was 75, some 25 years before the miraculous birth of Isaac – included the blessing that would come to 'all the peoples on earth'. Paul asks, were such promises made to Abraham because he obeyed the law and thus was able to earn his righteousness and justify the promises? No the law came through Moses some 430 years after the promise of Abraham's 'seed' (the Messiah) that was to come.

And how were these promises to be guaranteed? Was it through the earning of merit by Abraham's descendants? No and Yes. All the Jews, but one, failed to earn Justification by their own merits throughout the generations. But the 'seed', Jesus, was, as Luther put it, 'the proper man'. In the hymn we are about to sing the translation renders this phrase as the 'right Man'. So the guarantee could only be through the finished work of Jesus. That is, our Justification – the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham – is solely through faith in Jesus, by His sacrifice satisfying the penalty for sin and His righteousness covering our sinfulness. There is no other way God could guarantee His promises. He certainly could not depend on us. Only on Himself: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

How deep was the faith in God and His promise? A faith that God graciously granted to Abraham. ¹⁸ *In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of*

many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” How could any part of the promise come to pass. It was impossible. Against all hope! He was 100 and Sarah, not only recognised as 'barren' all her life, was now significantly past the 'child bearing years'. She was about 90. Abraham's faith was in the God *who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist*. So he, who for practical purposes was already dead, believed what was not possible. Because, and only because, it was God who said it.

²⁰ *No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,* ²¹ *fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.* ²² *That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness”.*

Now we come to today's text and title: ²³ *But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone,* ²⁴ *but for ours also.*

We too need to learn, from God's justification (credited righteousness) of Abraham. Faith through the saving work of Christ is the only way God today will credit righteousness to us.

Chapter 4 then sticks to its single theme: Justification by faith alone. However, in Chapter 6 particularly, Paul answers the charge that this leads to antinomian-ism. That one can be justified without living a better – changed – life. Extremely put: that you can be saved and then sin with impunity. Rather: that you can be saved because of faith in Christ; and not because of your works. But then the evidence of that true faith is demonstrated by your doing the 'good' works of Christ who lives in you.

Contemporary (now deceased) evangelical theologian [R. C. Sproul](#) writes:

The relationship of faith and good works is one that may be distinguished but never separated ... if good works do not follow from our profession of faith, it is a clear indication that we do not possess justifying faith. The Reformed formula is, “**We are justified by faith alone but not by a faith that is alone.**”²

When we get to Chapter 6, we will explore this further.

Paul, in writing to Timothy (2 Tim 3:14-17) gave this advice: ¹⁴ *But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it* ¹⁵ *and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.* ¹⁶ *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,* ¹⁷ *that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.*

And earlier in Chapter 2 Tim 2:11-13

¹¹ *The saying is trustworthy, for:*

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

¹² *if we endure, we will also reign with him;*

*if we deny him, he also will deny us;
¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful—
for he cannot deny himself.
for he cannot disown himself.*

[2230]

Pray for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we may live the new life made possible for all the saints present today. Amen

Romans Chapters 1-4

Much in Every Way

Rom 3:31

³¹ Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

Before we move to chapter 5 of Romans, in future weeks, let us pause to review an issue raised, so far, in Chapters 1-4.

Paul has very vigorously introduced and defended, that in order to be made 'right with God', we can only rest in His grace alone, through the faith His Spirit implants in the 'heart': in the finished work of Christ alone.

He constantly reiterates that: reliance on knowledge of the Law and our 'fallen', futile attempts to justify ourselves, through self-reliant 'works of the Law,' are unable to bring about the righteousness that God would require. Only God is righteous, that is: only Christ the Lord is righteous and satisfies the Law. And in this sense The Faith (Justification by faith alone) upholds the Law. The Law requires perfect obedience. Christ did this. The principle of the Law requires death for even the tiniest breach. Christ died for our sins. In Christ's atonement and satisfaction of the Law, He (and He alone) upholds the Law.

Who were the recipients of the Law? The Law of Moses. The law demonstrated by the Prophets. The law revealed from God in all the Scriptures. Initially the 'Chosen People'; the 'children of Israel (Jacob); the Jews. At the point in God's salvation history, when Paul was writing, these were the recipients of the Law of God.

And so he asks the question: (3:1) What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew? And adds the other Jewish sign, circumcision, which was incorporated initially in the practice of the Law. His answer is: **much in every way**. And he goes on to specifically mention that they have been entrusted, for centuries, with the very word of God.

Thus today we look at God's Law that is now entrusted to us. The advantage that is **much in every way**.

As we have mentioned 'the law' is a widely encompassing term. It embodies God's revealed will for us in every page of the Scriptures. And it is summed up in the two cases (Exodus and Deuteronomy) in what we call 'The Ten Commandments' and even more succinctly put in the OT references that Jesus quotes, when He is asked by *the expert in the law*, (Matt 22:36-40) ³⁶*“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”* ³⁷ *And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. (Deut. 6:5)* ³⁸ *This is the great and first commandment.* ³⁹ *And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. (Lev. 19:18)* ⁴⁰*On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”*

Absolute obedience to the law, we know, is not possible for us in our 'fallen state'. We cannot earn salvation in this way. But the Law (the command of Jesus) is still relevant to the truly believing Christian. **Much in every way.**

Firstly it is through the Law that we are **shown that we are sinners** and deserve the full wrath of God. This is the first part of the message of the 'good news'. The gospel. It is only when the Spirit convinces and convicts us, in our heart, by the use of Scripture – in particular the law – of our sin, that we are made ready to be converted, at God's pleasure, through His will. (Note our 'new birth' is not of our choosing, but entirely by God's sovereign will as He sees fit.) Again it is the Spirit, using the Word, that changes our 'heart' from stony rejection of God and Christ. Only through the Spirit may we be able to repent and believe so as to become Justified through the 'finished work of Christ'.

It is not for nothing that in Ephesians 6:17 the (active, attacking) work of the Spirit is coupled with the revealed Word of God. How strong is the image: that the Spirit works on us with the Word as His mighty sword! It is God's choice that His Spirit operates in and through the Word. The **Sword of the Spirit**. Incidentally you might recall that our password when required on our web-site is *swordofthespirit*, as a frequent reminder of God's way.

The value to the Christian of the law is **much in every way!**

Now to the second point: The law has been in OT times, and still is today, a **moderating influence on society**. This is so even if many are unbelievers, as long as they still know and follow, even though it be a matter of social coercion, the Ten Commandments. Or even somewhat loosely: the 'Golden Rule'. Two thousand years of Christian civilisation has been built on this! Even though at any time, some more than others, there have always been many who are at best 'nominal' Christians. Other civilisations throughout history have either been controlled by arbitrary and merciless dictators using overwhelming force or else have decayed and died out. However it is becoming harder and harder in current Western Civilisation, which has owed so much to God's law in the past, to find knowledge and regard for the social benefits of His laws.

Some moderation of behaviour is motivated by profit. Appear to be law abiding, honest and trustworthy in order to sell your product or service – at a profit. But a growing disenchanted and marginalised under-class is evident. There is no profit motive for them. Nor are they the recipients of commercial favour – since they don't have the discretionary money to be significant customers. We have seen in England (2011 Youth Riots) where a disenfranchised underclass of the young – in some cases barely teenage – have opportunistically taken what ever they want during rolling riots. "It was like Christmas presents" – without an understanding of the implications of their words – they said. The goods in the 'broken' shops were theirs for the taking! Where is the knowledge of the law? Where are the parents which foster good social behaviour and civic duty – a reflection of God's law? Nowhere to be seen!

How far is our Australian society from British style riots? We had a Prime Minister who is a declared atheist, who when it suited her, would mouth a platitude such as, 'We pray for the flood ravaged people of Queensland'. Frequent evidence of Post-Modern language and action from all sections of society – not just the young. There is no absolute right and wrong they believe. No ten commandments. No righteous God. Just do what feels 'good' to you at the time. Perhaps even a different 'good' some other time. Whatever!

What has been the training of the recent generations. Up to today's middle teenagers. How many have been conveniently fostered to clinically, commercialised 'child care' even from the age of a few months. While both parents develop their 'full potential'. Our families are gadget rich and nurture poor.

Then there is still family pride. But not the pride that says, "Show outsiders that you are a worthwhile person." That you follow the 'golden rule'. No! Family pride today is, "How dare you question our family, by drawing attention to the errors of our children." You see it in the family groups which crowd outside the court to blame everyone else for their child's appearance there.

Then at school. Many of us will know of a time past when a child came home from school with the complaint that they were punished at school that day. What was the parents response? Good on the school. Here's some more!

Today? "How dare you school people criticise our family". During 14 years at the same school I saw cases where in the primary grades a controllable, but naughty, child was supported against the schools discipline, by the parents, when corrective action or formative discipline was being applied. Later when the child was about 14 the same parents would come to a high school 'parent-teacher' meeting, wringing their hands and pleading, "Tell my what I can do. I can't cope with him." As we sow, so shall we reap!³ But our society is reaping the results of the failure of allowing God's law to to be **much in every way**.

The third use of the Law. As a guide, a blueprint, a Maker's manual for the **proper conduct of God's adopted children**. The redeemed at infinite cost. The saved. The true believer. The Christian.

Each week in our full Order of Service, following the Prayer of Confession, I often have before me these words:

Guide for grateful living:

"As God's forgiven people, how are we to live?"

Hear now God's will for our lives:"

The Law:

"Hear the teaching of Christ:
'A new commandment I give to you,
that you love one another
as I have loved you' "

from John 13:34 NRSV

Which is just a brief reminder of God's will for our lives, which is contained throughout scripture. The full Law of God.

Once again we are powerless to obey the Law absolutely. But as 'born again' children of God we have a Spirit-changed heart. Unlike unbelievers we have been changed, to recognise God and receive – by imputation from the work of Christ – forgiveness of sins, that are paid in full and the 'cloak of His righteousness' that stands between God and our still sinful, fallen natures. With the Spirit's help and Christ working in us, we – already set apart – (holy) willingly seek to grow in righteousness. To co-operate in God's will for our sanctification by taking to heart the **much in every way** that His law directs.

[1594]

Pray for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we may live the new life made possible for all the saints present today. Amen

Romans 5:1-11

Peace and Hope

Rom 5:1

¹ ... since we have been justified by faith, we (let us) have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's letter to the scattered house churches in Rome continues. He has one eye on the Jewish objector to his Law-free gospel (as has been the case in other letters – particularly to the Galatians). But he is concerned for the genuine believer, Jewish or Gentile, as well. Chapter 4 was addressing the objector, now he turns to the believer.

Few pages of Paul's writings so eloquently set out, the blessings of Christian belief, as this. Through Christ, the believer is now justified; reconciled and at peace with God; given a gracious standing in the presence of God; and assured of salvation for the Last Day. At the same time however, Paul by no means plays down the circumstances of some of his readers, then and now. They were and remain morally powerless; godless; sinners; enemies of God; and destined for His wrath.⁴

A keyword in the passage would be 'exult', while the 'time words', 'now' (*nun*); 'still' (*eti*); and 'right time' (*kairos*) are significant.

Paul, as a devout Jew, prior to his conversion, would have believed that God's revelation of all things would be delayed to the End Day. Especially the revealing of who would be deemed 'righteous' before God, based on God's evaluation of, and reward for, self-effort from good works. Like looking forward to the publishing of exam results to see who passes and who fails.

Now, Paul's teaching is a radical departure from this. Who God chooses to receive the verdict of 'righteous' can be revealed now, before the End, while 'this present age', continues. Above all this verdict is not dependant on self-effort or works, but only on whether or not one belongs to Christ.

If one does indeed, belong to Him, one is deemed 'righteous' now, even though he is 'still' ungodly. The Day of Judgement has been brought forward into the present and God's verdict is known, and that verdict is good to all those who believe.

As a result of God's saving activity in Christ, that secures their ultimate futures, Paul and his fellow believers 'boast', that is, 'exalt in', their sure hope of sharing God's glory and even in the sufferings that strengthen that hope. Furthermore they 'exalt in' God Himself.

In chapter 4 Paul's pastoral concern was for the theological misunderstanding of the Jewish objector. Now, while the main point is that the believer will be safe on the Last Day on account of Christ's 'blood' and His risen 'life', Paul addresses the present time and its 'afflictions'. Paul brings hope and purpose to bear on such sufferings. The Jews in Rome had been expelled by Claudius in AD 49 and by the time of Paul's letter, had only been able to return in the past couple of years. Not only that, Jew and Gentile alike were out of the 'frying pan into the fire' as it were, with the developing rule

⁴ Direct quotes from: Paul Barnett, *Romans – the revelation of God's righteousness*, Christian Focus Publications, Fearn Scotland, 2007, p 99

of Nero. Yet Paul, by way of ministry encourages them: that in 'affliction', 'hope' is strengthened. This hope will 'not disappoint' when finally it is revealed.

Immediate blessings: (v 1,2)

Because we are 'justified' by faith we enjoy two immediate blessings through Jesus Christ our Lord.

First is '**peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ**'. God was angry with us. His wrath and judgement were accumulating against us. We, like the world, were guilty before God. This is clear from Chapters 1-3. But 'now' God the Father's righteous, holy, absolute and perfect justice has been preserved by what Christ did. What God did by His incarnation as the Son. The anger, the punishment, due to us, has been diverted and has fallen on God Himself. Our substitute, Jesus – the second *person* of the one God. There is no punishment for us to bear. God no longer has cause to condemn us. Instead, we are approved by Him as no longer guilty. The second blessing, is '**access by faith into this grace in which we stand**', and follows as the outcome of the first. By faith, Christ's righteousness has been credited to us. Though our fallen human natures are still flawed, God sees only Christ in us. His 'cloak of righteousness' covers us. We are adopted as sons, heirs of God's presence and glory at the End Day. We meet with God's whole-hearted approval, just as He approves the 'begotten' Son, Christ Himself. What wonder! His wrath towards us has been removed and replaced with 'peace with Him' through our Lord Jesus Christ. A peace that does not refer primarily to our state of mind, but defines our reconciled relationship to God.

In all of this we '**rejoice (boast, exult) in the hope of the glory of God**'. In a special way our being reconciled to God in the present, bringing as it does the indwelling of the Spirit in our lives, makes our lives better than they could ever be. Right now! We enjoy God's peace right now in this life. But will He then reject us when we die? No! He has no reason any more to reject us. In Christ our acceptance is not only complete and unqualified, but also eternal. God's righteousness is seen in His fearful justice, but also in His magnificent mercy and love. Christ having satisfied justice, now brings God's mercy and love to our lives, right now. It is certain that this unchangeable mercy and love will stay with us, as He promises, throughout eternity. This then is a certainty, but has not yet happened. He **will** receive us into His glorious dwelling place. The biblical meaning of 'hope' is not wishful thinking, but an absolute confidence in the certainty of what is to come, though it has not, as yet, happened to us.

What about trials and difficulties? (v3,4)

We are not yet in heaven. This world, this life, is flawed by man's rejection of God right from Adam. We have blessedness in reconciliation with God and that certain hope into eternity. Our lives are magnificently better than the lives of all those without reconciliation and hope, but meanwhile affliction is promised to us throughout our remaining days on earth (John 16:33; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim 3:12; 1 Peter 4:12-16). There is no such thing as a comfortable Christian.

To unbelievers, who do not know Christ. Who do not know and revere His agony, lovingly endured, for us. Who do not know that His believers must 'also take up His

Cross' as they follow Him. For unbelievers who are in that state, where they cannot receive the 'blessedness of God's peace' and 'rest in the grace in which we stand' or have that certain hope in eternity. For these – the vast majority – it is false to advertise that a Church can 'make life better'. To unbelievers who see such a message, they can only assume and expect that they are being offered a comfortable, pleasant, prosperous life. This is not the Christian message!

The Christian rejoices in difficulties; we glory and exult (boast) in them! Paul explains this because trouble (like the refining of metal by fire) produces 'perseverance' (endurance, patience, steadfastness). This in turn, produces a tried and mature Christian 'character' or experience.

Initially, in the Christian life, we may be immature and shallow Christians. Guided by the Spirit, unfolding circumstances ('afflictions') teach us 'patience' – bringing on a deepened 'character' that has been tried and tested (as the beating of the horseshoe and testing its shape on the anvil). Thus we see beyond this world into God's Kingdom.

People of such spiritual stability are inevitably those with increasing hope. Spirituality and hope are intimately related.

In this way everything that we suffer causes us to look more and more towards that heavenly inheritance which is waiting for us. That certain hope. For as we grow in hope we also become increasingly assured, by the Spirit who is active in our hearts, that God loves us. (v 5) This is clearer to us in times of trouble than in times of ease.⁵

What an amazing thing Christian experience is! The buffetings of this world stir up our hope of, and our longings for, heaven. The more the world turns its back on us, the more sure we are that God loves us. Will He who loves us so much, fail to 'bring us home'? Would His Spirit stir up within us such a hope only not to bring it about?⁶

Where is the proof that God loves you? (v6-8)

Such proof is not found in the circumstances which surround us in this world. It is found through Calvary. We were unable to save ourselves, powerless and lost. Alienated from God. Hating His righteousness even. With us, in this condition, entirely at God's appointed time, that special 'right time', the *kairos* time, Christ died for us even though we were ungodly, undeserving and already condemned. That is love. That really is love.

Paul contrasts it with the best that humans demonstrate. Perhaps for a really good person another may *dare* to die. But Christ died for sinners. Even the worst. How do you feel about a Hitler, Armin, Gaddafi being saved? 'Surely not them', you say. Surely not! Even if they were to come to belief in Christ? But if not them, then it would not be us either! Where do they fit on a scale of merit compared with us and then with God's righteousness? It's difficult for us to imagine the infinite. Or even the very, very large. We use analogies and still fall very short. Consider the vastness of even our planet earth. We might liken it to an apple, say. If the earth were the size of an apple then the highest mountain and the deepest sea would not even be noticed on

5 The salvation of the sinner is the work of the triune God: Great concord between the persons of the Trinity is shown in this passage. God the Father loves us, and the measure and the proof of His love is the willing death of His Son (v 8). It is this same love of God which the Holy Spirit pours out into our hearts (v 5). The whole passage displays Paul's understanding of the glorious and eternal harmony that exists between the persons of the Trinity, and that salvation is the work of the whole Godhead.

6 Direct quotes from: Stuart Olyott, *The Gospel as it Really is*, EP Books, Darlington England, 2010, page 62 ff

the shiny smooth skin. Perhaps the worst of sinners on this scale would be in the sea and we (we wish) would be on a mountain. But from God's infinite perspective we are no different. We are all sinners. Differing only in the tiniest degree when compared with God's standard – God's righteousness. Yet He died for us. This is God's love.

What assurance this gives us regarding the future! (v 9-11)

It is Christ's death and resurrection that has secured our justification. It is His perfect life and example which is paid into our account that covers our sinful nature. It follows that there is no danger of us suffering the wrath to come. The price paid is so great that God will never let us be damned. It is unthinkable. Such is the certainty of our hope. God's love and mercy was so great that He justifies believers at the infinite cost to His Son. His humiliation saved us when we were far off, how much more shall His exaltation save us now that we are near. Paul in arguing from the greater to the lesser reminds us that this was done even though we were completely lost to sin. When we were His enemies. If He did such good to us when we were unrepentant sinners and enemies, it is certain that He will do even more good to us now that we are His friends – His adopted heirs. His death, that greatest of sacrifices, confirmed by His resurrection, secured our reconciliation. How much more shall His life secure our final salvation!

For this reason the Christian life is a life of joy! We rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (v 2) We glory in difficulties. (v3) **'We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ'** (v11) He is a reconciling Father who has brought us back in Christ. This causes our hearts to leap with joy. The atonement, the reconciliation is complete. Salvation is a present reality. Our hearts burst with joy, gratitude and appreciation, and most of all with worship for Him.

These then are some of the blessings that accompany justification. Paul will add to this list as the letter continues. But for now there is enough to realise that the gospel of the grace of God in Christ, has made us rich indeed.

And the final word of verse 11, 'reconciliation':

God restoring all things harmoniously to Himself – ultimately and absolutely at the End. But for now Paul says that our reconciliation with God has happened now (*nun*) before the End, through the death of the son of God. This is the 'now', the significance laden 'special moment' the *kairos* time, the climax of God's salvation history. As a result we may know that we are 'righteous' *now* and reconciled to God *now*.

Consequently, Paul says, we 'exult in God'. Formerly, Paul the Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, Pharisee of the Pharisees and persecutor of the heretical Christian sect, 'exulted in his works' but not in his God. But no more, 'Now' because he is justified by Christ's blood, reconciled through the death of God's Son and at peace with God, he 'exults in God' Himself, into and under whose grace he has now been granted access.⁷

[2174]

**Pray for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today.
Amen**

Romans 5:12-21
Justification and Life

Rom 5:17b

(how) much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

We will need to spend some time on the Chapter 5:11- end. Broadly speaking Paul is contrasting the second (or last) “Adam”, Christ, with the first “Adam”. The first Adam was originally a sinless created being. He had the potential to be found righteous by God, through obedience and close communion with God in the 'garden'. This he failed to do and he and his progeny were condemned under the wrath of God. In him all die. Physically and eternally.

Christ is the divine, only begotten, Son of God. A person of the one true and only God. He, as God is, is fully righteous. Born in the form – with the 'proper', or intended, nature – of a human, at His incarnation, He had both the divine and human nature. In Him the many are saved to the eternal life that the 'fallen' Adam, and we his descendants, otherwise fail to achieve.

But before we clarify (in two week's time) that all important summary, let us remove, (out of the way) some incidental issues:

Adam, the real and the first human. Adam, was created by God in His own image and for God's purpose alone. There is a crisis, for Bible believing, reformed Christians if this fact is ignored, watered down or rejected. Jesus clearly recognised the Genesis account of man's creation and purpose. Paul frequently confirms the existence of that first human individual, Adam.

Bible believing Christians believe the New Testament? The New Testament writers clearly believed the Old. Paul specifically refers to Adam as a fact of Scripture.

We all participate, and in a sense, participated, in Adam's 'original' sin. As Paul puts it. ² *Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—*

The doctrine of 'original sin' and the Calvinist principle of 'total inability' agree and combine to describe our 'fallen', corrupted, human nature. A state of being which is what humans are. Not, from birth, as innocents and potentially good, but by human nature as it now is (but not as it was when God created and pronounced created man as 'very good'). But now, wilfully sinful and alienated from God. As a consequence of being naturally conceived descendants of the first Adam.

Is it so unbelievable that the nature of a species of life is determined by its ancestors? We happily say, 'A leopard doesn't change its spots'; 'certain breeds of dog are unreliable'; 'cats are inquisitive'; 'apples don't fall far from the tree'. As natural humans we are born sinners and as such this nature causes us to reject and disobey God as

first done by Adam and Eve. God's just curse is on the whole creation as a consequence of that original sin.

At other times we have glanced at the history of the times when Paul and other Biblical writers were acting by the 'breath of the Spirit' to record God's revelation, the Holy Scriptures. We have from time to time found it helpful to know, and partly understand, the context of a writer's time and circumstance.

Today in this introduction to the main theme of the passage which we will look at more thoroughly in two week's, I wish to consider some more recent history.

It may help us to understand where we are in our Christian journey. It is sometimes regretted that as we fail to recognise the past we are doomed to repeat those same failures.

A. The reformation was initially made a public issue at a volatile period of European political history, by Luther, and developed during the following generations. A reform of the previously 'established' Church in Western Europe became widespread. This reformation developed in many countries such as those today called Germany, France, Holland and Great Britain. Although the progress of reformation was often captured by the politics of the time, never the less a large number of devout and knowledgeable Christians were active in their respective countries. Often refining and defining the reformed faith, independently of each other, but under the guidance of the Spirit, and thus with a common purpose and understanding.

At a time of great political change in Britain (Henry VIII to the restoration of the Stewarts) there was significant reformed scholarship in the religious leadership. Henry had turned the developing appetite for reformed theology to his own personal benefit, but the ensuing 'break from Rome' and the establishment of the Church of England had a wider and more important religious significance. An early reformed statement of reformed theology was written by Thomas Cranmer called the 42 Articles of the English Church. A later monarch (Elizabeth 1) was not ready to have so much control eroded from the Monarchy and the articles were reduced to 39. In which form the world wide Anglican Church still supports it.

However in the period when Parliament and 'the King' were struggling for supremacy it was seen by Parliament as advantageous that a state religion for the whole of what was to become Great Britain be debated and a reformed code or confession be prepared for ratification by the Parliament. This work took five years; involved the so called 'divines' of England, Wales and Ireland; and importantly, official 'observers' from Scotland. It was held at Westminster in London, the home of Parliament. The result was what we call, The Westminster Confession of Faith. It took as its starting point the 39 articles. It is substantially in agreement with other Bible based confessions and catechisms from other parts of Europe. It is, essentially, a Calvinist theology: The main original purpose of man – to glorify God; the subsequent 'fallen' nature of man – derived from the 'original sin of Adam'; and God's initiative, through Christ – salvation by faith and not works, being key components.

Political events in England changed as the final Biblical 'proofs' were being prepared. Eventually the Monarchy (Charles II) was 'restored'. Parliament was not able to pass the Confession into Law. Many of the staunch supporters of the developed reformation

in England – some called Puritans or Pilgrims – felt it necessary to leave for the 'New World' so that they could freely practise their 'reformed' religion. In the meantime the Scottish 'observers' on return to Scotland had the WCF installed by Act of the Scottish Parliament.

As Australia came into being as a Nation in 1901, the States had already developed separate Protestant Churches, depending on the settlers' country of origin. Those from Scotland, typically brought versions of the Church of Scotland. They were familiar with the WCF and the Presbyterian Form of Church governance that it contained. The United Church of Australia was formed of these separate State Presbyterian Churches in 1901 and called the Presbyterian Church of Australia. The Bible was confirmed as the principal source of God's revelation to man, with the WCF as a secondary standard together with the Australian Declaratory Statement.

The WCF was also widely adopted in the American Colonies. Many Churches calling themselves Presbyterian. Later, in the mid 20th Century some missionary initiative was undertaken from America to WA. The Church that continues from that, is called the Westminster Presbyterian Church, it also holds (an American version) of the WCF as its secondary standard.

B. Recent history of the Presbyterian Church in Western Australia:

The Presbyterian Church of Australia in Western Australia commenced in 1901. During the first half of the Twentieth Century, protestant Churches generally were affected by the erosion of reformed theology and practice by the 'enlightenment' inspired growth of humanism in European thought and theology. The original sin of Adam – wanting to be a God. Being a God to himself – took hold. The Bible was reduced from the revealed will of God to a book of fables and platitudes. Only so called science fact was accepted. There was no room for the 'different from what usually happens' – supernatural. No belief in miracles. Jesus was a good person to take as an example of the proper way of life, but not God. A sort of idea of renewal or resurrection was what passed for the actual resurrection of Christ. In fact what we today call 'liberalism' became prominent in what was once reformed Christianity.

Original Sin and the PCA in WA. From my experience in the Presbyterian Church from 1946 as a Sunday School pupil to 1973 as an Elder, the WCF was unknown and not followed. In the 1950s the work of Karl Barth (German neo-liberal theologian) was popular. Especially among younger academics who became leaders of Presbyterian Ministerial Education in WA. Barth made a study of Chapter 5 of Romans, where he dismissed Paul's clear reference to 'original sin' and promoted the idea that each person is responsible for generating all of their own sinfulness. There is no doubt that we each demonstrate the nature in which we are naturally born, to be sinners. So we are responsible for this sin. But Barth's approach led to the mistake that if we have it within ourselves to only personally chose to sin, then we also have it within ourselves to save ourselves from sin. Leading to a 'universalism' approach to salvation. In fact if sin did not come through the disobedience of the one man, then salvation by the 'proper man', Christ, is not necessary. To deny original sin is to deny the gospel of Christ. Paul on the other hand draws the parallel that we are all born to be sinners because we belong to the sinful race of one man, Adam. BUT by that one 'proper'

man, the last Adam, Jesus the Christ, we (the many) are saved from this enslavement to sin, through faith in the saving work of God through Christ.

Events subsequent to 1976 were influenced by the general slide into 'liberalism' and the teaching of those like Barth which led to 'universalism' – anyone and everyone is saved by self-indulgent good works, attitudes and feelings.

By the early 1990s having lost the regard of many Dutch migrants (who had consequently started their own Churches) during the 50s to the end of the 80s, the 'continuing' Presbyterian Church had a revival. Returning to its Calvinist and WCF roots. With the help of its faithful members, though small in number – particularly in WA – attempts to maintain the spirit and practice of the Reformation now continue. This is the task before us.

[1733]

**Pray for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today.
Amen**

Romans 5:12-21
Justification and Life (continued)

Rom 5:17b

(how) much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

A week ago we began to consider the same passage (Rom 5:12-21). We made observations that: The New Testament points to the Genesis account of the origins of mankind, confirming for reformed, Bible-believing Christians, that Adam was the real, 'first', God-breathed human, created from dust; this 'first' Adam although created for God's purpose, in God's image, and found by God, to be 'very good', broke the covenant of obedience; and that God's perfect justice fulfilled that covenant, in that death 'came into the world' (that is physical death of all creatures; eternal – spiritual – death for all humans; and the curse of corruption of the whole earth). We thus affirmed the doctrine of 'original sin'!

As somewhat of an aside, we traced the development of the Reformation movement in Europe to the formulation of the Westminster Confession of Faith. This confession, relying on the 'inerrant' revelation of God in the Holy Scriptures, clearly recognises the fact of 'original sin' as given in Genesis and frequently reiterated in the New Testament, particularly in our current passage from Paul's letter to the Romans. (It is relevant to be reminded that Paul's message was not directly written to non-believers, but to the already professing Christians in the various 'house churches', already established in Rome. And so, then, and now, he is instructing Christian believers. Those who have already committed themselves to belief in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.)

We concluded the brief reference to Church History by relating the twentieth century failure of the Presbyterian Church in Western Australia: The general degeneration of Reformed Churches through the effects of 'enlightenment' fostered humanism; causing the growth of 'liberalism' – denying the 'inerrant' truth of the Bible, the reality of miracles, even the resurrection of Jesus – and 'universalism' – a derivative of salvation by 'works', which implies that all will be saved in the end. In this developing climate of thought, the Presbyterian Church of Australia, from its 'united' inception in 1901, declined in its acceptance of and practice in the 'truth' of the Bible as usefully summarised in the WCF. From the middle of the 20th Century this process was accelerated by the influence of such Theologians as Karl Barth on those charged with the training of Presbyterian Ministers up to 1977. Karl Barth specifically denied the fact of 'original sin' clearly stated by Paul in today's passage.

It is our belief and hope that since the early 1990s this decline is being corrected and that through such things as the faithful, Bible-based preaching and the instruction given at the Presbyterian School of Theology, we may all contribute to a much needed revival in our Australian society, to re-affirm that, 'the chief [purpose] of mankind is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever'. While being specifically concerned about what we must do to fulfil God's plan for our lives, we recognise that there are many faithful Christians with the same concern, that are being nurtured in a range of Christian

communities, often bearing the description of being: reformed, evangelical, Christians. In particular in WA we mention PARCWA – Presbyterian and Reformed Churches of Western Australia.

And so we now look more closely at what Paul actually teaches.

The verses 12-21 of chapter 5 should be recognised as being part, and consistent with, the principal purpose of the whole letter. Paul is presenting a detailed description of the Gospel. He spends the first three chapters making the need for the Gospel clear. Fallen mankind is in need of a Saviour. This is the beginning of the 'message' that is also called a 'gospel' – a good message. The climax of the message is that Christ is that Saviour and the free gift of Salvation is provided through, and only through, Him.

In chapter 4, Paul mainly talks to those members of the Roman house Churches who had a Jewish background. The Jews, by and large, had misconstrued (and continue to misconstrue), God's developing revelation of His plan for salvation, by trusting in the expectation of being able to save themselves by their own works – being good and doing good. Today this same expectation is seen in the 'universalism' preached in many Christian communities. Paul emphasises the 'free gift' of justification by faith in Jesus alone. Apart from works! He asserts that salvation is only through the merit of Jesus Christ, for both the Jew and the non-Jew, (variously referred to as the Gentile or the Greek).

In the beginning of Chapter 5, Paul gives an interim summary of the key benefits of this 'free' justification by faith: peace with God; access to His grace; rejoicing in the inevitable glory of God; even to rejoice in our sufferings as they produce character and hope; the pouring out of His love into our hearts by His Spirit; that Christ died for us, the ungodly – even the worst of us; and in reconciliation with God, we are assured of eternity with Him.

And so to verse 12. By Adam's sin, all sinned, and as evidence of this all die. The full consequences and remedies of this are to be explored by Paul from 5:12 through to 8:5. A lengthy passage indeed. However, here, from verse 12 to 21 Paul concentrates on one aspect. The analogy between the coming of sin into the world (and the sin imputed to the whole of the human race) by the sin of one man, on the one hand, and the salvation of the 'many' by the one 'proper man' – the 'last' Adam, as it were – Jesus Christ. Paul makes it clear that while there are absolutely opposite effects brought through these two 'federal' heads: the procedure is analogous. The Sin of one man was, from the instant of the 'fall', imputed – applied – to all humans. All those to come! True, all subsequent humans carried in addition, the result of God's curse or penalty, that separates them from God. Their corrupted and fallen nature rendering them unable to seek God or in any way to do anything that would heal the rift with God. That is, totally unable to achieve their own salvation. (The 'T' of TULIP) In this, since we all willingly do what our corrupted human natures direct – to sin, because our nature is to be sinful – we are responsible for our own sin. And justly guilty before God. However the Sin in verse 12, to be consistent with Paul's teaching, so far, and as it continues, is not our own personal sinning but the one Sin of Adam

which is however at that same time charged to the account of each of us. Here of course we have trouble describing this concept with the tenses of past, present and future. Our experience and intellect and thus our language-constructs are not adequate to describe the will and purpose of God. Despite our automatic human arrogance, we are not God. We have only echoes of His Attributes. We are not omnipotent and omniscient – know all, understand all. For us time is linear. God transcends – is beyond – time. After all, the eternal God created the 'time' that we know of and experience.

It is this Sin of the first man, Adam, and its consequences, which we all have, even before we add our own personal sinfulness. It is 'original sin'. It is at this point that such as Karl Barth, deviate. At best they affirm the personal sins that our natures dictate, but ignore that the first Sin that we did not personally commit in Eden is the one that Paul clearly states was still credited as our Sin. You might say that this is a minor point and of little consequence. And so it is even from Paul's point of view, because the purpose of the analogy is not to emphasise 'original sin', so much as to concentrate on what Christ is, to the believer.

By analogy, the one 'proper' man, Christ, has done that which can be imputed to the 'many'. His merit is put to the account of those whose faith in Him connects them as heirs of God's grace. Remember Paul's key point, that justification is by faith alone and not by any 'work' or merit of we the creatures. It is by the finished work of that one God/man, Jesus Christ, that the 'many' are deemed to be righteous, forgiven, redeemed, reconciled, saved. Not what they might do now or in the future. This is the analogy being drawn with the first Adam. We did not contribute to that original Sin in the garden of Eden, BUT that sin was, and is, nevertheless laid to our account. The proof? We all die, at least the first death. Even the baby who dies at, or even before, birth. Before any conscious personal sin.

The Sin of the one, Adam, being laid to our account is compared with the merit, obedience, sacrifice of Christ, which is even more so put to our redeemed account.

Yet those who deny this imputation – debiting – of 'original sin' on all, destroy the analogy of Christ's 'work' being imputed – credited – to the 'many'. Further the idea that our only sin is what we create for ourselves, suggests that we may have the ability and option to correct that sin by our own efforts. Which puts us right back with salvation by our own merit and 'works'. This is clearly not Paul's message. It is not THE gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As the passage continues, Paul points out that while all had sin and thus died from the beginning of Adam's descendants, they were not necessarily personally guilty of the specific Sin of disobedience (or coveting the Nature of God in wanting to be an omnipotent and omniscient being) that was Adam's Sin. Adam had been given a specific law or command. Not to eat of the tree of knowledge. With the destruction of the direct contact with God which followed, explicit Law was not instituted for many generations, until Moses at Sinai. Thus the specific sin of transgression of God's direct commands came about from that time on, for the Jews. Yet there was sufficient sinfulness of other kinds to maintain responsibility for condemnation for all people.

Having used an analogy to demonstrate the similarity of method: One man's Sin brought condemnation on all while the gift that came by the grace of the one God/man, Jesus Christ, overflowed to the many! Paul goes on to note significant differences. Firstly the benefit of the gift far exceeds the condemnation. God's grace is described as not merely sufficient to cancel the Sin, but 'overflowing' or overwhelming, as our pulpit fall quotes. God's grace through the work of Christ does more than secure our justification and remove from us the penalty of sin, but also the perfect righteousness of Christ is by 'double' imputation covering over our continuing sinful nature from God. So that we are not only deemed innocent but also acceptable in His sight.

Further the condemnation of all was due to the one Sin, yet the gift followed many trespasses. The trespass brought death to all, yet how *much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.*

¹⁹ For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Returning to the law – so important to the mindset of Jewish Christians – Paul reminds them that it was through the law that the knowledge of how far humans have come from the will of God is shown. Yet however many, however grievous, the sin is in a person's life, God's grace through Jesus Christ is increased to be *all the more*. More than enough to save the worst of sinners as John Newton was able to look back over His life and declare, “Amazing Grace”. ²¹ *so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

At the time this sermon was written, at the School of Theology, our discussion touched on God's super-abundant grace. That the worst of sinners and the best of humans are all alike in God's sight. His grace is *all the more*. Some reservation was expressed about the validity of a repentant, murderous dictator being able to be covered by God's grace in the same way as 'good' people like us. Not only is God's righteousness and thus the standard of His judgement so much higher than ours, that the difference between the best and worst of humans is practically zero, but also if we look to the miracle of our own justification we must be overawed by the fact that to God we are as far from perfect ourselves as even the worst human we can imagine. God loves us even as vile sinners. In addition, from today's passage we can learn that while we are not practical murderers – only in our hearts according to Jesus – we are more than condemned as a result our human nature. Is there a 'small' sin for which we might not be condemned? Adam brought judgement on himself and whole human race for ----- eating an apple? No. He brought this judgement, for wanting to be a substitute for God. “There, but for the grace of God go I.”⁸

[2235]

**Pray for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today.
Amen**

8 First spoken by the English evangelical preacher and martyr, John Bradford (circa 1510–1555).