

CREATED GAY

Grace is a Haven

by Gary Simpson

Romans 5:1-5 (KJV) Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

Sin starts us quarrelling with God and the quarrel makes us hate God,¹ so we need to be reconciled to God. Traditionally, Christians have maintained that Jesus death reconciles us to God, which is a fancy way of saying God finds us acceptable. We are found acceptable, without doing anything.² A case can be made that God loves us intensely and that God had always found humanity acceptable. Jesus death may be what makes us, as deeply hurt people, believe that God is acceptable and that somehow we are acceptable.

It is a perversion of God's character to think that the Messiah's death for humanity makes God love us.³ F.F. Bruce, a scholar who wrote a commentary on Romans, makes the point that God's love does not change. It is impossible for God to love us more! All that changes is the relationship.⁴ Be glad of that. Any God that can be bought is a cheap God, not a God worth worshipping.

Jesus introduces us to God's kindness and "ushers us into the presence of God."⁵ Blind, sick and weak, we are led into the presence of the Lord.⁶ There we find grace, not vengeance. Standing close to God, we look at ourselves and we find that we are

¹ Matthew Henry. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Unabridged, Single Vol. (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Pub., 1991), 2204.

² J. Vernon McGee. *Romans*. Vol. 1. (Pasadena, California: Thru the Bible Books, 1985), 89.

³ McGee, 115.

⁴ F.F. Bruce. *The Letter of Paul to the Romans: an Introduction and Commentary*. (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), 115.

⁵ William Barclay. *The Daily Study Bible: The Letter to the Romans*. Revised Ed. (Burlington, Ontario: G.R. Welch, 1975), 73.

⁶ Henry, 2204.

changed, no longer hated, no longer feeling like we are criminals. We stand before God, our dignity and honor secure.⁷ And there is no need to fear God, because we stand before God having more dignity and honor than we have ever experienced. Biblical scholar William Barclay translated the Christian Scriptures. His translation of Romans 5:2 reads, "Through him, by faith, we are in possession of an introduction to this grace in which we stand." The word translated introduction also means a harbor, a haven. That is where ships come, a harbor.⁸ Without the protective harbor we find in Jesus, we would be in trouble. We would be thrown about by storms, because we would be left to our own efforts.⁹ Trusting God, having faith in what God does accomplishes what the works of the law cannot do. Trusting God gives us peace.¹⁰

John Calvin describes it as a peace of conscience.¹¹ Those that live lives dedicated to sin do not have this peace, because their vices make them drunk.¹² Legalistic people cannot have peace, as their peace is as stable as the quicksand of their ability to resist temptations.

This peace is not a quickly changing emotion; it is a state of being. Instead of being at war with God, we are at peace. There is no longer hostility between you and God.¹³ From that of peace with God, comes emotional peace. But we are in a state of peace, not warring with God, even when we feel a little discouraged, because we blew it.

We are able to have hope, even in the face of troubles and difficulties. Verse 5 says that our hope will never disappoint us. That literally means our hope will not shame¹⁴ or embarrass us. We are confident, because a god that would pour out love on a cross is the kind of god that will not let us down. Our hope is well founded and well grounded, when it rests on Jesus Christ.

You may be wondering how being acceptable to God produces peace and hope. Perhaps, an example of love can help us better understand grace.

⁷ Henry, 2204.

⁸ Barclay, 73.

⁹ Barclay, 73.

¹⁰ Barclay, 72.

¹¹ John Calvin. *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, n.d.), 187.

¹² Calvin, 187.

¹³ Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald B. Allen and H. Wayne House, eds. *The Nelson Study Bible*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1997), 1886.

¹⁴ Bruce, 116.

Rabbi Krohn tells a powerful story, which I am going to condense. He tells the story of a boy, who I will call David, because I can pronounce David and because David is a good Jewish name. David had a learning disability and he was not athletic. One day David's father brought him to Torah school early. Some of David's classmates were playing baseball and David told his father that he wanted to play baseball with the other children.

David's father knew that the children would not want David to play on their team, but for the sake of his son, the father approached one of the boys in the field and asked if his son could play. The boy got no guidance from his teammates, so he said OK. It was the 8th inning and the team was 6 runs behind. The boy said that they could put David up to bat in the 9th inning.

David got a glove and played. Fortunes changed by the time David came up to bat. David's team scored a few runs and was only down 2. Toward the end of the 9th inning, David was next to bat. The bases were loaded. Everything depended on David. Would the team let David bat and lose the game?

The team put David up to bat. He had no real chance, because he didn't even know how to hold the bat.

The pitcher moved close and pitched. David swung and missed the ball. A member from David's team stepped up and helped David hold and swing the bat. The pitcher moved forward and gave a slow pitch. David hit the ball and the ball rolled to the pitcher. The pitcher only needed to throw the ball to first base and the game was over. He picked up the ball and threw it as hard as he could, over the head of the first baseman. And everyone yelled, "Run!"

David was not used to running fast. All wide-eyed, he ran to first. An outfielder got the ball. He knew what the pitcher did. What would he do? He threw the ball high and far over the third baseman. Everyone yelled, "Run to second! Run!" And David did. The second baseman told David to run to third base. As David got to third base, both teams were yelling, "Run home!" As David stepped on home plate, the players from both teams hoisted him to their shoulders and made him the hero of the game, because he won the game for his team.¹⁵

My guess is that the baseball game made an enormous impact on David and it required so little work.

At a burning bush in the wilderness, God reaches out to an oppressed people, living in the slave-pit of Egypt and says, "I choose you for My team. Play ball!" At Calvary, God demonstrates perfection. God takes those who feel untalented, unworthy, diseased, damaged, disordered and treats us the way God sees us - as perfect, as flawless, as worthy of a heavenly, a spiritual and emotional Pride Parade.

¹⁵ Adapted from Paysach Krohn. *Perfection*. Source unknown.

Feel discouraged by a constant cycle of sin and remorse, by a constant cycle of self-hate, broken by moments of feeling whole and worthy? At the burning bush in the Exodus story and at Calvary, God held the bat for us and struck the ball out of the stadium. And the hosts of heaven joined God and yelled, "Run!" And we had no idea what we were doing and where we were going, but the hosts of heaven, the people God planted in your life, kept pointing you to the next base and repeatedly yelled, "Run!" After a lifetime of mistakes, of going down rabbit trails, of getting lost, of hating your rainbow self, you arrived home. And the angels of heaven carried you on their shoulders, threw a party for you and treated you like a champion. Years later, it slowly dawns on you that perhaps God was the hero. We call God's action grace, respect, inclusion and love.

The God of Abraham and Sarah, the God of Ruth and Naomi, the God of Jonathan and David smiles on you and asks you to be a living book of love for the world to see and just as important, a book of love for your own heart to feel.