

Lesson 3 – Romans 4 & 5

I'm sure when Carol came up with the title to this year's Bible study, she wasn't thinking about the initials. Building Foundation Faith – or BFF! How appropriate is it that this year's lesson, which so beautifully presents the character of God and His love for us would have the initials BFF. If each of you leaves this study this year more deeply understanding that Jesus is the real Best Friend Forever you'll ever have, your time spent on this study will be well worth it!

Last week we read about Paul's proclamation that righteousness came through faith in Jesus Christ. This was not a revolutionary statement. For those of you who were part of last year's study, you may recall Habakkuk 2:4, which said the just shall live by faith. However, Paul took the proverbial gloves off and said in chapter 3, verse 22, that this justification, or righteousness was available "*to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile.*" One of the true testimonies to a follower of Jesus Christ is the visible evidence of a changed life. The Apostle Paul was formerly known in Scripture as Saul. He was a prominent member of the Jewish religious leaders known as the Pharisees. He was militant about adherence to the law and was a chief persecutor of the early church. His encounter, though, with Jesus on the road to Damascus changed his life forever. This encounter with Jesus, as it should for every believer, brought him the truth and unveiled his eyes to realize how much of his life was a lie.

I can relate to this. I did not become a believer in Jesus until I was 35, and even to this day I marvel at how much of my life prior to my conversion was spent believing a lie. I have often thought how much different and better my life would have been had I come to know Christ at an early age. However, I have come to peace with that issue because my later conversion has made me more understanding and compassionate of the deceived condition of the non-believer –

as well as the believer. Had I not spent as much of my life believing the lies, I don't think I would be as focused as I am today on teaching the truth that is only found in God's Word.

In today's reading, Paul is going back to the roots of his faith - to revisit his understanding of the father of the Jewish faith, Abraham. Prior to his conversion, the notion that Abraham's faith was available to both Jew and Gentile was nothing short of blasphemous to the Jew. Now, though, with the revelation of the truth as told to him by the Holy Spirit, Paul is seeking to unveil to Jews and Gentiles alike that Abraham's faith in God was foundational to **all** of humanity – not just to the Jews. For those of you who aren't familiar with Abraham, we first learn of him towards the end of chapter 11 in Genesis. At the beginning of chapter 12, the Lord tells him (he was initially called Abram) to get out of the country he was in and, if he does, He will abundantly bless him including giving him the Promised Land. Abraham obeyed the Lord, and the Lord has been fulfilling the promises made to Abraham ever since. For the Jews, he was the father of their faith. Where Paul is going in this passage of Scripture is the promises made to Abraham were really promises made to **all of us who shared Abraham's faith**. However, it wasn't Abraham's obedience, or works, that caused God to make these promises. What was it that Abraham did that God saw was so impressive that He would heap such promises? He simply, and truly, **believed** God's Word.

Now Carol and Dellena as well as last week's homework have spent some time on a key term that is used heavily in today's reading, but I'm going to say it again because the more you understand the significance of it, the better chance you will find it a life-changing truth. This term is *justified*. The Greek word for justified is “dikaioo” (pronounced dik-ah-yoo). This means to render just or innocent.

To be justified, or declared innocent, before God requires only one thing – **to believe**. In today’s reading, Paul is going to demonstrate that this foundational truth of righteousness through faith, or belief, has been the case since Abraham. In the first two verses of chapter 4, Paul is zeroing in on the source of salvation – meaning is salvation the result of something we do or what God did? Why is that important? It’s important because of who gets the glory – who can boast about being the one who made salvation possible. Paul points out in verse 2 that if Abraham had been justified, or declared innocent by His works – things like leaving Ur when God told him to or willing to sacrifice his son Isaac – then Abraham would have been able to boast, or get the glory, for his salvation. I remember Chuck Smith talking a little bit about his pastoral training and saying, “I learned there are three things you don’t touch. You don’t touch the money. You don’t touch the women. And, most importantly, you don’t touch the glory.”

So Paul brings up the key verse from Genesis 15:6 where Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. What Abraham believed was God’s promise that he would not only have a child, but also his family tree would be more than the number of stars in the sky. Abraham’s “faith” was a deep trust in God’s promise. The Christian faith is simply measured by this – do you fully and completely trust God’s promises and character? If there is a “work” in Christianity, it is a conscious effort to allow the Holy Spirit to replace the lies we’ve come to believe in our human experiences with the truth that is in the Bible. This “work” is the level of trust you are willing to put in God’s faithful and devotional commitment to you. If you find yourself saying something like “this will never happen” or “God can’t do that,” then you are listening to the same lies Eve heard Satan say to her in the garden, “you will certainly not die.”

Personally, the only way I know how to build up my trust in someone is to spend time with him or her – to get to know his/her character. When it comes to

knowing Jesus, the best way to come to know Him is in spending time in His Word. Your being here in this Bible study is some of the best time you can commit to yourself and your faith because you are, hopefully, opening your heart and mind to the truth of God's faithful and sacrificial love for you. True faith is about deep trust – to the point you are so sure of God's character that despite your circumstances or previous human experiences, you absolutely and totally believe God's promises and commitment to your betterment.

We make huge mistakes applying the painful human concepts of love we've experienced and assume that is how God loves. This is why the central theme to all of my teaching is the cross of Christ. The hurtful things that have happened in our lives that have caused us to be wary, or not to trust, need to be brought to the cross of Christ and see that none of those things apply to God. At the cross, we see that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. We see truly sacrificial love. We see a man who had no sin, look at our worst moments, and yet look past them to see us as He originally designed us and hear Jesus say to each of us, *'You are worth My dying for you to understand how valuable you are to Me.'* He is utterly trustworthy to fulfill His promises of His goodness and love towards you. His resurrection is the proof that God's love and goodness is victorious over the evil you've experienced that has led to your wariness and inability to trust. But you can't get to that point of trust and confidence if you don't spend time with God and His Word to truly believe Him. God bless you for being in this Bible study.

Why is it so hard for us to believe? - Because there is an enemy to God, and therefore to you as well as His adopted child, who will throw every possible lie and deceit at you to prevent you from believing Him. No one knows this battle of truth vs. lies better than God. He understands the power of deception – how easy it is to believe a lie. Paul brings up another important lie – the idea that God owes us anything. In verse 4, we read, *"Now to the one who works, wages are not credited*

as a gift but as an obligation.” What Paul is pointing out is that if our works, or our efforts, to be good and righteous were the sources of or reasons for God blessing us, then God would be a debtor to us – He would owe us something. You know what that mindset does? It eliminates grace. If you take just one thing out of not just this lecture – but this entire year – stop trying to earn God’s grace – it’s a waste of time and impossible. I like what Jon Courson says, *“Quit trying to give God a reason to bless you. It will never work because God will be a debtor to no man.”* A glorious moment in every believer’s walk is a deep understanding of the grace of God. You don’t need to do anything to get God to bless you. He’s going to bless you not because of anything you need to do. He loves you so much, and His nature just wants to bless you. If you can get to this point, imagine the rest and the peace that comes with that!

In verse 6, Paul brings in another heavyweight in Jewish history – King David. Notice what concept he is emphasizing – the forgiveness of sins – being declared not guilty. In verse 8, the Apostle Paul quotes King David in Psalm 32:1-2, which says, *“Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them.”* I know David gets a lot of criticism by Christians, and, from a human perspective, I can see why. He was a flawed human being. But we’re not to look at people from our flawed and sinful perspectives are we? We’re to ask God to look at people **as He sees them**. What does God’s Word say about His thoughts about David? He was a man after God’s own heart. Yet, we sit on our self-righteous thrones of judgment and condemn him. Shouldn’t God’s opinion of David humble us and give us a spirit of gratitude? Are any of us perfect? Have any of us never sinned? Put your gavels down and carefully read David’s devotion and passion for God in the Psalms – and He didn’t know about Jesus!

What God revealed to David and what David, thankfully, wrote down was the truth of the connection of forgiveness of sin and righteousness. David wrote in Psalm 103:12, *“as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”* The apostle Paul built on this undeniable link to forgiveness of sins and righteousness in 2 Corinthians 5:19a, *“that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them.”* Once again, who was doing all the work of forgiving? – God. Friends, we have no role in God’s forgiveness – there are no good works and no amount of money that means a bloody thing to God when it comes to our standing before Him. Isaiah said in verse 6 of the sixty-fourth chapter of his book that all our human righteousness is like filthy rags in the eyes of the Lord. Our faith is built solely and entirely on what **God** has done.

In verse 9, Paul invokes the act of circumcision. One of the key symbolic evidences of being a Jew was circumcision. The message behind circumcision was the sacrificial cutting of the way of the flesh as a public demonstration of consecration and devotion to God and His principles. The Jews, then, would assume that anyone who was not a Jew was, therefore, uncircumcised. Paul connects the dot of forgiveness of sin to be made available to both the circumcised and the uncircumcised. He emphasizes that the moment Abraham was declared righteous; he had not yet been circumcised. Circumcision did not confer or make one righteous – it merely confirmed it.

Moving to verse 13, we read, *“It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.”* The promise given to Abraham wasn’t given because of the law. It was given **before** the law. Why is that important? Grace. If the promise were conditional upon obedience to the law, then the promise would be worthless for two reasons: 1) We could never receive the promise because we

could never be perfectly obedient; and, 2) Who would get the glory if the delivery on the promise was dependent on our works? If I were to promise to give you \$1 million unconditionally, you would be grateful to me – or at least I hope you would. However, if I told you that in order for me to fulfill the promise you had to climb Mount Everest backwards in a tutu, my promise wouldn't mean much, would it? It would also make me seem pretty twisted.

In verses 14 and 15, Paul gets into the issue of the relationship between the law and faith. The law was the Ten Commandments along with all of the other acts of righteousness as outlined in the Torah, or the first 5 books of the Bible. As I mentioned earlier, the purpose of the law was to demonstrate to humanity we cannot on our own live in a manner that is acceptable to God. The purpose of the law is to reveal our unrighteousness and make us recognize our need for a savior. Paul makes 3 important statements about the law in these verses:

1. Obedience to the law voids the need for faith. If all we have to do is depend on our obedience to the law to make us right before God, then what is the point of having faith in Jesus? This makes Jesus' sacrifice pointless. Obedience to the law is all about our efforts and nothing about what God has done. The lie behind this notion is it is impossible to be perfectly obedient to the law. Therefore, we are depending on something that will doom us. This leads to the second point.
2. The law brings wrath. The law introduces the concept of God's high standards of conduct and, therefore, accountability to our behavior. Disobedience brings on the wrath and judgment of God. As we strive to be righteous, Satan brings in more temptation to our flesh to be disobedient. When we give into the temptations, we then feel the condemnation and wrath of our guilt.

3. If there were no law, there would be no transgression or sin. Without the law, we would not be aware of our sinful condition before God. God's righteousness needed a documented standard for us to realize that we are sinners. Therefore, out of our revelation of our sinful condition, we then need to come to God and ask for our forgiveness – should we want to have a relationship with Him.

Simply put – without the law, we would not understand our need for Jesus. This is why Jesus said in Matthew 5:17, *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”* The condemnation that comes with realizing we are not able to keep the law perfectly is overwhelmed by the truth that Jesus was able to perfectly fulfill the law. Therefore, by faith in Him and His victory at the cross, we are no longer guilty. Jon Courson makes an important point, “If salvation were by works, we would always wonder if we are really saved.” Jon adds this great progression about salvation:

- The Father thought it.
- The Son bought it.
- The Spirit taught it.
- The Bible brought it.
- Satan fought it.
- But praise the Lord, by His grace, we got it!

In verses 16-18, Paul is emphasizing that Abraham's faith in God's promises – not any of his works and before the law – was available to both Jew and Gentile. All of Abraham's offspring, who shared the same faith, or belief in God's Word and His promises, would receive the blessings of His promises. In verse 17b he

makes an important statement about God's character, "...*the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.*" Jesus said in Mark 12:27, "*He [God] is not the God of the dead, but of the living.*" What I wanted to point out is that God is a giver of life, and He is grieved just as we all are when someone dies. But thanks be to God, Jesus conquered death. In verse 19, Paul recounts Abraham's and Sarah's inability to produce children as a type of death. Verses 20-21 is a remarkable testimony to Abraham's faith regarding his and Sarah's inability to conceive a child, "*Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.*"

Some 1,700-1,800 years before Jesus said it, Abraham believed what Jesus said in Matthew in 19:26, "*With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.*" He believed God, being a giver of life, could raise the dead of Sarah's womb and produce the offspring that would ultimately lead to the fulfilled promise of Jesus. And verse 22 confirms that because of Abraham's faith, it was credited to him as righteous. Again – God is doing all the work – the righteousness Abraham is credited for is simply to believe God is going to do what He says He is going to do. Paul then confirms that this accreditation of righteousness through faith wasn't just for Abraham – but for all of us – for all who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He confirms the purposes of Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection in verse 25:

- He was delivered over to death – for our sins
- He was raised to life – for our justification

Moving in to Chapter 5, we get to two of my three favorite things – peace and hope. My third favorite thing you'll have to wait for when I finish. J. Vernon McGee provides a powerful outline of Paul's noted benefits of salvation found in verses 1 through 11 in Chapter 5. The first benefit of salvation is found in verse 1,

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” The first benefit of salvation is *peace*. Peace can mean different things to different people. For one person, peace can simply mean the kids are asleep, right? For another, peace can mean not hearing another ignorant media member blaming every ailment in the world on President Trump. The peace that Paul is referring to in this verse is peace with God. Ephesians 2:3 describes the condition of the non-believer – the one that is merely pursuing the things of the flesh, *“All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.”* Prior to coming to faith in Christ, we are at war with God. Upon confession of faith in Christ’s redemptive work at the cross, our salvation brings us peace with God. We get to participate in what Jesus offers in John 14:27, *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”* As I get older, I’m finding a deeper and deeper appreciation for God’s peace.

Verse 2a offers the second benefit of salvation – *access* to God, *“through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.”* Paul expanded on what this access meant in his letter to the Ephesians. From verse 2:18 he proclaimed, *“For through him we both [those who are far away and those who are near] have access to the Father by one Spirit.”* In verse 3:12 he adds, *“In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.”* In the Old Testament, only the High Priest was allowed to come before the throne of God one time per year on the Day of Atonement. He was allowed to go behind the veil into the holy of holies in the tabernacle and make his supplications for the nation and himself. Paul is pointing out that Jesus’ sacrificial work removed the veil to the holy of holies – into God’s presence. Do you recall the description of what happened in the tabernacle when Jesus breathed his last breath? *“At that*

moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.” (Matthew 27:51a). The fact that the veil, or curtain, was torn from top to bottom is awesome because only God could do that. That proves He **wants** you to come to Him – in freedom and in confidence. You can only do this through faith in His only begotten Son because He sees you in your glorified state – He no longer sees you in your sin. How amazing is that?

The third benefit of salvation is in verse 2b, *“And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.”* Hope – does anyone in this room not need hope? What does hope look like to you? For me, it means there is goodness in the future. Biblically, hope can mean Romans 8:18 *“For I do not consider the present sufferings of this world compare to the glory that will be revealed to us.”* That is an amazing promise of hope, but what about the here and now? Some of us are likely in the middle of serious suffering – be it our health, your marriage, your children, your finances, etc. When we’re in the middle of a mess, the hope we need – the hope our flesh is crying out for – is immediate. My family and I have been in this kind of hell, and it is extremely painful. I remember when we were in the middle of our nightmare; I was tasked with teaching about God’s deliverance. Despite the fact I wasn’t seeing any evidence of it at this time, I did my best and gave the lecture. After it was over, Carol came up to me and said, *“That was a very good lecture, Dan. Now do you believe anything you just said?”* Truthfully, I didn’t have a good answer to that question.

Now that we’ve been through the darker days of that trial, I can see God was there, and that is the hope that I see in God – His presence. If you are willing to believe – there’s that word again – if you seek Him, He will be there. He is the proverbial shelter in a storm. Psalm 61:4 states, *“I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings.”* Sometimes, God’s deliverance is merely the promise of His presence – that you are not alone. There are many types

of pain, but few are more painful than loneliness – the feeling that no one understands what you’re feeling. God is your creator, so no one knows better than He what you are feeling. Your loneliness has some link to sin – I’m not trying to put the blame of your loneliness necessarily on you – we just live in a sin-drenched world that is ruled by Satan whose only mission is to rob you from the joy of the presence of God. Who better than God knows the pain of sin? – Just look at the cross. His presence alone may not seem like much deliverance, but it is a start.

If we choose to draw near to him in our pain, we will uncover the fourth benefit of salvation – *triumph in troubles*. Verses 3 and 4 offer a progression of hope in the midst of suffering, “*Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.*” I wish I had more time to build on this vital component of the Christian walk, but I need to keep going. For those of you who want to dig into the issue of suffering and God, I cannot encourage you enough to read Bob Sorge’s commentary on the book of Job. It is called *Pain, Perplexity, and Promotion*. Of all the books I have ever read, this one did as much for my spiritual development than any of them with the exception of the Bible.

Verse 5, appropriately, reveals the fifth benefit of salvation – *the love of God*. “*And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*” Romans 8:38-39 provides us this awesome statement of the power of God’s love, “*For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” Again, there’s so much here to spend time on, but we must move forward.

Verse 5 also reveals the 6th benefit of salvation – *the Holy Spirit*. This is the first time in Romans that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is mentioned. I think I've shared before that the things of the spirit world are like a foreign language to the non-believer. Oh, there are charlatans out there – palm readers, fortunetellers, horoscope writers, etc. – that are offering insights into the spirit world. But let me ask you something, do any of these offer their services for free? No – they're looking to make a buck off of you and then tell you lies. The Holy Spirit is given to the believer for free. His job is to be the interpreter of the truth of the spirit world – the Kingdom of God. He makes real the love of God in the heart of the believer. We'll get more into the ministry of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8 where He is mentioned more than 20 times.

I'll take a break in the list of the benefits of salvation and highlight Paul's definition of God's love in verses 6-8. I'm just going to read these verses because they are so powerful. *"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* If I were to ask you to recall your worst moment – your greatest sin, I would suspect many of you would immediately think of something. Meditate on that moment and then try to wrap your head around the fact that despite that moment, Jesus still died to save you from the penalty of that sin, forgave you, and restored you. That is the love of God, brothers and sisters. His love for you is deeper than you know.

The seventh benefit of salvation is *deliverance from wrath* as outlined in verse 9. In my opinion, the wrath that Paul is speaking to is God's wrath poured out in the Great Tribulation. This verse is one of the ones I reference as proof of my agreement with the doctrine of the pre-tribulation rapture of the church.

The eighth and final benefit of salvation on this list is *joy*. In the KJV and NKJV of verse 11, the words “joy” and “rejoice” are used instead of “boast” before “*in Christ*.” A deep understanding of the complete and total forgiveness from our past, present, and future sins *should* produce great joy. The reason most Christians walk around like a bunch of sad sacks is they don’t understand or don’t really believe in the completeness of what Jesus has done. What was the last thing He said on the cross? “*It is finished*.” What was finished was the totality of the requirements the Father demanded to be the perfect sacrifice for sin. Finished means finished – there’s nothing more required. Yet, Christians keep listening to the accuser – Satan – who keeps telling them they’re guilty and what Jesus did wasn’t enough to deal with the gravity of their sin. Look, it’s your choice. Are you going to listen to the One who cannot lie, or the one who is the father of lies? Joy in God is part of the benefits of salvation, people. Just like everything else, though, it’s up to you as to whether or not you’re going to believe.

In the remaining verses of Chapter 5, we get into the truth that one person can make an enormous difference. Paul begins with the consequences of Adam’s disobedience. There are four of them:

1. Sin entered the world (verse 12a)
2. Death entered the world (verse 12b)
3. Condemnation entered the world (verse 16)
4. Sin continually enters the world (verse 19)

That’s a daunting list, but Paul offers in verses 15, 18, and 20-21 the truth that God is greater than all of these. Verse 15 says, “*But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!*” Verse 18 adds, “*Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in*

condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.” Verses 20-21 bring this argument to its glorious conclusion, “The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

There is so much life-changing truth in these verses, I could spend hours on them. Thankfully for you, though, my time is about up. I mentioned earlier that peace and hope were two of my favorite things. My third favorite thing is the motivation behind everything we covered today – God’s love. There is nothing more life changing than coming to truly believe how much God loves you. 1 Corinthians 13:8 reminds us that God’s love never fails. God didn’t have to save you or save me – but He wanted to. Why? Because you are His creation – He made you in love. God loves you just the way you are, but He loves you too much to leave you the way you are. Therefore, He sees beyond the sin in your life and rejoices in your original design. He’s willing to take every step necessary to forgive you, heal you, and walk the path with you to His original design and plan for you. Do you believe that? Look at the promises Abraham was given simply because he believed. We learned today that all of those promises made to Abraham are available to those who did what he did – believe. I invite you into a life of grace – where all your efforts to earn it can be laid down at the cross, and you can find rest in the peace, hope, and love of salvation available in Jesus Christ. Let’s pray.