

December 7

Romans 3-8

Hi, my name is Marty Barnhart and I am glad you are reading Romans with me today. Today you read Romans 3.21-8.39.

Now if the Book of Romans ended at 3.20 -- with the bad news -- by the works of the law, no one will be justified -- everything would be pretty grim. There would be no gospel -- no good news. Thank God then for verse 21 and the paragraph that follows it. It starts with a word of incredible hope and power. "But now a righteousness of God, a righteousness from God has been made known." This is the "righteousness from God" that Luther tried so hard to understand, and we are told in verses 21-26 some incredible things about this righteousness. We are told that it comes from God through faith in Christ to ALL who believe.

Notice three words. "Justification" is a legal word that means "to declare righteous", "redemption" is an economic term meaning to "buy back", "propitiation" is a religious word which means "to satisfy". Propitiation is found in the pagan religions of ancient Greece. The gods of the ancient pantheons were like exaggerated and capricious human beings. They got jealous and angry -- for the wrong reasons. To **propitiate** the god, to turn away his anger, you offered a sacrifice to assuage his anger.

These three transactions all occurred in the moment that Christ cried out, "It is finished." His sacrifice propitiated the wrath of God -- turned it aside -- the work of Christ had reference to the Father. It also redeemed us and made possible the judicial declaration that came from God to us when we were declared righteous, and the righteousness of Christ was imputed to us. That is the "what" of the cross.

Verse 26 explains the "why". God did this so that He might be both "just and the justifier"... so that both His holiness and love might stand side by side without either being compromised.

Next, Paul explains what "justification by faith" really means. In chapter 4, he cites Abraham and David as an illustration and proof that justification is by faith alone, apart from works which we might do to "run up points" with God. In chapter 5:1-11, Paul talks to us about the blessings that come to us because of "justification by faith," and in 5:12-21, we are shown how Adam and Christ parallel one another as representatives of the human race.

In the fifth chapter of Romans, there are two sections and two important things for us to note. The first is the attention given by Paul to the "results" of justification by faith. Three very notable characteristics of the one who has been justified through faith appear in Romans 5. The first is peace. "Therefore since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God."

The second noticeable characteristic that Paul mentions is hope. Whenever the New Testament talks about hope, it is talking about an assured certainty -- complete and total confidence that what God has said will happen, and will actually happen when and how He says it will happen, with no hitches -- just as He has promised.

Peace and hope invariably have a third companion and that is joy. Understanding who Jesus is, knowing what He has done, possessing absolute confidence in what He yet will do -- all of this yields to real joy -- soul-satisfying joy, deep inter-satisfaction.

Paul ends chapter five saying, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." Adam was the first of our human race. When he sinned, we sinned. Just as the sin of Adam affected us, so the righteousness of Christ can be imputed to each and everyone who trusts in Him.

We continue with Romans chapter 6. Remember now that Part 1 of this epistle includes the first 11 chapters. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 form the next sub-section of the book. F.F. Bruce gives us an easy outline by saying that these chapters describe the Christian life as one of freedom from sin (chapter 6), freedom from law (chapter 7), and freedom from death (chapter 8). In theological terms, what has happened here is that Paul has turned his attention from the doctrine of justification to the doctrine of **sanctification** -- the process by which believers grow into maturity in Christ.

What Romans 6:1-10 is saying is that when a person is united with Christ, the chain that sin had attached to them is broken. It no longer has power over them. They are "dead" to sin. This is illustrated best in baptism by immersion. We go down under the water illustrating our death to sin and come up out of the water to picture our new life in Christ. What happened on the inside through Christ is testified on the outside for all to witness at our baptism.

The last part of chapter 6 is full of one simple idea. Take that life that once was a slave to sin and make it now the instrument of righteousness -- because now you really are free from the power of sin -- free to be holy! What an amazing thought!

In chapter 7, Paul carries the idea of freedom over to the arena of the law, and sounds a whole lot like he did back in the book of Galatians. Before the doctrine of justification by faith is grasped, there can only be the idea of justification by law. Since no one will ever be justified that way, there is a terrible bondage felt by everyone who tries to justify themselves by keeping rules. When you died with Christ, Paul is saying, you were freed from bondage to law-keeping as a way of justifying yourself before God.

In the second half of chapter 7, however, there is the description of a terrible struggle going on inside someone -- presumably the apostle Paul himself. Can you identify with that passage? In one of Paul's early letters he described himself as "the least of the apostles." Later he called himself the "least of all the saints" and in his very last correspondence -- the letters to Timothy just before his death -- his self-description was, I am "the chief of all sinners." He struggled just like we do.

Augustine, Calvin and Luther say this is Paul the Christian talking -- Paul the struggling saint -- Paul the one who knows that every true believer struggles with indwelling sin. Paul ended chapter 7 with the exasperation, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" His answer: "Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

In chapter 8 the first two verses signal a tremendous switch in emphasis from chapter 7, while still continuing and finishing up Paul's thoughts with regard to this subject of our relationship as Christians to the "law".

After the doom and gloom of chapter 7, we find Paul in chapter 8 challenging anything and everything in the universe to just try to separate us from God's love. It can't be done. He shouts -- "If God be for us who can be against us -- who can lay any charge to God's elect -- in all these things (and he has considered everything!) We are more than conquerors through Him who loves us! For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ our Lord."

I'd like to conclude with one aspect of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. It is He who, according to chapter 8, gives us assurance of our salvation. I think there are three different levels of assurance that the New Testament gives us. The first is a kind of intellectual assurance that comes from simply trusting God's Word. It says "whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved." It says "whoever comes to Me I will never cast out." It says "if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus Christ and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead you will be saved." Is God a liar? No. Have you done that? Yes. Then you are saved! It doesn't matter what you feel -- it's true. That is Assurance 101 -- the first level.

The second kind of assurance the New Testament talks about is related to fruit. "These things I have written," John says in his first letter, "that you might know that you have eternal life" -- and what John has written is a practical set of tests. "Here," he says over and over again, "is what a Christian does -- how he acts -- what he thinks -- if this is you -- you can KNOW if its not you, how can you be sure that you belong to Christ." That is the second level of assurance.

The third level -- the deepest level -- is what Paul talks about in Romans 8. It comes when the Spirit of God bears witness to my Spirit that I am indeed the Child of God and makes me cry out Abba - Daddy! This is very subjective -- there will be no way to explain it fully -- but when you have it, you have received a blessed gift. He is the spirit of assurance.

Remember today -- "nothing can separate you from the love of God."