

Romans 5: God's Answer to Sin & Death

The Broader Context:

Rom 1-3: The universal **need** for justification

Rom 4: Faith in Christ's righteousness as the **basis** of justification

➤ **Rom 5-8:** The present **benefits** of justification

Rom 9-11: The **defense** of justification considering Israel's election

Rom 12-16: The **application** of justification in the multiethnic church & apostolic mission

The Benefits of Justification (5:1-11)

1. **Peace with God** (cf. John 14:27; Ephesians 2:14-18).
 - Hebrew *shalom* (peace, wholeness, blessing) – promised in the New Covenant (Isaiah 52:7; 55:12; 57:19; Ezekiel 34:25-28).
 - Access to God's presence and his favor (Ephesians 2:6, 18; 3:12; Hebrews 4:16; 6:19-20; 10:19-22; 1 Peter 5:12).
2. **Joy in Suffering** (cf. Acts 14:22; James 1:2-4, 12; 1 Peter 1:3-9; 4:12-19).
3. **Hope of Salvation/Glory** (cf. Psalm 22:4-5; 33:22; Titus 3:7; Hebrews 10:23; 1 Peter 1:13).

God's love has been “poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (5:5):

- An echo of OT prophecies about the New Covenant (Isaiah 32:15; 44:3; Ezekiel 36:25-26; Joel 3:1; cf. Acts 10:45).
- The Spirit and hope – see Romans 8:16-17.
- The Spirit and love – see Galatians 5:22; 1 Peter 1:22. “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).
- “And so, if you are not exceedingly worthy, despond not, since you have that Love of your Judge as a mighty pleader for you. For this is why he himself by saying, ‘hope makes not ashamed,’ has ascribed everything not to our well-doings, but to God's love” (St. John Chrysostom, Ninth Homily on Romans).

Christ died “at the right time” (5:6) (cf. Galatians 4:4-7; Ephesians 1:10).

- See St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* Book IV Ch. 38.

The proof of God's radical love for humanity: “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (5:8).

- The cross is the ultimate assurance of God's love for us (Mark 10:45; Luke 23:33-34; John 3:16; 16:27; 1 John 4:9-10; Revelation 1:5).
- St. Augustine: “Hear the Apostle speak; hear, as I said some time ago, lest you be broken by despair; hear how you were loved when you had nothing to be loved for, hear how you were loved when unsightly, deformed, before there was anything in you which

was lovable. You were first loved, that you might be made lovely. For Christ, as the Apostle says, ‘died for the ungodly’” (Homily 92 on the New Testament).

- Dorothy Sayers: “For whatever reason God chose to make man as he is— limited and suffering and subject to sorrows and death—He had the honesty and the courage to take His own medicine. ... He was born in poverty and died in disgrace and thought it well worthwhile” (from “The Greatest Drama Ever Staged”).

“We have received reconciliation” (5:11) (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Colossians 1:19-23).

The Work of Christ as the Solution to Sin and Death (5:12-21)

Paul extrapolates from Christ’s work to his understanding of the problem, why we needed reconciliation -- we were alienated *through Adam’s disobedience*.

The origin of sin and death: In Jewish theology at the time, there was widespread agreement that sin and death came into the world through Adam & Eve’s primordial rebellion in Gen 3. But sources differed as to who was primarily responsible.

- The devil (Wisdom of Solomon 2:24)
- Eve (Sirach 25:24; cf. 1 Timothy 2:8-15)
- The serpent, Eve, and Adam (*Jubilees* 3:17-32)
- Adam alone (4 *Ezra* 3:7, 21; 4:30; 7:48; 2 *Baruch* 23:4; 54:15-19; R. Judah *Sifre Deut* 323).

Why Paul focuses on Adam here: *covenant representative* (and a precursor/parallel to Christ).

Paul’s Logic:

Adam’s sin → Sin and death present in the world; mortal humanity under the power of sin and condemned to die → Everyone sins because of their fallen nature & environment → Everyone dies

VS.

Christ’s obedience → Grace abundant in the world; righteousness available to all → Those who receive grace & righteousness by faith will reign in eternal life

The biblical doctrine of “original sin”: We are not personally guilty of Adam’s action, but we do all personally suffer the consequences of Adam’s choice.

- Because of Adam, humanity was “made sinners” (5:19) and experiences “condemnation” (5:18). We are under the power of sin (recall Rom 3:9-26).
- Because of Adam, we all inevitably sin (“because all sinned” – 5:12) and need a Savior.
- Because of Adam, the creation has been subjected to futility and corruption (8:20-21).

“The death which entered through sin is without doubt that death of which the prophet speaks when he says: ‘The soul which sins shall surely die.’ One might rightly say that our bodily death is a shadow of this death. For whenever a soul dies, the body is obliged to follow suit, like a shadow.” (Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*).

“Original Sin” as a Historic Christian Doctrine

Article IX: Of Original or Birth-Sin: “Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam, (as the Pelagians do vainly talk;) but it is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the Spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation...”

“We not only fail to receive an original goodness, and are [spiritually] diseased, but human nature as a whole is corrupted. Each human being thus receives a corrupted nature, but is not thereby a sinful person until he or she commits actual sin.” – Charles Sherlock, *The Doctrine of Humanity*, Contours of Christian Theology (InterVarsity Press, 1996), 236.

Catholic writer G. K. Chesterton famously remarked that original sin is “the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved.”

In the early Fathers, even before St. Augustine:

“For it behoved Him who was to destroy sin, and redeem man under the power of death, that He should Himself be made that very same thing which he was, that is, man; who had been drawn by sin into bondage, but was held by death, so that sin should be destroyed by man, and man should go forth from death. *For as by the disobedience of the one man who was originally moulded from virgin soil, the many were made sinners, and forfeited life*; so was it necessary that, by the obedience of one man, who was originally born from a virgin, many should be justified and receive salvation. Thus, then, was the Word of God made man, as also Moses says: ‘God, true are His works.’ But if, not having been made flesh, He did appear as if flesh, His work was not a true one. But what He did appear, that He also was: God recapitulated in Himself the ancient formation of man, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man; and therefore His works are true.” – St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 3 ch. 18.7.

“...by which things He clearly shows forth God Himself, *whom indeed we had offended in the first Adam*, when he did not perform His commandment. In the second Adam, however, we are reconciled, being made obedient even unto death. For we were debtors to none other but to Him whose commandment we had transgressed at the beginning.” – St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book V ch. 16.3.

“So then He united man with God, and established a community of union between God and man; since we could not in any other way participate in incorruption, save by His coming among us.... And, *because in the original formation of Adam all of us were tied and bound up with death through his disobedience*, it was right that through the obedience of Him who was made man for us we should be released from death: and because death reigned over the flesh, it was right that through the flesh it should lose its force and let man go free from its oppression. So the Word was made flesh, that, through that very flesh which sin had ruled and dominated, it should lose its force and be no longer in us. And therefore our Lord took that same original formation as (His) entry into flesh, so that He might draw near and contend on behalf of the fathers, *and conquer by Adam that which by Adam had stricken us down.*” – St. Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 31.

“And (the man) being given over to death on account of his sin, the entire human race, tainted in their descent from him, were made a channel for transmitting his condemnation.” – Tertullian, *The Soul's Testimony*, ch. 3.

“The Church received from the apostles the tradition of giving baptism even to infants. For the apostles, to whom were committed the secrets of divine mysteries, knew that there is in everyone the innate stain of sin, which must be washed away through water and the Spirit.” – Origen, *Commentaries on Romans* 5:9.

“But again, if even to the greatest sinners, and to those who had sinned much against God, when they subsequently believed, remission of sins is granted—and nobody is hindered from baptism and from grace—how much rather ought we to shrink from hindering *an infant, who, being lately born, has not sinned, except in that, being born after the flesh according to Adam, he has contracted the contagion of the ancient death at its earliest birth*, who approaches the more easily on this very account to the reception of the forgiveness of sins—that to him are remitted, not his own sins, but the sins of another.” – St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle to Fidus, On the Baptism of Infants*, v. 5.

“Adam, the first man, altered his course, and through sin death came into the world. . . . When Adam transgressed, sin reached out to all men.” – St. Athanasius, *Discourses Against the Arians* 1:51.