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Romans 5 (Part 2)

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The fifth chapter of Romans forms a high water mark for Christian theology. Its focus on the results of justification by faith makes it essential reading for every believer and a target of detailed study for the serious student of God's Word. Romans 5:1-11 points to the fact that justification results in the believer's position of peace with God. Verses 6 through 8 form a cohesive block. "Paul accentuates the unity of the argument in vv. 6-8 by ending each sentence (in the Greek text) with the verb 'die.'"¹ By implication, these verses carry the theme of redemption. Although the word "redemption" is not found in these verses, it's clearly at the core of Paul's thinking. Redemption refers to Christ's substitutionary payment for our sins by which He purchases us from the slave market of sin through His death on the cross. Romans 5:6-8 can be summarized with the statement, "Redemption: our sins have been completely paid for by Jesus Christ."

Redemption was prompted by our desperate need (5:6).

In our natural condition we're enemies of God. Furthermore, we're powerless (Paul uses the word "weak" or "sick") to change our

situation, "meaning that we were helpless to rescue ourselves"² and that we have a "total incapacity for good."³ But God is powerful. He sent His Son at just the right time. God's timing is always perfect. This timing may be chronological in nature (compare Galatians 4:4), meaning that the historical circumstances were just right for Jesus' entrance into the world. From another perspective, "just the right time" could carry a theological sense, the idea that at the time of our weakness Jesus died for us. However, since human weakness due to sin has been constant throughout history, a chronological perspective seems preferable. God's providential timing for Jesus' death perfectly matched His ordained plan. At the appointed time Jesus Christ died on the cross, providing redemption for our sins.

Jesus' death took place when we were unable to do anything about our sin problem. Not only were we powerless, we were also "ungodly" or "irreverent" toward God. But Jesus died "for" us. This preposition can mean "in partnership with" (that is, along with) or "in the place of" (that is, as a substitute). The latter meaning makes the best sense in this context and elsewhere to refer to Christ's substitutionary death on the cross. "Paul frequently uses this preposition to designate Christ's death as vicarious—e.g., a death 'for,' or 'on behalf of,' others."⁴ Jesus died in our place so that we might live. His death paid the penalty for our sins in order that we might be brought back to God. This is the work of redemption.

Redemption was prompted by God's unfathomable love (5:7-8).

God loved us when we were unlovely. Christ died for us when we were God's enemies, at war with God. Paul here points out that such a substitutionary death is completely counterintuitive. In the most ideal circumstances a person might be willing to die for a righteous person. Someone might dare to die for a good person. But such cases are indeed rare. Did Paul have two degrees of virtue in mind when he referred to a "righteous" person and a "good" person? Some see these as the same type of individual. For example, Bruce states, "There is little distinction between 'righteous' and 'good' in this verse . . ."⁵ However, it makes sense to see a progression in Paul's use of these terms. A "righteous" person might have his or

her life in order but be less than caring toward others. Stott describes such a righteous person in this context as “probably referring to somebody whose uprightness is rather cold, clinical and unattractive.”⁶ However, a “good” person would have the additional quality of kindness toward others. Stott describes this person as one “whose goodness is warm, generous and appealing.”⁷ Paul’s argument, therefore, might go like this. Someone might be willing to die for a righteous person. There’s even a higher likelihood that someone would die for a good and kind individual. By contrast, however, Jesus died for us when we were at our lowest state. He died for us while we were lost in our sinfulness.

Jesus’ death was prompted by God’s love. The greatest way in which God could “demonstrate” or “prove” His love for us was by giving His own Son to die in our place. “Indeed, ‘demonstrate’ is really too weak a word; ‘prove’ would be better.”⁸ God proved His love for us through the redemptive work of His Son. This took place while we were still sinners, wicked at heart and at war with God. But God still loved us. Jesus died for us, thereby redeeming us. He died in our place as a substitute sacrifice for our sins. When we respond to God’s love and Jesus’ redeeming sacrifice by faith we are justified. We enter experientially into the love of God. God has done everything possible to restore us to a relationship with Himself. He sent Christ to die for us, thereby fulfilling the judicial requirement for sin. Now God calls us to faith in His Son. When we receive Jesus Christ, trusting in His redemptive work on the cross, God justifies us (declares us righteous) and then reconciles us to Himself. Our sins have been completely paid for by Jesus Christ.

⁶ Stott, 145.

⁷ Stott, 145.

⁸ Stott, 144.

¹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 306.

² John R. Stott, *The Message of Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 145.

³ Moo, 306.

⁴ Moo, 307.

⁵ F. F. Bruce, *Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 128.