



ROMANS: WEEK II

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Previously, in Romans: *In an age of enormous division based on status and culture, Paul has broken down the value of these divisions and says that our external markers of status and identity and worth are not impressive to God.*

Monday, February 22 – Romans 3:1-8

3 Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? ² Much, in every way. For in the first place the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. ³ What if some were unfaithful? Will their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? ⁴ By no means! Although everyone is a liar, let God be proved true, as it is written,

“So that you may be justified in your words,
and prevail in your judging.”

⁵ But if our injustice serves to confirm the justice of God, what should we say? That God is unjust to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) ⁶ By no means! For then how could God judge the world? ⁷ But if through my falsehood God’s truthfulness abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? ⁸ And why not say (as some people slander us by saying that we say), “Let us do evil so that good may come”? Their condemnation is deserved!

Points of Interest:

- ‘Then what advantage has the Jew?’ – We’re still in Paul’s diatribe, his debate with his imaginary interrogator. Paul writes these series of questions (vs. 1, 3, 5, and 7) that he imagines the Jewish members of the Roman communities will have.

Reading Paul devaluing the importance of being Jewish throughout chapter 2, perhaps someone imagined he thought being Jewish was worthless. Or that he was suffering from some ethnic self-hatred and joining the Roman authorities in their anti-Semitism. So Paul circles back and says that it’s wonderful to be Jewish and that Jews have had a central role in God’s work on earth. He’ll circle back to this theme in greater detail later in the letter.

- ‘Although everyone is a liar, let God be proved true’ – The behavior of people who claim to be close to God does not necessarily say anything about God. People might wonder if God should be judged on the basis of the people God trusts. Paul says no. God can be faithful to God’s promises, even if the people on the other end don’t hold up their end of the deal. This reminds me of parents who are determined to love their kid into successful adulthood, even when their child goes through a period of rebellion. It’s not necessarily the parents’ fault, and their plans can still come to pass.
- ‘So that you may be justified in your words’ – Paul makes a quick allusion to a case study on this

point. Here is a quotation from Psalm 51, which is King David (mentioned in 1:3) writing about how much he screwed up when he took a woman named Bathsheba as his lover and then arranged for her husband to be killed. Talk about being unfaithful! David tells God that God will be in the right to judge him and have him face consequence for this. The record of Israel's kings says that David does face difficulties from these awful choices. Yet God is still able to be faithful to his promises to David and David's legacy, almost despite David's foolishness.

- 'For then how could God judge the world' – Paul has established that it's hard for people to derail God's plans, even when they screw up. But what happens when this makes God look good? Should people be off the hook for our foolishness when God finds a way to make it all work out for good? Paul says no by appealing to a core conviction most people who believe in a god have had about that god – that God has a responsibility to judge the world: to establish a sense of justice and of right and wrong, and to ensure that there are consequences for injustice.
- 'as some people slander us' – Paul apparently believes that his reputation has preceded him, that some people are saying he is so committed to God's message of love and grace and kindness that people should do evil just so that they can be forgiven by God. Paul thinks this reasoning is so ridiculous that he doesn't even entertain it.

Taking It Home:

For you – Has it ever felt like God's plans for your life might be derailed, either because of circumstances, or because of your own or others' bad behavior? What does it mean to you that people's faithlessness cannot "nullify the faithfulness of God"?

For your 6 – Perhaps some of your 6 were born with particular advantages. Ask God they would experience these with gratitude, and that God's good hopes for each of their lives would come to be as well.

Tuesday, February 23 – Romans 3:9-20

Previously, in Romans: *While arguing for the universal brokenness and need of humankind, Paul took us on a quick tangent to deal with a few questions that might have been coming up, particularly for his Jewish readers.*

⁹ What then? Are we any better off? No, not at all; for we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, ¹⁰ as it is written:

“There is no one who is righteous, not even one;

¹¹ there is no one who has understanding,
there is no one who seeks God.

¹² All have turned aside, together they have become worthless;
there is no one who shows kindness,
there is not even one.”

¹³ “Their throats are opened graves;
they use their tongues to deceive.”

“The venom of vipers is under their lips.”

¹⁴ “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.”

¹⁵ “Their feet are swift to shed blood;

¹⁶ ruin and misery are in their paths,

¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known.”

¹⁸ “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰ For “no human being will be justified in his sight” by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

Points of Interest:

- ‘What then? Are we any better off?’ – Perhaps it seemed clear to all of us already that no one is better off before God, despite any status or advantages people appear to have. Perhaps, though, after claiming that it is a good thing to be Jewish, Paul feels the need to return to his main point, that nothing – not religious heritage, not education, not high-status privilege – makes you better off as a person. We’re all in the same boat.
- ‘are under the power of sin’ – That same boat we’re in, without God’s help, is a sinking one. Paul says that sin – all the ways we miss the mark – isn’t a series of mistakes but a malevolent, almost personal force within us, determined to ruin our lives. Those of us who have battled addiction or bad tempers or any other number of personal demons have found this to be true as well.
- ‘There is no one who is righteous’ – Again, Paul’s writing is soaked in the Hebrew scriptures, whether he’s directly quoting them in the moment or not. Here there’s a whole mash-up of quotations. For those checking at home, here are the references: Ecclesiastes 7:20, Psalm 14:1, Psalm 14:53, Psalm 5:9, Psalm 140:3, Psalm 10:7, Isaiah 59:7-8, and Psalm 36:2.
- The primary meaning of all this Bible quoting is clear. He appeals to a source his Jewish readers would trust – their Bible – to make the point that his own argument of universal human sin is not original. That said, N.T. Wright’s commentary points out that in their context, every single one of these references is near to a prayer or promise that God would prove himself righteous – good and just and in right relationship – by rescuing people from ourselves.
- ‘so that every mouth may be silenced’ – This is an interesting goal God has in mind. Some people have seen God’s law as a tool for self-advancement, a way to justify themselves as better than their fellow humans. Paul says that doesn’t work out so well, because God’s expectations tend to show us what’s wrong with us, more than what is right in us. Perhaps silence is better than all that self-justification. Like a kid busy making excuses when caught in the act, it would be more helpful to just stop talking and ask for forgiveness and help.

Paul has the humility to apply this extended argument to his own culture and religion, but the extension to the Roman elite in these house churches, or to ourselves for that matter, isn’t that hard to make. Whatever it is that we use to justify ourselves or make us look more favorable than others, or gain privilege over others, we are still broken and flawed human beings, exposed as needy before God.

Taking It Home:

For you – Consider a different mode of prayer for a minute. Tell God that you know you are no better than anyone else, and that you too are a broken sinner. Then simply be silent for a while.

For your church/city – Not unlike Roman society, ours appears to be status and privilege-obsessed as well. Whether through the quality of our resume or the numbers of our instagram followers, we find meaning in comparison to others. Pray that God would break through our city's obsession with education and achievement and popularity to give people the freedom to embrace their common humanity, and their common need for God.

Wednesday, February 24 – Romans 3:21-31

Previously, in Romans: *Paul has wrapped up his initial attack on human boasting and exceptionalism, insisting that all people are broken and all people are accountable to God.*

²¹ But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, ²³ since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; ²⁴ they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶ it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.

²⁷ Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law. ²⁹ Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ³⁰ since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. ³¹ Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

Points of Interest:

- 'the righteousness of God has been disclosed' – Reading the first three chapters of Romans in the 21st century, most of us would conclude that God's big problem would be how in the world to help us. We're broken, we lose our way in life, we live under the power of sin, and we're busy covering this up and justifying ourselves in comparison to other people? How will God help us?

As a first century Jew, Paul had a different concern he led with. What in the world does this say about God? How can God be good and just and fulfill his promises to set the whole world right, when this is what we are like? Paul says that Jesus answers this question. Four times in this one paragraph, Paul says that Jesus reveals the righteousness of God. Jesus is the center of God's story, the hinge of God's history, revealing how God is good and just and will fulfill his promise to set all things right. How this is so will get considerable attention over the next few chapters.

- 'there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' – Paul won't let go of his theme of status-free, privilege-free, comparison-free common humanity. None of us are better

than one another in our common problems, and none of us are worse than one another in our common opportunity to receive kindness from God.

- 'they are now justified' – If you didn't grow up in a Christian, church-going setting, some of Paul's language – steeped in Jewish culture and religion and scripture, on the one hand, and first century Greco-Roman people on the other – will feel kind of technical and foreign sometimes. But if you grew up in a Christian, church going setting, it might seem over-familiar, since so many Christian thinkers have spun theories about Paul's language over the centuries. Either way, we'll do our best to follow Paul's line of thinking and ask how it might remain relevant good news for us in our times.

So far Paul hasn't seemed particularly interested in some of the questions later Christians talked so much about. He hasn't been asking about an individual's fate after death, for instance, as important as that question may be. He's been wondering how God can fulfill his promises to set the world right, and how people can find grounds for our existence and meaning that don't depend on comparing ourselves to others. He starts to address that second question here, saying human justification isn't about our qualifications at all. Education, health, morality, ethnicity, status, privilege, popularity – none of those things makes life right and meaningful. The gift of Jesus, and particularly Jesus buying us out of being under the power of sin (3:9), makes our lives right.

- 'whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood' – "How?" would be a reasonable question. Paul will have more to say about this, but he starts by saying that on Jesus' end, it has to do with his death, and on our end, it has to do with trust that this works, that Jesus' death has something to do with God setting things right in the world and freeing us from problems of our own making. Paul (and we) will explore this idea more in chapters to come. For now, it's fair to note that everything about this is surprising – that the long-dismantled Jewish sacrificial system would be at all relevant to Roman Gentiles (or us), that a shameful death would be at the center of God's plans to make things right, or that the key to a meaningful life would be trusting something God does rather than doing anything unique ourselves. All of this is unexpected, to Paul and to the Romans, as well as to us.
- 'Then what becomes of boasting?' – For now, Paul brings this thought to climax by saying that it dismantles our battles of achievement and power and comparison. The law of faith, that people are made right by trusting in the efficacy of a gift and not by status or accomplishments, makes elevating ourselves over other people or groups seem ridiculous.
- 'God is one' – The Hebrew line, "Hear, O Israel, that God is one." (Deuteronomy 6:4) has been at the heart of Jewish daily prayers for thousands of years. In its original context, it was tied to a bold claim of monotheism – that this God is the one true God, over and against the pantheons of Israel's surrounding nations. It was also tied to the giving of the 10 commandments, and the rest of the law of God; over the centuries, Jews came to believe that possession of and obedience to that law made them special. Paul now ties this line to God's universal goodness to all humanity – one God for all people.
- 'On the contrary, we uphold the law.' – You could understand if people called Paul a revisionist, making up new purposes for the Bible in light of his faith in Jesus. Paul says that the opposite is

true, that in Jesus, God has revealed his original purpose for the whole of the Jewish faith and law and heritage.

Taking It Home:

For you – What does it mean to find worth in someone else’s gift, to say that your life matters because of the value that Jesus places on it? Is this freeing or troubling to you? Does it resolve tensions for you, or raise questions?

For your 6 – If any of your six consider themselves outsiders to faith, pray that they will come to understand that God is for them and relevant to them as well.

Thursday, February 25 – Romans 4:1-12

Previously, in Romans: *Paul has introduced the notion that faith – specifically, trust in the value and relevance of Jesus’ life and death – is the key to a meaningful life and was at the center of all of God’s past involvement with the Jewish people.*

4 What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” ⁴ Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. ⁵ But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness. ⁶ So also David speaks of the blessedness of those to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works:

⁷ “Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven,
and whose sins are covered;

⁸ blessed is the one against whom the Lord will not reckon sin.”

⁹ Is this blessedness, then, pronounced only on the circumcised, or also on the uncircumcised? We say, “Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness.” ¹⁰ How then was it reckoned to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. ¹¹ He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the ancestor of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them, ¹² and likewise the ancestor of the circumcised who are not only circumcised but who also follow the example of the faith that our ancestor Abraham had before he was circumcised.

Points of Interest:

- ‘Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh’ – Paul brings up Abraham, as both a case study in the value of faith and also the relative insignificance of anything else that we might think makes us better than others. It’s interesting to me that Paul assumes the Romans would be interested in this story. After all, while he and some of the Jesus followers in the house churches are Jewish, most were not. Today, Abraham is a founding father-figure to Christians, Jews, and Muslims – roughly half the world’s population – but then he was only a central figure for Jews. Yet Paul insists that his story, his experience, and his example are important for all people.

If I'm not Jewish, this is humbling. It tells me that the start of God's story for me isn't in my life, or that of my grandparents, or in America, or in the European Enlightenment, or in anything else that was accomplished by or happened to my ancestors. God's story for me is "to the Jew first." (1:16) If I were Jewish, it would also be humbling, because it means that Abraham and his legacy are not my special possession, that all along this story was for everyone. It is "also to the Greek." (1:16)

- 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' – This line is from Genesis 15. Abraham thinks God has promised to do something great for the whole earth through his descendants. Yet his wife Sarai and he are getting older, and they don't yet have a single child. God tells Abraham he will get that child and a gazillion descendants through which this promise will come true. Abraham says, "OK. I trust you, God." And God calls that righteousness. That is what it means to be in right relationship with oneself and with God. It's not to try to accumulate payment, whether through moral goodness or human status, but to trust God's provision. Paul says this is the pattern for all human dealings with God – it's what it means to be in the game, to trust what God is doing to make our lives meaningful, to make us part of a bigger story and community, and to set right all the earth.
- 'who justifies the ungodly' – Paul slips in this little phrase to talk about what God did for Abraham. Calling Abraham ungodly would be a pretty big surprise for Paul's fellow Jews, but Paul is sticking to his agenda of equal footing for all humanity. We are all part of that story Paul tells at the end of chapter one, tending toward a lack of trust in God and making life difficult for ourselves and one another. Put differently, we have all "sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." (3:23) Abraham, the Jews, the Romans, you, and I were made to be tight with God and experience all of God's goodness and joy and light and power. Yet for all us, that is consistently not true. Our only way back is to trust God to make it so.
- 'Blessed are those whose iniquities...' – Paul brings another Jewish hero into the conversation, this time King David again, from Psalm 32. With David, too, the good life came from trusting God to make things right, not from any way he had to make that so. There's that word "reckon" again, God counting faith for us, but not counting all our faithlessness against us.
- 'pronounced only on the circumcised...?' – Abraham had faith and became an example for relating to God before he was circumcised and long before God gave people any law to follow. Thus circumcision was only a sign of something for a time, not the thing itself. Yet for Paul's contemporaries, to be circumcised was to be a Jew. To not be circumcised was to be an outsider to the experience, ineligible, inferior.

Paul is really going after that value of human achievements and identity markers here. He has the humility here to go after that of his own culture first. Presumably this would apply, though, to anything else we think is the key to the good life. For Romans, it might have been status as Roman citizens. Interestingly enough, Paul had that status (unusual for a first century Palestinian Jew), but doesn't bring it up in this letter. It's just that big a deal. I think Paul would say the same thing about graduate degrees, social media followers, high incomes, fit bodies, getting married or having children, and more. If these things make sense as part of the life God's leading you to, go for it, but they are not prerequisites. They are not keys to the good life; faith is.

Taking It Home:

For you – Is there an equivalent identity marker to circumcision in your life? Something you have considered essential to the good life, whether you have it yet or don't? Try telling God you'd like to hold that thing more lightly and trust God to give you a relationship to God and to your own life that makes things right.

For your church/city – Pray that our church would provide another witness, like Abraham and David, to the reality that trusting God brings joy and love and the good life.

Friday, February 26 – Romans 4:13-25

Previously, in Romans: *Paul is half way through a case study on Abraham, discussing why faith – trust in God, and not anything else – makes us part of God's family and restores our lives.*

¹³ For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

¹⁶ For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, ¹⁷ as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations")—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸ Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "So numerous shall your descendants be."

¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.

²⁰ No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

²² Therefore his faith "was reckoned to him as righteousness." ²³ Now the words, "it was reckoned to him," were written not for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵ who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

Points of Interest:

- 'the promise that he would inherit the world' – That's a big inheritance, the whole world! In Abraham's story, God promises that his descendants would be blessed by God and be a blessing to the whole world. It was never about ultimately about a particular plot of land, but about the whole earth be changed through what God did in their story.
- 'did not come... through the law' – Like circumcision, the law comes after Abraham trusts God, steps into the good life as a result, and this story of making things right is set in motion.
- 'For the law brings wrath' – Paul does think God has expectations for human living that are good for us. He'd said these can be written on our hearts. (2:14) But the law itself has all kinds of other

drawbacks. It judges people who don't follow it (2:12), it can become a source of status boasting (2:17 2:25-27), and it leads to wrath – the consequences God has established for when we don't live rightly.

- 'it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace.' – The answer to this problem isn't better law-keeping, but faith. Paul insists that Jesus has revealed more clearly that all people can trust God to make them right, giving them the chance to be included in God's family and experience all of God's benefits.
- 'Hoping against hope, he believed' – Many of you are participating in a 40 Days of Faith season, in which you are trusting God to do something good for you as well as for some other people you care about. If it's any encouragement to you, you are doing this in a long line of others for whom that has gone well. In Abraham's case, the odds against his faith were enormous. His faith required a God "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist." Know that the God you are trusting when you trust the God of Abraham and David and Jesus has done just this, again and again.
- 'when he considered his own body... or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb' – For Abraham, faith did not involve denial of his present reality. He noticed and considered the odds against God's promises coming true. Yet for much longer than 40 days, he kept praying, and his trust grew stronger. Of course, we can misunderstand the details of God's promises, but Paul admires Abraham's considered trust, and says that God considered it to be wonderful as well.
- 'It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead...' – In the shortest possible way, Paul summarizes what it means to follow Jesus. It is entering into Abraham's story of a God who does the impossible. It is entering into the story of a God who can give life to the dead, and has specifically done that in Jesus on the first Easter. It is trusting that Jesus' death cleared out the weight of our trespasses that these first four chapters have talked so much. And it means that in Jesus coming back to life, he set in motion our justification – our inclusion in God's family, and our lives and all things on earth being made right and new.

Taking It Home:

For you – If you have been asking God for something for this 40 Days of faith, has your trust in God changed? Has your faith grown or decreased? How can Abraham's example encourage you?

For your 6 – Pray that your friends would experience full inclusion in God's family. And if any are up against great odds, hoping against hope, pray that God will answer any prayers they have spoken and connect them with a God who gives life to the dead.

Saturday, February 27 – Romans 5:1-11

Previously, in Romans: *Paul has explained to the Romans that all of them who trust God – Jew or Gentile – are full members of the family of faith.*

5 Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.³ And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.⁷ Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die.⁸ But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.⁹ Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God.¹⁰ For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.¹¹ But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Points of Interest:

- 'justified by faith' – This one phrase serves as a summary for the first four chapters. Lots of missteps serve to separate us from God, self, and one another. We are made just – given standing with God and with one another – not through comparative status at another's expense, but by trusting that through Jesus, God has made it so.
- 'we have peace with God' – The result of this new standing is peace with God. Scholars debate whether this phrase should be translated as, "we have peace," or "let us have peace." Either way, within reach, to be experienced is access to a free and easy relationship with God. For Romans whose gods demanded much from them and offered little, peace with the divine and access to God's kindness would have sounded extraordinary.

More than personal well-being, this phrase "peace with God through our Lord" had deliberate political overtones. Rome promised the Pax Romana – the peace and order and justice of Rome – through the rule of its emperor, called Lord and Savior. Paul elevates Jesus above Cesar and claims he provides a higher, deeper peace, with broader access as well.

- 'we boast in our hope... we boast in our sufferings' – Of everything Paul had to say in this letter, this might have been the most ludicrous-sounding to the Romans. Romans would boast in the superiority of their state, and all the benefits it provided. Jews would boast in the superiority of their god and the privileged status their identity as God's chosen conferred. By contrast, anyone suffering would lose opportunity to boast and would face shame, both internalized and reinforced socially by everyone who knew. Paul flips this reality on its head, saying that for the one who trust Jesus, good things are coming. Regardless of present circumstances, we will eventually share in the status and power and joy and goodness of God.

The Orthodox say, "God became like us, so we could become like him." If that is so, then that is a future worth being excited about.

- 'hope does not disappoint us, because God's love...' – Literally, disappoint here is "put us to shame." Sticking with the honor/shame language of his culture, Paul says God accepts and loves us, and that is our reality to experience by the Holy Spirit. Robert Jewett writes, "Thus the link between trauma and shame is broken by unconditional acceptance.... In Christ, traumatic adversity has lost its power to shame."
- '...has been poured into our hearts' – This language of "poured out" has pretty rich associations in the Bible. Jesus' love is "poured out" for us in his death, symbolized by the wine that is poured at communion and the woman who poured out her perfume to anoint Jesus before his death. The Holy Spirit is also poured out on all flesh, Joel prophesies, and Peter in the book of Acts says is fulfilled amongst the followers of Jesus. The result of all this pouring out is God pouring love into us, regardless of our present circumstances.
- 'while we were still sinners Christ died for us' – If we need a proof of this love of God, this is it. While we had nothing to offer, when we were in fact missing the mark, not like God, even resistant to Jesus, he died for us. This might have been literally true for Paul's readers, who had strong ties to either the Roman or Jewish authorities who conspired to kill Jesus. Paul implies it is symbolically true for all people, though, that Jesus died for us in love when we had nothing to offer him.
- 'justified... reconciled... saved by his life' – The second paragraph here is full of benefits that Jesus' death and post-resurrection life ensure for those that trust him. There's justification, this new standing before God and others. There's the exalted future with God, called sharing in God's glory. There's salvation – rescue from a terrible fate, which Romans understood as being a barbarian outside the empire, but Paul understood as facing the terrible consequences and judgment that our sin provokes. Perhaps most powerful to a 21st century ear, though, is the final benefit here – reconciliation. Separated from God and alone in the world, Jesus gives his followers the opportunity to be reconnected with God as a child or friend.

Taking It Home:

For you – Consider any disappointments or suffering that have caused you shame. Invite God to pour out his love into your heart in this space. What does it mean to you that you can trust God to share in his glory?

For your church/city – Various groups of people in my city come to mind, when I think of folks struggling with shame and disappointment. I think of the dashing of American dreams experienced by some immigrants, or the struggles I've seen in friends in hospitals. Who comes to mind when you think of residents of your city who experience more shame and disappointment than hope and peace? Pray that God would reverse this inner state for them, and that our communities would do better by these people as well.

Sunday, February 28 – Romans 5:12-21

Previously, in Romans: *Paul has turned his focus toward the tremendous benefits all people can experience when they trust the game-changing significance of the death and life of Jesus.*

¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned— ¹³ sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. ¹⁴ Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come.

¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. ¹⁶ And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. ¹⁷ If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. ¹⁹ For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. ²⁰ But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹ so that, just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might also exercise dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Points of Interest:

- 'just as sin came into the world through one man' – Paul's been reaching further and further back for Bible figures that illuminate the life and work of Jesus. Now Paul goes all the way back to Adam, understanding him to be a kind of anti-Jesus figure, the comically drawn opposite who created conditions that Jesus has begun to reverse.
- 'death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses' – The most significant of these conditions is death. In the Adam and Eve origin story, people begin to die when they choose to try to be like God, rather than receiving life from relationship with God. We talked on Tuesday about the way our own sin can dominate us. Paul draws a pretty tight link between this sin and the literal and metaphorical death we taste as a result.
- 'the free gift is not like the trespass' – Paul begins an extended comparison of the impact that Adam and Jesus have on humanity. Sin unleashes a hell of death and condemnation, while the gift of Jesus restores standing, connection with God, and life.
- 'so by the one man's obedience...' – It is interesting that the primary contrast Paul draws between Adam and Jesus isn't humanity and divinity, but disobedience and obedience. By saying yes to God's way for his life, Jesus becomes a kind of new first human for us all, Humanity 2.0. He also restores humans to our intended position of justification and life.
- 'law – trespass – sin – grace – eternal life' – In the causal chain of the final two verses, Paul is polemically shifting a common Jewish understanding of how God will rescue people from Adam's

sin. A contemporary of Paul's might understand God's delivery of the Law to Moses as the way out. People developed the habit of rejecting God's guidance, so God gave people really clear guidance through Moses. And in the keeping of that Law, by this logic, people would find their way back to God.

Paul, though, swept by Moses as just part of the history of death and sin, and says that the primary fruit of this law was to highlight all that is wrong with humanity. But in our flourishing of sin – all the many ways we can misfire in our action and thinking and taste death instead of life – we have provided the territory to experience the grace and love of God from Jesus that leads to unending life.

Taking It Home:

For you – Thank Jesus today for living the life that all humans were meant to live but before him, never had. If you are still experiencing any of the death that comes from sin – negative consequences, for instance, of your own or others' wrong-doing – ask Jesus to give you a taste of life in that very space.

For your 6 – God desires grace to have dominion in the lives of your friends as well. Pray that each time they are aware of any of their mistakes or faults or short-comings, that they would come to know the love and acceptance of God there as well.