

Week Three

Conversations with God

ROMANS 5–6

READ

In this letter to the church in Rome, Paul is building a case. Like a lawyer in the courtroom, he makes a point, expounds and builds on the point, and he then assumes cross examination and addresses questions. It is in this week's readings—Romans 5 and 6—that Paul first expounds on grace and then addresses a highly anticipated question from cross examination: Is grace a license to sin? It is by grace, we will read this week, that “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). Even more, this grace was not a one-time offer, but it is grace “in which we now stand” (Romans 5:2). Does this standing in grace make obedience superfluous?

To get to this question, we need clarity on two essential concepts: grace and regeneration.

Grace

Grace is a summary word. It describes the gift of God, the favor of God, and the work of God on our behalf. God declares us righteous, he justifies us, not because we deserve it, but by grace. In another letter, Paul writes, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). By grace, by God's gift, we are brought into good standing with God. Sin is not held against us but taken care of by grace.

Regeneration

Regeneration is a word used by theologians to describe an essential concept in Romans and elsewhere. In short, regeneration is the spiritually dead being raised to spiritual life. Romans 5 goes to the depth of this concept by taking us back to the beginning. Why is humanity so broken? Why the pervasive rebellion against God? The following may sound cryptic, but once understood, it is deeply profound.

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned (Romans 5:12, TNIV).

Why the pervasive brokenness? Consider this: All humanity is impacted by decisions of our ancestors, even decisions hundreds and thousands of years prior to our conception. Yes, this can sound far-fetched, but consider it carefully. When an ancestor moves from one state to another, for example, or from one country to another, that ancestor effectively moves the entire family lineage in the process. Or if an ancestor intentionally raises a child to speak a different language, chances are the new language will be adopted for generations to come. Reflective of these examples, rebellion against God at humanity's inception created a state of spiritual death—separation from God. This deathlike state made Adam incapable of reproducing spiritually alive people. It is this reality Paul touches when he writes the seemingly cryptic verse just mentioned: “*Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin...*” (Romans 5:12, TNIV). Humanity is widely in a state of spiritual death, as is seen by pervasive disregard for God.

ROMANS 5–6

Why does this matter? Many reasons, not the least of which is that it deepens Paul's response to cross examination.

Is Grace a License to Sin?

Paul raises the question himself.

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? (Romans 6:1).

Paul's response to this cross examination is both immediate and strong.

By no means! (Romans 6:2).

But why? If we're forgiven, why not simply do as we want to do whenever we want to do it? And if we can't, are we truly saved by grace? These are fair questions that can be addressed a number of ways, but in these chapters, Paul gets to the heart of the matter by pointing to the very purpose of regeneration.

We were buried with Christ through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (Romans 6:4).

The English phrase "in order that" comes from a solitary Greek word with unmistakable meaning: *hina*. *Hina* denotes purpose, aim, and goal. "We were buried with Christ," Paul explains, *for the very purpose of living a new life*. When we identify with Christ, we identify not just with his death (bringing forgiveness), but also with his resurrection (bringing new life). The death is the dying of our old lives. The resurrection is the rising to our new lives. If we go to Christ so we can wallow in sin, we deny the very purpose of going to Christ. So the very purpose of regeneration in Christ is empowerment for living with heart and passion for God. To deny this heart and passion and run from God denies the very purpose of grace.

As you read Romans 5 and 6, consider your own view of grace, and talk with God about it. Do you view grace as forgiveness leading to passionate living for God? Or do you view grace as a means to rebel against God so you can continue to live as the spiritually dead? And specific to this week's Reading, what implications does this have on the fight for your life?

MEMORIZE

This week's memory verses:

2 Corinthians 10:3-5, "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

MEDITATE

Meditating is simply talking and listening to God. Your conversation with God will be inspired and informed by reading and memorizing Scripture, but your conversation should also be personalized. Carefully consider the passages, but don't *just* consider the passage. Talk and listen. Pour out your

ROMANS 5–6

thoughts, concerns, frustrations, and joys. Or just sit in silence before God. Some talk best with God in a quiet room. Others prefer to talk with God while running or walking. Most importantly, engage God in a way that is authentic and personal.

Use the space below to record memorable thoughts or highlights from your conversations with God to share with your Small Group or Running Partners.



ROMANS 5–6

ROMANS 5–6

Week 3, Conversations with God, p. 96