

Attaining the Glory of God

A Study in Romans 5

David Gooding

A Myrtlefield House Transcript



MYRTLEFIELD
HOUSE
www.myrtlefieldhouse.com

David Gooding has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Author of this work.

Copyright © The Myrtlefield Trust, 2019

All rights reserved. Permission is granted to reproduce this document in its entirety, or in unaltered excerpts, for personal and church use only as long as you do not charge a fee. You must not reproduce it on any Internet site. Permission must be obtained if you wish to reproduce it in any other context, translate it, or publish it in any format.

This text has been edited from the transcript of a talk given by David Gooding at Roseford Hall, Cambridge, England in 1969.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. You may not copy or download more than 500 consecutive verses of the ESV Bible or more than one half of any book of the ESV Bible. Quotations marked KJV are from The Authorized (King James) Version. Rights in the Authorized Version in the United Kingdom are vested in the Crown. Reproduced by permission of the Crown's patentee, Cambridge University Press. Other quotations are Dr Gooding's own translations or paraphrases

Published by The Myrtlefield Trust

PO Box 2216

Belfast, N Ireland

BT1 9YR

w: www.myrtlefieldhouse.com

e: info@myrtlefieldhouse.com

Myrtlefield catalogue no: rom.009/dw

Attaining the Glory of God

We begin by reading in the Epistle to the Romans and chapter 5.

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgement following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For 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. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (vv. 1–21)

And may God's Holy Spirit lead us into the enjoyment of all these spiritual delights, here stored for us in this portion of his word.

The riches of God's grace—'much more'!

Romans 5 is perhaps one of the most majestic and delightful portions in all of holy Scripture. It is an exposition of the grace of God, and its characteristic and recurring phrase are the two words 'much more'. You may care to note them. In verse 9, 'much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God'; in verse 10, 'much more . . . shall we be saved by his life'; in verse 15, 'much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many'; in verse 17, 'much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life'; reaching the climax in verse 20, 'but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more'.

There runs through this chapter the gladness of those who discover a spring of water in their thirst and, when they have quenched their immediate thirst, imagine at first that there is no more water; but then they find that the spring deepens into an ever-widening river and they discover that there is much more in this thing than at first they thought. Until they discover that this wonderful spring of God's grace is fed from an infinite ocean in which people will ever discover, though eternity be limitless, that there is much more in the grace of God than initially they thought.

From justification to sanctification

There are two major portions in this chapter. Together they form a bridge that leads us from what has gone before—the subject of justification by faith—and links it with what will follow—the subject of sanctification, the secret of holy living. You might in fact fall to wondering what this chapter has particularly to do in this great exposition of the gospel. After all, chapters 3 and 4 have shown us that if we believe in Christ we are justified by faith and we have peace with God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. And once we have been justified, instinct will tell us that justification should lead on immediately to a life of holy living. What then is there to be said in between? If I am now justified and I am setting out to be sanctified, if I am accepted with God and now I'm intending to live to please God, why should I delay a whole chapter before I begin to consider the matter of my walk of holiness? We shall see the answer to that question as we proceed.

We observe then that the chapter begins by summing up what has gone before. We are now justified by faith. Consider for a moment, the present benefits that flow from that. Being justified by faith, we have peace with God. Mark that exactly—not necessarily peace with ourselves, or peace within ourselves. Indeed we shall discover that perhaps we've anything but peace within ourselves. We shall be required to face our own old nature's ugly sin. Our conscience, bearing witness to the truth of God's diagnosis, will perhaps create a sense of violent unease within us. We would be altogether on the wrong path if we settled down, contentedly and complacently, to be at peace with ourselves. But here the writer says that the present benefit which we receive and enjoy through being justified by faith is that we have peace with God. We know ourselves accepted by him. As far as God is concerned, we are at peace.

Distinguishing 'state' and 'standing'

And then, says Paul, we have this second benefit, 'Through [our Lord Jesus Christ] we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand' (v. 2). Consider the security of our standing before God. The old theologians used to use terms that one doesn't hear quite so frequently nowadays. They used to rejoice in making the distinction between our standing and our state, and it seems to me that they were perfectly correct. We ought not to confuse these two things. If ever we are to be successful, if I may use such a term, in our progress in our state—in our spiritual attainment—we will need first to get clear the basis of our standing with God.

Our 'standing'

We have been introduced by Jesus Christ, our Lord, into what kind of a standing? How would you describe your standing? Think what it might have been. How easily it could have been otherwise. God might have had mercy on my rebellious soul. God might indeed have forgiven me for the fact that my sin murdered his Son. But as I look at these things as a mere man, I could have thought that God might have said to me, 'Now look here, Gooding. I have forgiven you. Now I give you another chance to prove yourself. Let that be a warning to you. I've forgiven you once, but from now on I shall watch you exceedingly critically and the first time you sin and come short, out you go.' And I couldn't have complained, for I didn't deserve to be forgiven the first time. Having been such an incorrigible sinner at first, I couldn't expect that God would necessarily look kindly on my future sins. So God, had he so wished, might have put me in a condition where every moment of my Christian life was lived in suspense—where his gracious acceptance of me was held out conditionally upon my further attainment. And life would have been one long bondage of uncertain misery. Oh, we may praise God that it is not so.

The standing into which Jesus Christ has brought us is thus described, 'we have obtained access by faith into this grace'. You will always remember what this technical term 'grace' means when you read the Epistle to the Romans. It is later defined for us very carefully in a subsequent chapter. When we talk of God's grace, we mean the opposite of works, the opposite of merit. If it is by grace then it is not by works and if it is by works, it is not by grace. Being justified by faith not only cancels the past and puts me right with God, through Christ I am introduced into a standing that is altogether of God's grace and is not conditional on my attainment. But if that is the present blessing, instinct tells us that we ought now to be concerned about the future. It is not going to mean, is it, that I can be careless about my spiritual life and its development? Obviously, if salvation is genuine at all, it is going to lead to increasing holiness, to being made more and more like Christ, like God. And the standard of attainment that God sets in front of us is nothing less than this, the very glory of God. That is the standard by which our sinning has been measured, for an earlier chapter reminds us that all sinned and do constantly come short of the glory of God (3:23).

Our 'state'

That is our miserable state compared with God's standard. But the salvation that God has devised has set its heart on making us arrive one day at this self-same standard—the glory of God. What hope have I, in all realism, of ever attaining the glory of God and being like him,

perfectly? You'll now begin to see what this chapter is doing in this interim space. Chapter 6 is going to talk to us in very practical terms about the way we live, about the secret of our deliverance from sin, about all those processes that will bring us at last to the glory of God. But before we start, my brother, my sister, what hope have we of ever attaining? For really, if there is no hope that we will ever attain, would we not be advised to give up before we start?

The hope of the glory of God

Here the word of God introduces us to one of the characteristic terms of New Testament Christianity. It says that 'we rejoice in hope of the glory of God'. This word that is translated 'rejoice' is an interesting word. It doesn't mean so much rejoice in the sense that I'm happy, happy, happy all the day long and I feel like singing, and I go around with some beatific smile upon my face. It's not that kind of 'rejoice' at all. It means to boast. It means to glory. It means to exult in a thing. It means basically to have confidence in one's heart that makes one sure and certain, so certain that one is prepared—in all humility of course—to glory or to boast.

It is a characteristic word of the New Testament. You'll find it running through Paul's Epistles, and here we meet it in the context of our hope of becoming like God. Paul says that we may be utterly confident—we may glory in the fact, we may boast in the fact—that we shall attain the glory of God. It is exceedingly helpful and important to get hold of this. If we are to take seriously the lessons that God's school lays down in chapter 6 of this epistle and onwards, and if we are genuinely and sincerely to seek to co-operate with God in the school of holiness, we shall find that the lessons are indeed difficult. Our attempts to live a holy life will be punctuated by many a failure and many a bitter struggle. We shall find that the enemy we face is stronger than we think. We shall find that the course to holiness is longer than we had anticipated. We shall find, I'm afraid, twenty years from now (if we've got twenty more years) that we're making mistakes then that we thought were forever behind us many years ago. In a word, the enemy of our souls will do his direst to discourage us and to bring us to think that the whole struggle is worthless and that we shall never attain.

Settle it in your heart, my dear brother and sister, on the authority of God's holy word that if you have been justified by faith, you have every ground for certain assurance that you will attain the glory of God. You will need that assurance, you will need that vigour of faith, if you are to walk successfully and learn successfully in the school of holiness.

Realistic, or mission impossible?

But says somebody, 'Surely your enthusiasm is running away with you, Mr Preacher. Aren't you doing what preachers often do, though they don't often realize they do, painting a more rosy picture than the actual facts? Are you not in fact running ahead of yourself? What happens, for instance, if tribulation or suffering were to arise so severe that it caused you to lose your faith? What happens if temptation arises so overpowering that it smashes your testimony?' And some bright man will be sure to say, 'Here is the very weak point of all your Christian salvation: it depends on your faith, doesn't it? As long as your faith stands firm and you remain a believer, you can talk of the security of the believer. But what happens if persecution arises so severe that it breaks your faith?' Then you're no longer a believer and it

would be irrelevant to talk about the security of the believer, if your faith has been broken and you weren't a believer anymore. We mustn't be anything less than realist, for mere human enthusiasm and excitement will not carry us through the course.

The assurance of Scripture

As we read on, Paul outlines for us things that the Holy Spirit wants us to know — certain basic facts that lie at the very threshold of the school of God's holiness. Mark the term 'knowing', for true holiness is based not on wishful thinking, not on bouts of emotional excitement, not on mirages or dreams. It is based on the solid, calm knowledge of actual facts. 'I want you to know,' says God, 'that where you start off with genuine faith, suffering produces endurance.' I believe your Authorized Version, those of you who are reading from one, has it that tribulation (suffering) works 'patience', only that is an ambiguous term in English. There are several kinds of patience. There's the patience that is distinct from impatience and irritability, and I suppose it is a good Christian virtue to master our irritability and become perfect angels of patience. But that's not the kind of patience which God is immediately concerned with here. This kind of patience is literally endurance. There is a difference, isn't there?

If you won't tell them, let me confess to you; I have a couple of sisters who are mad keen on dressmaking, and in my youth, I have suffered much from this occupation. They used to get the half-made dresses and put them on me sometimes. In the days before they invented those wonderful mannequin things that you push here and there to make the appropriate kind of figure, I had to stand duty instead and many a pinprick I got in the process! And woe betide me if I took too much interest in the thing and looked round to see where the hem was, particularly if the hem was proving a little bit difficult. My dear sisters, don't tell them, but sometimes they got a little bit irritable, but for all the irritability they had a tremendous amount of stickability. They may have lost their patience with the scissors, the needles, the thread and the model, but they stuck it out to the end. They endured in the task.

That is the idea that the Holy Spirit wants to get across: 'suffering produces endurance.' It is the word used by our Lord when he told us the parable of the Sower. When a sower goes forth to sow, he says there are generally four results, only one of which is any good. The one that is of the corn that fell amongst the thorns, or fell on the rock, is obviously no good. It sprung up, but it didn't endure. When the sun of persecution or the sun of too much prosperity arose and beat down upon this corn that had no roots, it didn't endure. It fizzled out. That's no use. The only thing that was of any use was the corn that rooted and grew steadily. It brought forth fruit 'with endurance' (see Luke 8:15). The only kind of genuine Christianity is the Christianity that leads a man to endure. 'Oh,' says someone, beginning to quake in his shoes, 'will that be me? Shall I endure?' Hear this tremendously comforting word. It is given us on the authority of God himself, who ought to know, that where there is initial faith in Christ, suffering produces endurance. It is in that calm knowledge that I may face my suffering. Now you will see the point that to 'rejoice in suffering' doesn't mean a H-A-P-P-Y kind of rejoicing, because that's the last thing you normally do in suffering. You may be feeling its pressure and heat, but you can be confident in the face of it. You can remain assured in the face of it that suffering will produce endurance.

‘And endurance produces character’—‘experience’ says the Authorized Version, using the parlance of many centuries ago. More exactly translated for our modern world, it means ‘approvedness’¹—for the person who endures suffering takes root and grows in spite of it. That man demonstrates himself to be a genuine believer in Christ, so that endurance reveals genuineness or true character. It shows that the man is a real believer and, when a man so endures and is thus demonstrated to be genuine, this in itself gives rise to confidence and hope, for genuine character produces hope. ‘And hope does not put us to shame,’ says the apostle, ‘because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us’ (v. 5). Christian hope, in the last analysis, is itself founded on the love of God.

The love of God—foundation of our hope

And now we come to an argument, and I dare say that some of you would prefer that we were reading a story, rather than an argument! The Epistle to the Romans after all, is it not complicated? Doesn’t it get you trying to reason things out logically and working your intellect? And yet you know it is a lovely thing when God starts arguing! And this argument is the most delightful of arguments for this reason, that it is an argument based in the love of God and making all those deductions that logic can make from the love of God. For, says the apostle, ‘Hope does not put us to shame, because the love of God—that is, God’s love for us—is poured into our hearts by his Holy Spirit.’

When the Holy Spirit enters the heart of a believer and pours out God’s love, we begin to see what kind of a thing God’s love is. It is a constant thing and once God has demonstrated his love, you can take that as a constant and build upon it with remorseless logic. You couldn’t always do that with our love, could you? Your friend is kind to you today, heaps you with gifts, and seems to be a delightful fellow. You come tomorrow to borrow his rake and he nearly blows your head off. He helps you today, but if you were to appeal to him for help tomorrow, you might find him not willing to give it. Human love is such an uncertain thing but the love of God is utterly constant. ‘Let us start then,’ says the holy apostle, ‘with this exhibition of God’s love that is the death of Christ. God, having showed his love for you in the death of Christ, you may take that exhibition of his love as a deliberate constant and argue from it, right up to the furthest bound of eternity.’

Let’s do that then. Let’s see what we can deduce from the fact that God loved us and gave his Son for us. First of all, we notice the timing of God’s love. ‘For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly,’ says the apostle (v. 6). Please will you notice the timing of it and observe the realism of it. God loved you when? When you had somewhat improved? When some of the uglier features of your sin had been removed and you were making good progress in the Christian life? Not a bit of it. God loved you when you were still a sinner, with all the ugly scars of your spiritual leprosy still so terribly evident in you. He loved you then and he loved you knowing your disease from one end to the other. Hear him drag out its ugly symptoms and features.

¹ Greek *dokimē*, meaning ‘proof’—as for example when a jeweler tests a ring to verify that it is real gold.

Our sinful state

Listen to God's realistic description of what you are really like and what sin has done to you. 'You were weak,' he says, 'and you were a sinner and you were ungodly, and you were an enemy.' Oh, what a ruinous thing sin is. It is true that sin shows different emphases in different people, but all of us along the line will show some of these scars.

Weak

Sin had left us morally weak. It had eaten out the fabric of our moral courage. It had made us moral cowards. It had made us impotent. God knows it, my brother and sister, and when God says that you may be utterly sure of attaining the glory of God, he hasn't overlooked the fact that in yourself you are impossibly weak. He hasn't overlooked that fact, for you see he loved you when you were still weak.

Sinners

He says we're sinners. The term 'to sin', as you know, means to come short. Under this term, you picture a man who's been striving his very best, he's pushed up the level of his attainment past forty per cent to fifty percent, through a second class honours and coming up to a first—he's nearly there, and then he flops. And when at last he flops, the very effort to get up into the high marks leaves him more discouraged than ever, doesn't it? How many Christians, if they were honest, would have to admit that much of their spiritual experience since they trusted the Saviour has been very much like that? Going forward on the crest of a wave and thinking we're now about to attain, we're much better than we used to be then, oh dear me, flop, a sinner. When God promised you that you would attain the glory of God, do you think he'd forgotten for a moment? Was he carried away by excitement, failing to remember that you were a sinner? Oh, no, my brother, my sister, he loved you while you were still a sinner.

Ungodly

The word 'ungodly' is a nasty word. It means a man who has lost reverence. Lost reverence for God, of course; and not only lost reverence for God, but lost reverence for other people. Lost reverence for truth, for honesty, for decency. Life's values have become blurred. Life's sanctities have been fouled. He has lost respect perhaps for his own body, and perhaps for other people's bodies as well, and he's got no genuine value to hold on to. So much has he lost his grip and respect for values that in the end, he ends up by loathing himself. He hasn't even respect for himself. That's a dark character, isn't it?

Enemy

Moreover, my dear fellow Christian, when God says that you may be utterly sure of attaining the glory of God, he hasn't overlooked the fact that deep down in your heart, there is a spirit of rebellion that would foul life's sanctity. Yes, even in you, as in me. For sin in its last analysis is nothing less than enmity against God. We do not always realize the implications of it. The flesh that is in us as Christians is no better in this respect than ever it was.

For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. (8:7).

We recall the enthusiasm of our first love to Christ and the wonderful experiences that follow conversion, but we should not mistake them for some imagined eradication of the enemy within us. When Israel stood on the further bank of the Red Sea they got so excited about the fact that God had delivered them from Egypt that Miriam got out her timbrel, and the rest got out their guitars, and they played them for all they were worth. But it wasn't all that long afterwards that, when God allowed them to enter difficult circumstances, they were abusing God right, left and centre. They discovered that underneath there was a rebel heart that wouldn't stop short of trying to overthrow and question the very throne of God.

My fellow believer, when God says that if you have trusted the Saviour, you may be utterly confident in attaining the glory of God, he hasn't forgotten that the trouble with you is that you have an old flesh that is diametrically opposed to him, a thorough-going enemy of God. And yet he dares to say that you're going to attain the glory of God! I feel like shouting 'Hallelujah!'

Our future confidence

If God dares take on that task and assure us that we shall attain his glory, how on earth can he do it? On what ground can he be so positively sure? Let the Holy Spirit pour out this certainty in your hearts. It is founded in the love of God, in its realism, in its timing. When did he love us? The argument is simple. He loved me while I was still a sinner. And if he loved me while I was still a sinner, do you think he'll ever abandon me now I have become a believer?

What was the biggest thing that God's love ever did for you, ever does for you, ever will do for you? Pause and think a moment, because one of these days, God might give you a whole planet and you'd feel that was a big gift, wouldn't you? Think, what is the biggest thing you expect God to give you or do for you? And your conclusion after much thought would be this: the biggest thing that God will ever do for me, he has already done. He gave his Son for me. Ask yourself, when did he do it? I can imagine him giving you a little bread and butter to eat while you were still an enemy, but to give his Son for you, you'd have to be rather super-duper and attain somewhat before he'd do that, wouldn't you? But the amazing thing is this, that while you were still an enemy, God gave his Son for you.

The logical implication of that is obvious, so the Holy Spirit thinks anyway, for if you were justified by his blood, much more shall you be saved from the wrath of God through him. If while you were an enemy, you were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more certain it is that you will be saved by his life. If ever there was a moment when your salvation was in doubt, I'll tell you when it was. It was when it came across God's mind and heart in actual practical experience what it was going to cost to save you. It had been planned from eternity, but as in those last moments, the Father and the Son walked together up to that ancient hill, destined for sacrifice, and all others had to be left behind while Father and Son alone went together, and the Son asked, 'Wood and fire, but where is the lamb?' And they came to a garden and now, the realism dawning upon the soul of Christ, he knelt down in that garden and using all the logic he knew, all the power of prayer he knew, pleading by God's love, 'Abba, Father,' he said, pleading by God's power, 'all things are possible to you. By your love, by your power, let it pass.' If ever your salvation was in doubt, it was then.

They took Christ and nailed him hand and foot to a cross; and your sin from start to finish, in all its ugliness, rose up before the all-seeing eye of God—not a thing was hid from him. And his orphan Son cried, ‘But why did you forsake me?’ and it was for people that were still passing by in their declared enmity. Then it was in doubt, but the fact is that the love of God triumphed and while you were an enemy, Christ died for you. That being an accomplished fact, there remains no doubt. In fact, the only uncertain thing is, have you really been justified? Have you been reconciled? You have? Then you may be much more sure of being saved from the wrath of God, of being saved through his life and attaining the glory of God.

And not only so, but, says the holy apostle, ‘We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation’ (v. 11)—an expression that in this context is sheer beauty. Can it be that I can rejoice in God—have my confidence in God? If you go back a few pages in this very letter, you will meet this God who condemns human sin remorselessly, who erects his standard and refuses to lower it one tiny little inch. How can I have my hope in him? When it comes to human examinations, you know why students choose their examiners, if they can, because it is the fact that some examiners are more kindly than other examiners. If you were going to be examined on your attainments by anybody, who would you choose? Would you elect to be examined by God? You say, ‘He’s very kind-hearted. I’m sure he’d overlook a little thing here and a little bit there.’ Oh, no, he wouldn’t. If God examines you according to his holy principles and law, my good friend, he would be utterly remorseless in his condemnation of even the tiniest fault.

How can I have any confidence in him then? He’ll never take the lenient view and say, ‘Well, you nearly came up to the standard. I’ll forget that you didn’t quite make it—you can go in.’ Not God. But you say, ‘Now God loves me with a realistic love like that and I know he’s seen the worst in me and he’s given the best for me. I know he is righteous and I know he loves Christ. I may put all those things together and God becomes the biggest source of my confidence. To redeem me, Christ shed his blood and I trust Christ.’

Do you think there’ll ever come a day when God will grow weary of Christ, when God will grow weary of his sacrifice, or regard those sufferings of Christ with lesser value than before? The very thought is frightful. So long as God values that sacrifice and those sufferings of Christ, my friends, you are eternally safe. Oh, trust that sacrifice and if in the end, I am confident that I shall attain the glory of God, my confidence is based not in me, but in God.

God’s purpose for mankind

The second part of this chapter deals with another slightly different problem, but again it is forming a bridge between what has gone before and what follows. Again, it is an exposition of the grace of God, only it puts this exposition in the context of God’s purpose for man.

Man’s ruin—the glory lost

We’ve been talking about man attaining the glory of God. What shall it mean? What did it mean to start with when God made man? God made Adam to rule, to have dominion, to be a veritable king in God’s universe, but this next paragraph reminds us that man soon lost his dominion and, as verse 14 puts it, instead of Adam reigning, sin reigned. It was as though a

man were on a throne of his country and some underground conspirators managed to worm themselves towards his palace and presently he opened the door to them, not knowing exactly who they were. And as he opened the door, they burst in and moved him off his throne and installed themselves on the throne. So it happened to Adam. Made to reign, he opened the doorway to sin, and sin coming in pushed Adam off the throne and reigned in his stead. The man found himself a slave to the reign of sin.

God's remedy

God's move was very interesting. When sin reigned, we read in verse 17 that death reigned. That of course was God's move and a very merciful move it was, for if God had not so ordained that sin should bring death in its train, man might have gone on eternally in opposition to God, to his eternal detriment. Therefore God brought in this limiting thing that the reign of sin should be limited by the reign of death. At the same time God was devising means to break the reign of both, and restore man to his happy position. This is the subject matter of this paragraph, for we're told in verse 17 that whereas death reigned, 'those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness [will] reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.' How is it going to be? You may say that what needs to be done is to bring these people back to submit to the law of God that God's law might reign in their life, and that would sound a sensible scheme. God goes one better. The secret of the whole restitution of man to his glory is going to be this, not that law might reign, but that grace might reign (v. 21).

Let us briefly follow out the steps of the argument, for here we are indeed on the very threshold of the practical side of this epistle. How is God going to make me holy? 'Well,' says God, 'before I start to tell you, let me once more diagnose your complaint.' You'll find that, throughout this letter to the Romans, there are at least three sections devoted entirely to a diagnosis of sin, for there is no healing of our spiritual disease properly unless first our sin and our trouble is truly diagnosed. Now take any one of us, and we're going into this school of God's holiness.

'All right, what's your trouble?'

'A bitter tongue.'

'And yours, my brother?'

'A dash of selfishness.'

And mine? A good deal of sarcasm with all the old knots underneath that that represents. I say, my brother, how did you come to have that unfortunate attitude that you show from time to time? Where did you get it from? How deep does it go exactly?

Perhaps after all, it mightn't be a bad idea to face it, but if we're going to cut it out, we'd better know where the roots start, lest we merely cut off the top and leave the roots in. Where did you get your peculiar personality from? (Excuse the term!) The answer to that is more complicated than you think. Take me, for instance, with my strange mixture. First of all, I got it from generations of sinning people (I don't know how many, I've never tracked them) whose very bodies were marred by sin before they passed on to me the germ of life, so that I started out in life somewhat at a disadvantage.

I had a body and a nervous system that didn't respond as it ought to respond anyway and you will have mercy in judging me, won't you, with all my peculiar quirks. Part of my peculiar quirks are due to my peculiar body and nervous system. I couldn't help that much. Picture me as a delightful little infant when I was born, in the arms of fond parents. They did their best, God bless them, but you know those parents weren't exactly perfect. Sometimes they got a bit fed up with me. If the truth were told, they reacted sometimes as they oughtn't to have reacted; and of course I hadn't the sense at one and a half to react as I ought to react. I hadn't got the sense, and I began to react and I set up behaviour patterns long before I knew what I was doing. If only I hadn't set them up, but those behaviour patterns were laid down rather early. Then I grew up and I wouldn't have been so bad if you hadn't have been so bad. If you had behaved like perfect saints all the time, there would have been some hope for me; but you were so awkward sometimes, I didn't have a chance.

Where does it all stem from? It stems from a long, dim and distant past. It wasn't your fault, my fellow believer, that you were born a sinner. It was by one man's disobedience. Sin entered into the world by the disobedience of one man, and all were constituted sinners (see v. 19). Unless you are prepared to face and accept God's diagnosis of your trouble, you will not be prepared to face God's solution. If you think the roots of your trouble are shallow within you, you will go in for shallow remedies. But if it is the fact that you are a sinner, not primarily because of anything you did yourself, but first and foremost because of what Adam did, there will need to be a remedy bigger than something you can do. It wasn't your doing that started the trouble and it isn't, in actual fact, your doing that starts the solution. But God in the kindness and realism of his heart, knowing the trouble to its roots, has provided a way of holiness that more than matches the trouble.

If you were constituted a sinner by something that you didn't yourself personally do then, says God, 'I'm going to save you by something that you did not personally do.' If it was somebody else's initial disobedience that set loose the flood of evil into your life, it will be somebody else's act of obedience that will set the flood of salvation going in your life. The details of the argument are difficult—even so, not impossible if we had the time! But I've said more than enough. I trust that the overall impression that God's Holy Spirit has made, as we have studied this chapter 5, is so to convince us of God's realism and love that now, as we listen to the practical lessons in his school of holiness, we might come at them saying, 'Yes, this is not mere theory. It is possible for me—yes, even me—to be made holy and attain the very glory of God.'

About the Author

DAVID W. GOODING was Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. He taught the Bible internationally and lectured on both its authenticity and its relevance to philosophy, world religions and daily life. He published scholarly articles on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John, Acts, Hebrews, the New Testament's use of the Old Testament, and several books addressing arguments against the Bible and the Christian faith. His analysis of the Bible and our world continues to shape the thinking of scholars, teachers and students alike.