

THE HEALING OF THE CHURCH
Romans 5:6-11

Intro: We do not need anyone to tell us that morally, politically, financially, and internationally we are living in a very troubled world. Dishonesty prevails in almost every circle. The problems are more, I am sure, than anyone could possibly list. Paul said in writing to the Ephesian church that we are to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." And then he added in the following verse, "For it is a shame to speak of those things which are done of them in secret" (Eph. 5:11, 12).

It is not good for us to dwell on the immorality of our day, nor to look at the evidences of it. We all know too much about what is going on as it is.

And really, we should not be surprised. The Apostle John wrote long ago our affections were not to be turned toward the world because "all that is in the world, . . ." (1 John 2:16). All of this is under the judgment of God, having its day now, but it is passing away. John added at the end of that same Epistle, ". . . the whole world lieth in wickedness" (v. 19b).

It is not our business to clean up the world. We certainly must exercise every influence we can to improve things, but the world will never really be changed. It is under divine judgment. We certainly should be greatly exercised in our hearts about the things that are going on because we know from our acquaintance with the Word of God that it will most certainly lead to greater and greater judgments from God.

But, if there is to be any relief it all, it must come through the church. And yet at the very time we see the world plunging farther and farther down, we see the professing church in a terrible state of spiritual decline. It is getting harder and harder to find a church where the Word of God is taught. And it is hard to find professing Christians who are really interested in hearing the Word of God. And we see so many of the world's methods being followed by the church in its organization, its finances, its outreach, and in the principles of ministry. We seem to get farther and farther from the Word of God.

If there is to be a change in things (and I do not believe that we should give up hope of seeing a real work of God), then things must change in the church. And if things are going to change in the church, changes must take place in the leadership of our churches, and there must be changes in the lives of the people of God. Once more we need to turn to the Word of God to see what we should be, and what we should do. We need no more of humanistic psychology telling us how to run our lives and our homes, and how to raise our children. We need to get back to

the Bible, as our doctrinal statements say, as the only rule of faith and practice. It is not one among many, but the only one.

Much of the trouble can be corrected if we read our Bibles prayerfully and carefully. When we do, I think that you and I will quickly be able to see what is needed in the church, and how the church can again become a mighty force in the hand of the Lord.

To suggest two problems, and two remedies, I want to ask you to turn tonight to Romans 5.

Here Paul was showing the results of being justified with God--if not all of them, at least some of the most important. I am thinking especially of vv. 6-11, but, if we wanted to take the time, we could consider the first eleven verses.

But I want you to note that Paul was stressing here what it meant to be saved--and there are two things that he mentioned, and they are still the important things for us today.

I. A DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

The Psalmist gave a good description of what every person is like who is without God and without Christ when he wrote,
 The wicked, through the pride of his countenance,
 will not seek after God:
 God is not in all his thoughts (Psa. 10:4).

As Paul said here in Romans, man is naturally an enemy of God. He may be religious, and give lip service to God, but in his heart man is not concerned about doing the will of God, he is not concerned about the glory of God. He feels that he is the master of his own fate, and he really does not care about God, or His Word, or His Son.

If God had seen fit to do so, all of us would have perished in our sins. Man is no closer to God today than the heart of man was after sin was first committed in the human family.

But God has done something. He has done it through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And you all know what He did. He sent His Son to die for us while we were enemies that we might be reconciled to God. For the Christian, God is a Friend, not an Enemy. Reconciliation has completely changed our relationship with God. We can never be the same again.

Whereas before we had no place for God in our lives, now He figures into everything. We look at everything in a different light. We see sin as it really is. We are grieved that we ever displeased the Lord, and we want to live our lives for His glory.

We may not always succeed, but that pictures what the heart of the Christian is like. He never ceases to thank God for the forgiveness of his sins through Christ.

But is this what we see when we look at the church today?

Do we see people concerned about knowing God better? Do we hear testimonies of praise to God for deliverance from sin? Or do we see many people who profess to be Christians going on in their sins. Perhaps they have stopped doing some of the things that they used to do, but they are just as covetous, just as selfish, just as proud, as they ever were.

And what about the truth of the Word?

Are people flocking to hear the Word of God? Are our prayer meetings filled with people crying out to God in intercession and supplication for His blessing? Is there a strong conviction that the Bible is the Word of God? Do our churches stand united on the Deity of Christ? Our newspapers carried a notice this week of some Baptist seminary professors who have hired lawyers and are going to take the Seminary board to court to prohibit them from teaching conservative theology. That is in one of our seminaries.

There are two great problems that exist in our churches today. I will mention the second in a moment, but the first is that we have people in our churches, even in our evangelical churches, whose names are on the church rolls, but who give no evidence in their lives that their names are written in heaven--and this is what is really important. Some of their habits may have been changed, but their hearts have not been changed. And there is a lot of difference between those two things.

We need to get back to the preaching of the doctrines of grace, which is nothing but the true Gospel of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Grace no longer is understood in our churches. In many places people hear more about self-worth than man's worthlessness. We hear about man's potential, but not about his sin and condemnation before God.

The church will never again be a power in the hands of God until we insist that those who make up the church are truly born again, and that there is evidence of that in the lives that they live. A person is not a Christian unless he has been reconciled to God by the sovereign work of God which causes him to place his trust in Christ as his Saviour.

But there is another thing that characterizes a true Christian, and that is . . .

II. A NEW ATTITUDE TOWARD GOD.

This is to be seen in Romans 5:11:

And not only so, but we also joy in God
through our Lord Jesus Christ,
by whom we have now received the atonement.
That last word should be reconciliation.

Does this describe you? Does it describe me? What is the condition of our fellowship with the Lord tonight? Do you find your faith weak, and your love toward God cold, not a very strong influence in your life?

A true Christian not only has a new relationship with God, but he has a new attitude toward God. He delights in God. He loves God. Before, God was not in all his thoughts; now, he turns his thoughts to God every day. But with what strong desires is this true of you, and of me? How much do we actually think about God, and about Christ? What guides us in our thoughts? Do we approach God through His Word?

This is probably the greatest reason for our lack of peace, for our lack of joy, for our lack of faith--that we do not really know in our daily experience what it is to "joy in God." I would hope that after tonight you would never forget those three words. They can be the means of transforming all of our lives. And the more it is true of us individually that we "joy in God," the greater will be our power as a church in this present, evil generation.

The main thing that I want to do tonight is to establish this in your mind and heart as the greatest need that you have. And I want to do it, first of all, not by telling you how to do that, but by showing you the place that it has in the Word of God, and in the lives of the people who are mentioned in Scripture.

Please turn first to 1 Pet. 1:6-9. Notice that this takes us back into verses 3-5.

Look at David's words in Psa. 27:4.

Now turn to David again in Psa. 63.

We can profit from the Psalm of Asaph, Psa. 73:21-28.

Let us look at the words of two women in Scripture--one in the OT, the other in the NT:

- 1) Hannah -- 1 Sam. 2:1.
- 2) The virgin Mary -- Luke 1:46, 47.

Look at the prayer of Habakkuk 3:17-19.

Finally, let us look at what certainly has to be one of the most exalted statements of the way in which a believer should cry out for God, and for Christ, that is to be found any place in the Word of God. It was Paul's testimony, and he expressed the change that the Lord had made in his life in those words which we find in Phil. 3:7-12. AND REMEMBER THAT CRYING OUT FOR THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AND CRYING OUT FOR THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST ARE ONE AND THE SAME THING. TO KNOW THE ONE IS TO KNOW THE OTHER, AND IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO KNOW GOD EXCEPT THROUGH CHRIST.

Now add to these words Paul's instructions for us in Phil. 3:1 and 4:4.

Concl: Cf. Isa. 26:3, 4.

Rejoicing in the Lord will heal every ill in the church, and will make the church a useable instrument in the hand of God. But what is more important, this, more than anything else will delight God's heart.