

Shorter Catechism 36
2 Kings 18:28-19:7
Psalm 102
Romans 5:1-11

“The Benefits of Christ in This Life”

March 17, 2013

In Hosea 13 the prophet says that the time had come for Israel.

“The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up; his sin is kept in store.

The pangs of childbirth come for him,

but he is an unwise son,

for at the right time he does not present himself at the opening of the womb.”

Several of you are approaching “the right time” – the pangs of childbirth.

What would happen if you went into labor and your child decided not to come?!

That would be a *most* unwise son!

When you reach that most uncomfortable stage of pregnancy,

where you cannot find a good position to sleep in –

the one thing that keeps you going is that *this will end!*

The right time is approaching.

And when *the right time* comes,

your child *will* present himself at the opening.

As bad as an unwise child might be,

our problem is worse.

2 Kings 18-19 tells us of the invasion of the Assyrians,

and how Sennacherib the great king of Assyria destroyed Israel

(fulfilling the prophecy of Hosea).

Sennacherib also invaded Judah and besieged Jerusalem.

And Hezekiah the king of Judah sent word to Isaiah the prophet, saying:

“Thus says Hezekiah, this day is a day of distress, of rebuke and of disgrace;

children have come to the point of birth,

and there is no strength to bring them forth.” (2 Kings 19:3)

Our problem is that the child is ready to be born – but we have no strength!

The right time has come – and the baby is ready –

but we are too weak to do anything about it.

You lay there, exhausted – labor pains wracking your body –

but you have no strength left.

You cannot push.

You cannot breathe.

All you can do is lay there and die.

*That is the picture of 2 Kings 19 –
and that is the picture that Paul takes over in Romans 5:6*

*For yet Christ, while we were still weak, at the right time, for the ungodly – he died.
We could do nothing to save ourselves.
We could not give birth to salvation.*

For yet Christ, while we were still weak, at the right time, for the ungodly – he died.

It is this that Psalm 102 points us toward –
that at the appointed time God would arise and have pity on Zion!

Psalm 102
Romans 5:1-11

Over the next three weeks we will look at the benefits that we have in Christ.
On Easter Sunday we will look at the benefits of being in Christ at the resurrection.
On Palm Sunday we will look at the benefits of being in Christ at our death.
But today we are looking at the benefits that we have *in this life*.

It is appropriate that we also remember Patrick, the great missionary to Ireland, on this day.
Because Patrick's famous hymn reflects on the benefits of Christ in this life!

In Patrick's day, the druids were the dominant power in Ireland.
Through their spells and black laws, they held captive the minds and souls of men.
We often look back at the Celts of Patrick's day
and we cluck our tongues at their benighted backwardness.

But the deceitfulness of idolatry has not changed!
Last week we heard the announcement that our own Andrew Brinkerhoff
(maybe with a little help from the rest of the laboratory at CERN)
discovered the Higgs boson –
otherwise known as the "God-particle."

It's a pretty nifty discovery –
and from what I can gather, the Higgs boson is a remarkable little critter.
But the claim that the Higgs boson can "explain the universe" is a little over the top!

In fairness, most physicists object to calling it the "God-particle"
because they recognize it as nothing more than sensationalism –
but such a claim is no different from the claims of the druids in ancient Ireland.
Science and magic may appear to be entirely opposed to each other –
but in fact, they are more similar than you might think:
both attempt to explain reality through a secret knowledge,
only attainable by careful study and proper technique.

In the fifth century,

Patrick responded to the druids by emphasizing the *power* of God's word.
Where the druids focused on incantations and spells,
Patrick responds by *invoking* the virtue of the Triune God.

Listen to how Patrick does this –
and as you listen, think about how Patrick's language
connects to the magical thinking of his day;
because we ought to engage our own culture in similar ways.

I won't read the whole of Patrick's long poem,
but it focuses around the theme of "binding God to himself."
The image is that of a warrior preparing to go into battle –
girding himself for war.

What armor can he wear? What will protect him from the assaults of the evil one?

He opens by binding to himself the Triune God, "the Creator of the Universe,"
and then binds to himself the work of Christ – in the pattern of the Apostles' Creed,
and then binds to himself the whole history of redemption,
from the patriarchs and prophets to the apostles, confessors and virgins.
He then binds to himself the power of heaven, the depth of the sea,
and the stability of the earth – all creation;
before binding to himself – in those famous words:

God's Power to guide me,
God's Might to uphold me,
God's Wisdom to teach me,
God's Eye to watch over me,
God's Ear to hear me,
God's Word to give me speech,
God's Hand to guide me,
God's Way to lie before me,
God's Shield to shelter me,
God's Host to secure me,
Against the snares of demons,
Against the seductions of vices,
Against the lusts of nature,
Against everyone who meditates injury to me,
Whether far or near,
Whether few or with many.

I invoke today all these virtues
Against every hostile merciless power
Which may assail my body and my soul,

Against the incantations of false prophets,
Against the black laws of heathenism,
Against the false laws of heresy,
Against the deceits of idolatry,
Against the spells of women, and smiths, and druids,
Against every knowledge that binds the soul of man.

Christ, protect me today
Against every poison, against burning,
Against drowning, against death-wound,
That I may receive abundant reward.

Christ with me, Christ before me,
Christ behind me, Christ within me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ at my right, Christ at my left,
Christ in the fort,
Christ in the chariot seat,
Christ in the poop [deck – where the captain of the ship stands],
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks to me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.

I bind to myself today
The strong virtue of an invocation of the Trinity,
I believe the Trinity in the Unity
The Creator of the Universe.

What are the benefits in this life of being in Christ?

In every generation there are those who seek to extinguish the fire of the gospel –
whether by magic or by science – by superstition or by reason.

What is it that can protect and defend us from these assaults?
Patrick's answer is: the Triune Creator God – the gospel of His Son –
and therefore nothing in all of creation
can separate us from the love of God in Christ!

This is at the heart of what we are talking about today in question 36 of the Shorter Catechism.

Q. 36. What are the benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification?

A. The benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification, are, assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Spirit, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end.

I've given you an outline of how Paul talks about these things in Romans 5,
that shows how Paul deals with all the same themes as the catechism:

Introduction: Because of What Jesus Has Done... (v6-8)

- 1. ...We Have Assurance of God's Love (v5)**
- 2. ...Peace of Conscience (v1, 11)**
- 3. ...Joy in the Holy Spirit (v2-4, 11)**
- 4. ...Increase of Grace (v2-4)**
- 5. ...Perseverance Therein to the End (v9-11)**

But we really need to start with verse 6.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

The phrase "the right time" is often used in the OT to refer to the appointed time –
the time that God ordained for a particular sacrifice –
and as we saw in the prophets, it can refer to the time of judgment as well.

Romans 5:6 captures the basic point that Paul has been driving at
through these first chapters of his epistle.

At the very center of verses 1-11 is verse 6 –
which is one of the shortest sentences in the whole book of Romans!

For Christ,
while we were still weak –
at the right time –
for the ungodly – he died.

Christ came to us in our weakness, in our sin, in our utter helplessness,
and he did what we could not do;
he reconciled us to God through his death.

Chapter 5 of Romans is rooted in verses 24-25 of chapter 4.
Righteousness "will be counted to us
who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,
who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification."

We are justified before God – we are declared righteous in his sight –
not by works of the law, but by the grace of God
through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.
And this justification is received by faith.

Paul has already told us

that *Christ* “was declared to be the Son of God with power
by the resurrection from the dead.” (Rom 1:3-4)
The resurrection of Jesus was his justification,
as Paul says in 1 Timothy 3:16
“he was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit.”
Jesus was openly and publicly vindicated by God
by the resurrection.

But what does the resurrection of Jesus our Lord have to do with our justification?
We can easily see how the blood of Christ was shed for our sins.
We can easily see how the death of Christ is the atoning sacrifice –
the propitiation for our sin and guilt.

But how was Christ “raised for our justification”?
The whole dynamic of Romans 5:1-11 depends on this.
The resurrection of Christ *is* our justification,
because in the resurrection *he* was justified,
and we are now in Christ.

Start with the condemnation of Jesus.
Jesus was condemned – God put him forward as a propitiation by his blood.
He was condemned to bear the wages of sin, the curse of the grave.
God judged Jesus guilty in our place.

Jim Dennison puts it very well when he says:

“But sin, and guilt and the grave could not hold him.
The curse could not bind him.
The final judgment of Jesus could not sustain the charge
“guilty of condemnation.”...
The resurrection of Jesus is the declaration that he is not guilty.
The resurrection of Jesus is the declaration that he is righteous.
The resurrection of Jesus is his justification.

No more condemnation for Jesus of Nazareth—
no more death for Jesus of Nazareth—
no more curse for Jesus of Nazareth.
Jesus has been justified by resurrection.” (James Dennison on Romans 4:25)

In other words, the wrath of God’s final judgment
has fallen on Jesus,
and Jesus, alone among all flesh,
has endured the final judgment and been vindicated.

And so Paul says in Romans 4:25, “he was raised for our justification.”
Do you see what this means?

Christ's justification is our justification.

Okay, what does this mean?

Why has Paul spent the last four chapters
laying out this detailed historical and theological argument?
Plainly, Paul believes that you need to understand your history!
You need to know your theology!

But the doctrine of justification is not an abstract theological principle.
Paul believes that justification
will produce a certain sort of life.
Notice how I said that:
it is not that the *doctrine* of justification produces a certain sort of life.
It is justification itself!

(which is why it is useful to understand the doctrine!)

First:

1. Justification Results in Peace with God, Access into Grace, and Boast in Hope (5:1-2)

*1 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith,
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.
2 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.*

Paul's point here is that this is a present reality.
We *have* (present tense) peace with God
because we have been justified (past tense).
And through our Lord Jesus Christ
we have obtained access into this grace in which we stand.
Paul makes it perfectly clear that our access to God –
our approach to his grace –
is only through Christ.

And so therefore we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

The word that is translated "rejoice" is the same word used in chapter 4
to say that Abraham could not boast before God.

So it would be better to translate it, "we boast in hope of the glory of God."
I realize that sounds a little strange –
but Paul is drawing on the language of Jeremiah 9:
"let him who boasts, boast in this: that he understands and knows me!"

Our boasting is not in ourselves, but in hope of the glory of God.

Notice that our boasting is not in something that is presently obvious to everyone.

You are boasting in hope.

You are rejoicing in something that you cannot yet see.

You do not hope for something you already have.

I do not hope that I will become the father of seven children.

I am the father of seven children.

What is your hope?

What is the future that gives you purpose and direction for your life?

Do you boast in the hope of the glory of God?

Do you rejoice? Do you celebrate that hope?

Is that hope what keeps you walking forward day by day?

Or is it your career?

Your family?

Your happiness?

Or are you uncertain?

I think I hope in the glory of God...

But how can I tell?

That's where we go in point 2:

2. We Boast in Our Suffering Because of [our assurance of] God's Love (5:3-5)

3 More than that, we rejoice [literally, we boast] in our sufferings,

One of the best ways that you can tell what your hope is,
is to ask, "what are you willing to suffer for?"

Whatever glory you hope in – whatever future you celebrate –
is the thing that you will suffer for.

Think of the Olympic athletes

enduring great hardship and pain –

pushing their minds and bodies beyond the limits of ordinary human ability.

Why?

What for?

So that they can boast in their Olympic gold medal –

or perhaps simply that they performed in the Olympics
for the glory of their nation.

Maybe you have been pursuing the wrong hope.

Maybe you have been rejoicing in the wrong future.

How can you pursue the right hope?
How can you develop that hope in the glory of God?

Paul says that we rejoice in our sufferings,

*knowing that suffering produces endurance,
4 and endurance produces character,
and character produces hope,*

If you haven't been through much in life,
then you generally don't have too much endurance.

But God will bring suffering into your life.
He will bring tribulation and difficulty in order to test you –
in order to prove your character.
And the more suffering you endure patiently,
the stronger and more proven your character.
And when you have been through fire and water
and still your eyes are fixed on Christ,
that is when you have a hope that is unshakeable –
not because you are so strong but because

*5 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.*

One of the greatest of all benefits of being in Christ
is the assurance of God's love.

God's love has been poured into our hearts.

This is one of those funny uses of language.

When it says that the love of God has been poured into our hearts,
what does that mean?

Is this God's love for us? (that's the way the ESV is pointing)
Or is it the love that God puts in us for himself – and others?

The Greek can mean either (or a half dozen other things besides!) –
but Paul frequently uses this ambiguous construction,
and I suspect that he did it intentionally.

Usually, we should see both.

After all, when God's love for us is poured into our hearts,
it through his Holy Spirit,

it can have only one effect!
We love God because he first loved us!

3. For While We Were Weak, at the Right Time, Christ Died for Us (5:6)

*6 For while we were still weak,
at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.*

As we have seen, verse 6 is at the heart of this passage.

The structure of this verse is quite unusual.

Literally translated it reads,
“*For Christ,
while we were still weak,
at the right time,
for the ungodly,
died.*”

The effect is to make all three modifiers focus on Christ.

Because while we were still weak –
while we were laying there helpless –

Christ died.

At just the right time –
at the *appointed* time –
at precisely the right moment –

Christ died.

And – here is the most remarkable part –
on behalf of the ungodly –
for those who were hostile – sinners – enemies of God –

Christ died.

And this raises the question:

Why?
Why would the Son of God die for me?
Why would the Father send his only begotten Son to die for rebels?

4. For God Loved Us – While We Were Yet Sinners (5:7-8)

*7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—
though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—
8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Why did God send his Son?

Not because you were righteous.
Not because you were good.
But simply because he loved you.

God loves you.

And he has demonstrated his love for you
by sending Christ to die for you.

If you ever start thinking that God is an angry Father
and that Jesus is the one who loves us and appeases the angry Father –
come and read Romans 5:8 again.

God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners,
Christ died for us.

And so, Paul concludes:

5. Since We Have Been Justified by His Blood, We Boast in God (5:9-11)

*9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood,
much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.*

I want you to see what Paul is doing here:

We have *now* been justified by his blood.
And so we *shall be* saved by him from [literally, simply] “the wrath.”

What we have *now* is justification by his blood.

And if we have justification by his blood *now*,
then Paul considers it certain that we *shall be* saved by him
from “the wrath.”

This word “wrath” is the word Paul used in 1:18 to refer to the “wrath of God”
that is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

It is the word that Paul used in 2:5, 8 to speak of the “day of wrath”
and in 3:5 to speak of the wrath that God brought on Israel
as a prelude to the final judgment.

Paul explains this further in verse 10:

*10 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.*

In other words, if God loved you while you were a sinner,
if God the Father sent his Son to die for his enemies,

what do you suppose God will do for his friends?
What do you think God will do for his children?!

Justification, here, is portrayed in terms of reconciliation.

We are reconciled to God.

It is not as though God needed to be reconciled to us.

The problem was that *we* were enemies of God.

And *now* God has reconciled us to himself by the death of his Son.

We are now friends of God.

If we are reconciled by the death of his Son,

then how much more will be saved by the life of his Son.

Paul is here using the word “saved” to refer to the future aspect of salvation.

We have already been justified by faith,

we have already been reconciled to God.

And Paul’s point is that because of this justification,

because of this reconciliation,

we may have full confidence that he will save us from the wrath to come.

Because Jesus was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification,
therefore both the death *and* resurrection of Jesus have become ours.

*11 More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

Here’s that word “boast” again.

In verse 2 “we boast in the hope of the glory of God”

In verse 3 “more than that, we boast in our sufferings...”

And here in verse 11, “more than that, we boast in God.”

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have received reconciliation.

For yet Christ, while we were still weak, at the right time, for the ungodly – he died.