

Saved from Wrath

 Romans 5:9-11

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We are studying Romans 5:1-11 and in these verses we find the present and future results of justification. Paul indicates this by the expression in 5:1, "Therefore, having been justified." He wants to explore what we have as a result of being justified. In 5:1-5 he explores the present results and includes peace with God, access to grace, standing in grace, joy in present difficulties and the permanent indwelling of the Spirit of God. In Romans 5:6-8 he sets us up for the future results by declaring the extent of what God did for us when we were yet sinners. He demonstrated a kind of love that is not demonstrated by man. A man on rare occasions might die for a righteous and good man, but God sent His Son to die for us while we were yet sinners.

God's unique love for us as unbelievers establishes the background of the **much more** statements in vv 9-10 of what He will do for us in the future now that we are believers. Note the **much more** argument in verse 9. ***Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him,*** and note the **much more** argument again in verse 10. ***For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.*** Both these verses employ the **much more** kind of argument to paint a picture of what to expect in the future. And what can we expect? That we shall be saved from the wrath by Christ's life.

The **much more** mode of argument is known in the Latin as *a fortiori*, that is, "from a yet stronger reason." Let me explain the argument and then give an example from everyday life and other Scriptural examples. The *a fortiori* argument draws upon existing confidence in one proposition in order to argue for a second proposition that is implicit in the first, but sometimes considered weaker. In order to show that it is not weaker but actually stronger the arguer embeds the second proposition in the first. For example, if John won the race then you can argue with equal or greater certainty that John ran the fastest. Other arguments may be made that John ran the fastest but the argument that trumps all other arguments is that John won the race.

Turn to Romans 11:24 for a Scriptural use of this argument. Here Paul uses the "much more" argument to show that God has not cast off Israel forever. In the context the root is the Abrahamic Covenant, the olive tree is the place of blessing, Israel is the natural branches and Gentiles are the wild branches. God originally gave the

Abrahamic Covenant to Israel so that Israel as the natural branches is naturally in the place of blessing. However, when Israel rejected Jesus as their Messiah and crucified Him, they were broken off. In their place the unnatural Gentiles who received Him were grafted in. In verse 24 Paul says to the Gentiles, "For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree." The point is that if God grafted unnatural Gentile branches into the olive tree in order to bless them then God will graft the natural branches of Israel back into their own olive tree. The lesson is that we Gentiles should never get arrogant against Israel and should never write Israel off. We are unnatural participants in the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant. They are the natural participants and therefore God will restore them one day to the place of blessing. So the **much more** argument draws upon existing confidence in one proposition in order to argue for a second proposition that is implicit in the first. It is the strongest argument possible, it has no holes whatsoever because the second proposition is embedded in the first.⁹ The only way for the second proposition to not be true is if the first proposition is not true.

Paul uses this argument in Romans 5:9 and in Romans 5:10. As I pointed out these two verses are, if put side by side, are painting one picture, they are not two different pictures but one picture with some things identical and some things different. Together the two complement one another so we see the whole picture.

⁹**Much more** then, **having now been justified by His blood**, **we shall be saved** from the wrath of God through Him.

¹⁰For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God **through the death of His Son**, **much more**, **having been reconciled**, **we shall be saved** by His life.

Note first the things that are identical. First, they both use the expression **much more**. So they are both using the same kind of argument. Second, they both refer to the crucifixion. 5:9 with the expression **by His blood** and 5:10 with the expression **through the death of His Son**. Third, they both refer to a future salvation, both using the identical expression **we shall be saved**. Note second the differences that fill out the overall picture. First, only verse 9 tells us what we will be saved from, namely **the wrath** whereas only verse 10 tells us how we will be saved, **by His life**. Second, verse 9 bases the argument on the fact of our past justification, **having now been justified**, whereas verse 10 bases the argument on the fact of our past reconciliation, **having been reconciled**. So the two verses are really one picture and there is overlap, but each makes its distinct contributions to the final picture.

Let's look at the first one in 5:9. The first proposition in the **much more** argument is that **having now been justified by His blood**, **we shall be saved from the wrath of God**. So if you are confident in the first proposition, that we have now been justified then you must also be confident in the second proposition that we shall be saved from the wrath because the second proposition is included in the first. We may be able to come

up with other arguments for why we shall be saved from **the wrath** but the argument that trumps all other arguments is that we **have been justified**. Justification is the legal reason. Justification, as we have seen, is the legal declaration of righteousness that is made in heaven at the moment an individual has faith in Christ. It stands to reason that if Christ died for us while we were yet sinners and we believed in Him and are now justified, then much more we shall be saved from the wrath.

Now **the wrath**. What is **the wrath** which **we shall be saved from**? All admit it is a future wrath. The first view is that the wrath is future with respect to one's justification and so it refers to the individual being saved from wrath during his sanctification. This view hinges on the belief that a Christian can be under God's wrath. They define the wrath according to its use in Romans 1:18. In this verse the wrath is a present wrath. Paul says, "For the wrath of God is revealed" present tense, "from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." They argue that this wrath can come upon believers and unbelievers. I disagree with this interpretation because Romans 1:18-3:20 is describing all who are condemned. We are believers and not condemned. Further, since the wrath is defined in 1:24, 26 and 28 as God giving them over to their depraved nature I find it very hard to believe that God would give a believer over to his depraved nature. God disciplines believers to encourage them to live by their new nature. He does not turn them over to their depraved nature. Another reason this view is hard to accept is because a sanctification deliverance from wrath would be conditioned on the believer living by faith. In the context of Romans 5:9 there seem to be no other condition than the fact that the person has been justified. Since justification is one-time deliverance then it follows that the future deliverance from the wrath is also a one-time deliverance. So the view that the wrath is the individual believer being saved from wrath during his sanctification is not convincing.

The second view is that the wrath is future with respect to the eternal lake of fire. This view would be saying that because we are justified we shall be saved from the eternal lake of fire. While that is doubtless a true statement it is doubtful this expression is teaching that. The word "wrath" in its 36 uses never refers to the eternal lake of fire. Instead it always refers to a temporal judgment of God.

The third view is that the wrath refers to the future day of the Lord. This view would be saying that because we are justified we shall be saved from the future day of the Lord judgment. This view has many lines of support. First, the day of the Lord is the most common OT term for God's judgment prior to the establishment of the kingdom. In NT times Judaism referred to this time as "the wrath to come." For example, in Matt 3:7 John the Baptist said to the scribes and Pharisees who came out to him wanting to be baptized, "who warned you from the wrath to come." By "wrath to come" the scribes and Pharisees knew well that John was referring to the future day of the Lord judgment that would precede the establishment of the kingdom. The kingdom was 'at hand' and when the King came He would thoroughly clear His threshing floor, destroying the chaff and bringing the wheat into the kingdom. John expected this judgment to come soon when the King came and was received by the nation Israel. In light of the nation Israel's rejection, the day of the Lord was postponed from the human

perspective and still remains future. Paul would be saying that we are going to be saved from that future day. Second, the day of the Lord is described by the most terrifying compilation of terms the Bible has to offer. It is described as wrath, cruel, burning fury, burning anger, desolation, extermination, doom for the nations, Jacob's trouble, trembling, awesome, who can endure, moon into blood, darkness, sacrifice, trouble, distress, darkness, gloom, thick darkness, trumpet and battle cry, devoured in the fire of His jealousy, complete end, terrifying, destruction from the Almighty, roar and intense heat, and many, many more.² It is difficult to imagine how the Church could enter such a day, especially when the promises of the future rapture are cloaked in terms of comfort and joy, not fear and fire. Third, the Church is consistently said to be exempt from the day of wrath. Turn to Eph 2:3. In the context of describing our lives as unbelievers Paul says, "Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." Unbelievers are by nature children of wrath, they abide under wrath in the sense that if it were to fall upon the world they would be in it. But clearly believers are not children of wrath. As verse 4 says, we are recipients of God's mercy and thereby excused from the wrath because we are alive together with Christ. This all by grace. So Ephesians views us as no longer by nature children of wrath but those alive together with Christ and therefore exempt from wrath.

Turn to Romans 1:18. Here Paul is beginning his exposition on condemnation. This is not written to us as believers but to us when we were unbelievers. "For the wrath of God is revealed," present tense, "from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." The present form of God's wrath is then defined three times in vv 18-32 as removal of His restraint. In verse 24 God gave them over; in verse 26, again God gave them over and finally in verse 28, again God gave them over. These expressions show that God is removing all restraint that was holding them back from acting fully on their depraved thoughts. So there is a present wrath of God that is a removal of God's restraint. However, it is not an active pouring forth of judgment. As a consequence such depravity is storing up for them wrath in the future day of judgment. Paul speaks of this future wrath they are storing up in Romans 2:5 and 8. In Romans 2:4 Paul highlights that in the present God is being very kind and tolerant and patient, giving them time to repent. But verse 5, "because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." This day of the Lord wrath, a very specific day of wrath will come upon the unbelieving world. We are not going to be as verse 7 says, "to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life." Our destiny is to receive the reward of eternal life. "But," verse 8, "to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation." So the unbelieving world's destiny is to face the wrath and indignation of God in the future day of judgment. The way Romans views God's wrath is in two aspects. The first aspect is that He is presently revealing wrath by giving unbelievers over to their depravity. The second aspect is that He is storing up future wrath for them when their wickedness reaches its fullness. We are not subject to either aspect of wrath.

Turn to 1 Thess 1:10. In the positive report about the Thessalonian believers Paul says of them in verse 9 that they "turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come." The verb "wait" is *avapevw* and means "to expect," "to eagerly wait for." They were eagerly expecting Jesus to come from heaven. To do what? Verse 10 continues, "that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come." The participle "rescues" is *puouai* and means "to keep from," "to deliver" and with the preposition *ek* means "away from." Believers are not destined to face punitive wrath. Our rescue will be by way of the rapture. At the end of chapters 2 and 3 additional promises of rapture are stated and they culminate in 1 Thess 4:13-18, the most extensive explanation of the rapture. In 4:15 and 17 Paul includes himself as one who could live until this event by using the inclusive "we." He says in verse 15, "For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep." Paul did not say the rapture would come in his lifetime but he held that it could come. When it does come the dead in Christ will rise first, then verse 17, "we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." The context is comfort. The chapter that follows is deliberately sequential and deals with the day of the Lord. Verse 2 states very clearly that the Thessalonians knew full well that the day of the Lord would come just like a thief in the night. "While they," that is unbelievers" are saying, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape." But, of course, "you brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief, for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. Paul is exhorting us as sons of light to live as sons of the light and not as sons of darkness. Verse 9 states clearly why, "For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ..." The verb "destined" means "appointed." God has not appointed us to "wrath," "but" instead, "for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ," the salvation defined by verse 10 as resurrection life with Him. The salvation we are appointed to is the rapture as described in the prior 1 Thess 4:13-18. So that sequence is very important and deliberate by the apostle Paul. The rapture first, then the day of the Lord wrath. The Thessalonians knew all these things quite well but if you turn to 2 Thess 2 they were deceived into thinking that the day of the Lord had come. Paul corrects this notion by saying that two things must come before the day of the Lord can come; in verse 3, the apostasy comes first, and then the man of lawlessness is revealed. In the Greek this is a sequence. The apostasy I take as a reference to the rapture. Some people take it as religious apostasy or of a future end-times rebellion but what is interesting is there is no referent here. It does not follow its usage, for example in Acts 21 where it says "apostasy from Moses." Here it just says "the apostasy" with the definite article. This means that whatever "the apostasy" is was something well-known by his audience. Verse 5 indicates that Paul had taught them about "the apostasy". The word simply means "a departure." What departure had Paul taught them about? From 1 Thessalonians he taught them five times about a spatial departure we know as the rapture. Therefore the rapture has to happen first before the day of the Lord can come. As 1 Thess 5:3 said there will be a time of peace and safety after the Rapture during this time. The second thing that must happen before the day of the Lord can

come according to verse 3 is the man of lawlessness must be revealed. The man of lawlessness is one of over 30 titles used of the anti-Christ. The revealing of the anti-Christ refers to his identification. There are at least 20 things revealed about the anti-Christ's career that are identifying markers. A few are mentioned here but there are many others mentioned in Daniel, Isaiah, Matthew and Revelation. The question is when will the anti-Christ be identified so that we can say that the day of the Lord is about to come? The earliest identifying marker is Dan 9:27. In this passage the anti-Christ will either guarantee or force a peace treaty on Israel for seven years. Any bible believer who saw someone guarantee a peace treaty with Israel for exactly seven years would readily identify that person as the anti-Christ. So he must be revealed at the beginning of the 70th week of Daniel. However, I am convinced that he will be revealed even sooner for two reasons. First, for anyone to guarantee Israel peace he would have to already be a very powerful ruler. Israel would not entrust their homeland security to a weak or relatively unknown person. Therefore the anti-Christ must already be a powerful world ruler prior to the seven year peace treaty and this would make him a contender for being the anti-Christ. Second, Rev 13:18 says that the man who has wisdom will be able to calculate the number of his name. In the ancient world Hebrew letters and Greek letters of the alphabet also had numerical equivalents so that you could add up the number of names. The text says that the man who has wisdom or skill will be able to do this. Since it will be unnecessary to add up the number of his name after he has already forced this treaty upon Israel then it must refer to a period when he is still rising to power before the treaty. Daniel 7 describes him as a little horn that grows up rapidly among 10 world rulers and I believe it is during that time that the man of wisdom will calculate the number of his name to be 666 and so identify him prior to his treaty with Israel for seven years. The point is that Paul teaches that two things must happen before the day of the Lord's wrath can come; first the rapture and then the revealing of the man of sin. Since neither of these things had happened the Thessalonians could be sure the day of the Lord had not come. These things show once more that the church will not be here for the wrath. The sequence so far would be the rapture followed by a time of peace and safety during which the anti-Christ would rise rapidly to power and thereby be open to being identified and then make his seven-year treaty with Israel. Further I would say that since there is no time of peace and safety during Rev 6-19 then it would be inconceivable to say the day of the Lord begins sometime within Rev 6-19. And by the sixth seal all the unbelievers on earth are admitting that what is happening is the wrath of God because they say to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand." While some have said this means the wrath is about to come, the context militates against taking the aorist this way. They are saying that the wrath of God and the Lamb has come already, at least by this time. But even before that I would argue that the seals have been the wrath of God all along; this verse only states when they openly acknowledge it. But the scroll that contains all these judgments is opened by the Lamb who was slain, Jesus Christ. Therefore all the judgments it contains are His judgments. The scroll contains 21 judgments; seven seals, seven trumpets and seven bowls. That the judgment would be broken into these 21 segments is said to have been a mystery but now we know that all 21 judgments are part of God's future wrath in the day of the Lord. While not everyone agrees I think the best view

is to say that all of this is the wrath of the Lord and that it is the wrath that is for those who by nature are children of wrath. Therefore it is a wrath that we are not destined for; that we will be saved away from and that we will be saved by way of rapture.

Putting all these facts together and turning back to Romans 5:9; what Paul means by **the wrath** is the same thing John the Baptist meant by the wrath and what he himself consistently taught about wrath; it is the time of God's intensive judgment upon the earth in order to destroy the nations and restore Israel in preparation for the coming kingdom of God. Paul using a much stronger argument in Romans 5:9 says, **having now been justified we shall be saved from the wrath.** We are not Christ's enemies, we have perfect righteousness, we have peace with God, there is no reason for us to go through the wrath. Newell says, "He has had Christ die for us while we were "yet sinners"; "much more" will He see that we, being now believers and accounted righteous in view of Christ's blood, shall be saved from the coming wrath through Him (Christ)."³ The second proposition is included in the first. No matter how you cut it we can't be under the wrath of God.

In Romans 5:10 Paul uses the *a fortiori* argument again to prove it yet again. But this time Paul uses the concept of reconciliation and rather than referring to us as sinners as he did in verse 8, a fitting background for justification, he uses enemies, the fitting background for reconciliation. Here he says, **For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.** We've been called helpless, godless and sinners, now in verse 10 we are called **enemies.** Even if we did not show outward hatred God could see in our hearts inward hostility toward Him. This is part of what is in our nature due to our sin in Adam as Paul will explain in 5:12-21. Yet **while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son.** Every present and future blessing that results from justification is based on or **through the death of His Son.** The cross work of Christ is really the central element of 5:1-11. Everything we have and everything we are is due exclusively to the cross work of Christ. Here we **were reconciled.** The Greek word καταλασσω means "the exchange of hostility for a friendly relationship." Essentially it means we were enemies of God but through the cross work of Christ we have now become friends. The hostilities have ceased. This occurred at the moment of faith. At that moment verse 1 said "we have peace with God" and that is what reconciliation refers to. The doctrine of reconciliation has two aspects. The second aspect is in view here but both aspects are seen in 2 Cor 5:18-20 so turn there. The first aspect is God's provision of reconciliation made for the whole world. The second aspect is the application of reconciliation to each man which is conditioned on faith. Both aspects are seen here "Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,¹⁹namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." So the first aspect is God's provision for friendship with the world based on Christ's finished work, but the second aspect is our ministry of going into the world and begging men to be reconciled to God through faith. We would say the provision of

reconciliation is for all men but the application of reconciliation is limited only to those who believe. The same holds true for redemption and for propitiation. Each is unlimited in its provision but limited in application to those who believe. The cross has therefore rendered all men in a savable position but only those who believe avail themselves of what Christ accomplished. This is called unlimited atonement and by it we mean not that all men are saved, but that Christ died for all men rendering them savable; but only those who believe will be saved. So the provision is for all but the application is only to those who believe.

Now in Romans 5:10 Paul is referring to those who believe; those who have actually been reconciled to God by application of **the death of Christ** for us. **Much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life or in His life,** an alternative translation. Our life is tied up with His life and His life with our life. We are the body of Christ and He is the head of the body. Therefore when Paul was going to Damascus to persecute Christians and the Lord showed up he did not say, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute them," but "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me." To persecute the body of Christ is to persecute Christ Himself, the head of the body. The two are tied up in one another. What shall we be saved from? Verse 9 told us what we would be saved from - **the wrath of God.** How shall we be saved from it? Verse 10 tells us **by His life.** When the body of Christ is complete, when the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, then those who have fallen asleep will arise first, then those who are alive and remain shall be caught up with them and we shall forever be with the Lord. At that time the wrath can come upon the earth. But in no way can we see the wrath because our life is hidden in His life. This future salvation looks to tense 3 of salvation, our glorification which is the day of the Church's resurrection. This is a future, fuller experience of salvation that occurs once for all on that day when the entire body of Christ is finally complete. On that day we will all be resurrected and meet together for the first time with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It will be the greatest event of the entire Church age. Our position will then be united entirely with our experience. Who we are now by standing will be who we are then by condition. At last we will sin no more, at last we will have eternal rest, at last we will see our Lord face to face and hence never to be separate from Him.

In Romans 5:11, **And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.** The word **exult** is the same word used at the end of verse 3 and beginning of 4, it means "to leap for joy," "to glory." We glory **in God through our Lord Jesus Christ** because He is the one who has done this. He is the one who has done everything on the cross. What He did does not need us to add anything. His work was a complete work, a finished work, a perfect work. **Through Him we have now received the reconciliation.** So we not only look forward to being saved by His life at the rapture but we already **have** become friends with God through Him. And if friends then there is no hostility. We have peace with God and that is the big idea of this section. The section began with peace and ended with reconciliation; these are essentially the same thing. In between we find that it is all due to Christ's work on the cross which we have received by faith. At the moment of faith we were justified and the blessings we experience are both present and future. Our present blessings are access to grace, a standing in grace, joy in tribulations and the indwelling

Holy Spirit shedding love abroad in our hearts. Our future blessings are salvation from the wrath to come by His life. Our destiny is bound up with Him because His life is our life. To God be the glory!

ⁱ Another example outside of Romans would be Matthew 6:30. Here our Lord uses the “much more” argument to show lack of faith. In the context those who were worrying about where their daily provisions would come from had not learned the lesson from nature. Jesus says, “But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown in the furnace, will He not *much more* clothe you?” In other words, if God takes care of nature then you can argue with even greater certainty that God will take care of your daily needs since you are more important than nature. Other arguments may be made that God will take care of your daily needs but the strongest argument is that God takes care of nature. That doesn’t mean don’t work, it just means you shouldn’t focus your life on worrying about where your daily provisions will come from.

² David Olander, *The Greatness of the Rapture: The Pre-Day of the Lord Rapture*, ed. Kenneth R. Cooper and Christopher Cone (Ft. Worth, TX: Tyndale Seminary Press, 2009), 109–110.

³ William Newell, *Romans*, p 172-3.