

## “Conduits and Connections”

### Romans 5:1-8

June 18, 2023, Father’s Day

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Read Romans 5:1-8 (SLIDES)

### Prayer

**Illustration: Story of Bill Wilson<sup>1</sup>** – Bill Wilson, known as Bill W., was born on November 26, 1895, in East Dorset, Vermont. Although he came from a relatively stable family environment, he took his first drink at the age of 10. This began his tumultuous relationship with alcohol throughout his life.

Alcohol affected both his personal and professional life. Bill made numerous unsuccessful attempts to stop drinking.

In December 1934, at the age of 39, Bill W. hit rock bottom. After a binge that left him hopeless and desperate, he found himself in a New York City detox center, struggling with severe alcohol withdrawal symptoms. It was his fourth stay at the center and nothing had worked.

He consulted a close friend who told him to give up drinking and give his life over to the service of God.

Bill W. was not a believer, but, later that night, at the end of his rope, he called out in his hospital room: “If there is a God, let Him show Himself! I am ready to do anything. Anything!”

It was that night, on December 14<sup>th</sup> to be exact, that he had a spiritual experience. He said it was a profound moment of surrender and a realization that he needed to find a new way to live. He described it as a white light suffused his room and the presence of God appeared. “It seemed to me, in the mind’s eye, that I was on a mountain and that a wind not of air but of spirit was blowing,” he testified later. “And then it burst upon me that I was a free man.”

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<sup>1</sup> David Brooks, “Bill Wilson’s Gospel,” *The New York Times*, June 28, 2010.

<https://www.homileticonline.com/members/installment/93041417> additional information on Wilson from <https://chat.openai.com/share/9a395116-805d-4082-a17c-46bed575ea4c>

Following his release from the hospital, Bill reached out to a fellow alcoholic, known as Dr. Bob, whom he had met previously through a mutual acquaintance. Bill shared his experience with Dr. Bob, and together, they embarked on a journey to help others recover from alcoholism.

In June of 1935 Bill W. and Dr. Bob established Alcoholics Anonymous, which has helped countless alcoholics find sobriety. His “Big Book” of the Twelve Steps have become the cornerstone in other recovery movements around the globe.

Bill W’s spiritual experience can be articulated as finding peace with God through Jesus Christ. All of his own human attempts failed. He did not find true peace with God until he surrendered his life to God through Jesus Christ.

Through Christ, he was justified or “made right” with God. He was no longer condemned but set free by the grace of God. This is God’s work of salvation. Other scriptures speak of being sanctified, or being transformed to become more and more like Jesus over time. Justification is more punctiliar, or “in the moment” while sanctification takes place over a lifetime. Paul describes this as “working out your salvation” in Philippians 2:12.

Someone might ask, “How do I have this peace with God?” What do I have to do?

As we look to the first couple of verses in Romans chapter five, we will see that it’s not about what *we do*, it’s about what Jesus *has already done*.

He has made a way for us to have peace with God. All we have to do is believe in Jesus and receive the wonderful gift of his amazing grace.

**Key Verse:** “Therefore, since we have been justified *through* faith, we have peace with God *through* our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup> *through* whom we have *gained access* by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.” (Romans 5:1-2) **(SLIDES)**

**Big Idea:** Through Christ, we have *access* to the grace and love of God. Are we, who have received access to the Father, being accessible to others? **(SLIDE)**

Let's unpack this as we look more closely at verses one and two.

**Application: (SLIDES – please drop in points and answers as I go through them)**

**1. God invites every person to accept the gift of his amazing grace. (Romans 5:1)**

**We are justified *through* faith** – literally this is translated is *by* faith. The Greek word is *ek* which means “out of” or “from” or “through.” It is used to describe a new birth or something new that comes about.

Faith is the means by which we are made right with God. As Jesus said to Nicodemus in John chapter three, we are born again from above. It's simply trusting in God or placing our faith in Jesus Christ as savior and Lord.

**Through our Lord Jesus** -- Then Paul writes that we have peace with God *through* our Lord Jesus Christ. The Greek word here is *dia* and it means the channel of an act.

The word for deacon is *dia* + *konos* which means “through the dust.” In the first century, a worker would walk through the dust to serve tables.

Like a channel is the way from a river to the sea, so too is Jesus the way for us to receive peace and forgiveness from God.

**2. Jesus Christ is our access to God's grace. (Romans 5:2)**

*Through whom = dia*

We have access – The Greek word translated “access” is *prosagoge*. This means “the act of bringing to” or “introducing to.”

We can understand this word in a couple of ways:

- A document that grants legal permission. Think of your passport that allows you to leave our country, enter other countries and reenter the United States.

- This word also has the implication of a summons to a judge. A document that when it is issued, draws someone toward a judge.
- Think of a stent in medicine which is a small, tubular device that is used in medicine to treat narrow or blocked blood vessels or ducts within the body. The stent opens up the way for the blood or other important body fluids to get where they need to go.
- Conduits in the sanctuary under the floor that allow for connections to be made.

I like to think of Jesus as our “conduit” to God’s grace. He is the means, the vessel, the way that we have peace with God and receive his amazing grace.

### **Story of the thief on the cross – Luke 23:42-43**

**Illustration from Copernicus** -- The Polish astronomer Copernicus was one of the greatest scientists in history. But Copernicus was also a man of faith. He had these words inscribed on his tombstone:

“O God, the faith that you gave to St. Paul I cannot ask, and the mercy you did show to St. Peter I dare not ask; but, Lord, the grace you did show to the dying thief on the cross — that, Lord, show to me.”<sup>2</sup>

Jesus is our conduit of grace – through him we have access to the fulness of all that God desires us to receive in this life and in the next.

### ***How can we be conduits and connectors in the world for Jesus?***

#### **3. Our mission is to make God’s grace accessible to everyone.**

- Be a conduit of kindness.
- Be people who connect others to God.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.homileticonline.com/members/installment/93041417>

Last Sunday we looked at the life of Abraham. God called him to leave where he was and go to the place God would show him. And God promised that he would bless Abraham and that Abraham would be a blessing. In fact, both Abraham and Sarah would receive God's blessing and they would be a blessing to others, for God's redemptive work came through their offspring. The nation of Israel would be God's chosen people, through whom would come Jesus the Messiah, whose purpose was to make peace with God accessible to every human being.

We said that like Abraham, **every** person has a calling to be blessed and to be a blessing.

**Women and Men are Called:** At Huguenot Road Baptist Church, we want to affirm the calling of every Christian, female and male, to live out their calling of God. For some, this is to serve as a lay person in one of the many roles in the church. For others, this is to respond to a call to vocational, ordained ministry.

Our church affords the opportunity to women and men to serve as pastors of any role as they are called by God. We affirm women and men as teachers in any capacity as they are called by God. We have and will continue to ordain both women and men to the gospel ministry as God leads.

In the past, we have ordained five women to the gospel ministry: Rev. Emily Browning, Rev. Susan Price, Dr. Melissa Fallen, Rev. Kristin Francisco and Rev. Joan Maples. We are grateful that HRBC provides the opportunity for girls and boys to aspire to be pastors is God calls. That they have a church that will provide that opportunity and nurture their call as God leads.

This past week, the Southern Baptist Convention voted that only men are allowed to serve as pastors and that women are not permitted to serve as pastors of any type or to teach men. Earlier this year, the SBC made a list of its churches that were known to have women serving in pastoral roles and they made this list public, almost as a witch hunt. All this came to a head last week at their convention and it was a sad day that many people who may be on the fringes or who don't follow Jesus at all see this type of narrow mindset that puts a scar on the Baptist family and stumbling blocks in the path of many.

I am thankful that this church has not only ordained women to the gospel ministry, but that we have also ordained women as deacons for many decades. We have had a number of female deacon coordinators including current deacon coordinator, Sandra Lynch.

Our church left the Southern Baptist Convention in spirit many years ago and formally within the last five years. We are affiliated with the Rover City Faith Network (local), the Baptist General Association of Virginia (state), the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Virginia and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Global as well as the Baptist World Alliance. If we were part of the SBC, we would have been on their list to disassociate because of our stance on women in ministry. It is good that many in our congregation and others with a similar theological position saw the way things were heading in the SBC and made the decision to part ways. This was not easy, for many had a long-time relationship with the SBC, especially through its missions around the globe. But we can say today that we are being true to our calling as an autonomous Baptist congregation.

Let us join together as conduits of kindness who help others have access to the peace of God and his amazing grace through Jesus Christ our Lord.

How can we do this? It means allowing God's love and compassion to flow through you to touch the lives of others.

Here are some steps we can take to cultivate that: **(NO SLIDES HERE)**

**1. Cultivate a personal relationship with God:** Spend time in prayer, meditation, and study of sacred texts to deepen your connection with God. Seek to understand God's nature, teachings, and the example set by spiritual figures.

**2. Embody love and compassion:** Strive to live a life that reflects the qualities of love, kindness, and compassion. Treat others with respect, empathy, and generosity. Look for opportunities to extend a helping hand and show empathy to those in need.

**3. Practice forgiveness:** Forgiveness is a powerful expression of grace. Let go of grudges, resentment, and judgment towards others. Learn to forgive and seek reconciliation when possible, understanding that everyone is fallible and capable of growth.

**4. Serve others:** Engage in acts of service and volunteer work to uplift others. Look for ways to meet the needs of those around you, whether through charitable organizations, community initiatives, or personal acts of kindness.

**5. Share your faith and experiences:** Share your own experiences of God's grace and love with others. Talk about how your faith has transformed your life and offer hope and encouragement to those who may be struggling.

**6. Be a listening ear:** Offer a compassionate and non-judgmental presence to those who are hurting or going through difficult times. Sometimes, just being there for someone and actively listening can be a powerful conduit of God's grace.

**7. Live with integrity:** Strive to align your thoughts, words, and actions with your spiritual beliefs. Be honest, trustworthy, and live with integrity in all areas of your life. Let your actions speak louder than your words.

Remember, being a conduit of God's grace is an ongoing journey. It requires a sincere and humble heart, a willingness to learn and grow, and a commitment to live out your faith in practical ways.

It's not just what God can do. It's what God can do through you.

Amen.