

**Series:** Spiritual Health Checkup

**Title:** “Our Spiritual History”

**Text:** Romans 5:1-11

**Proposition:** Everyone should have a clean spiritual history because of the blessings of knowing Jesus Christ.

A doctor asks about our health history. This information helps in the diagnosis and prevention of health problems. If a person has a family history of heart disease, cancer, or diabetes, then that person may be susceptible to those kinds of diseases. When we know we have a physical disposition for a particular disease then we can adjust our lifestyles to potentially prevent an occurrence of the disease. For example: If a person has a history of diabetes in his/her family, then that person should live a healthy lifestyle with plenty of exercise, balanced nutrition, and appropriate rest.

Likewise, understanding of our spiritual history is vital to our relationship with God. We need to be aware of our sinful disposition. We also deserve to know that God loves us so much to offer His spiritual prescription. He offers us a remedy for our inherent infirmity. Christ Jesus came to cleanse our spiritual history so that we can make life adjustments.

The apostle Paul reminds the Roman Christians of this major league grace that enables us to live a life we don't deserve. I am reminded of the 1995 major league baseball season. You may remember that those million dollar arms, Cadillac bats, and contracted players went on strike. The owners invited anyone to come to their parks to play major league baseball. They were not minor leaguers because they too were on strike. These were guys who were coaching Little League baseball one day and wearing a Cincinnati Reds uniform the next.

So these guys took to the field for the love of the game. Yes, these pitchers pitched so slow that the radar gun couldn't clock their speed. We didn't see many home runs. It took a while for an outfielder to throw the ball to the infield. But these players had fun. They went all out, hustling around the bases, diving after fly balls. They arrived early for extra batting practice. They stayed late to help the ground's crew get the field ready for the next day. They even did their own laundry. These guys didn't see themselves as a blessing to baseball, but baseball as a blessing to them. They didn't demand more playing time; they were thrilled just to play. They never complained about poor pay. They never second-guessed the management. They didn't gripe when they were not recognized. They were happy to be on the team. Yes, this was what baseball was all about.

It may not have been classy. It may have been rough around the edges. But all was forgiven for the pure joy of seeing some guys play ball who really enjoyed the game. What made it so special? They were living a life they didn't deserve. They were chosen not because they were good, but because they were willing.

In many ways, followers of Jesus Christ resemble those players. Paul makes it clear in the first four chapters of Romans and in this passage that Christians are living a life they don't deserve. They had a scarred, damaged, inferior spiritual history, and Jesus Christ came and chose them for a spiritual cure. Christians are not good enough to be picked, but they receive the team's uniform and play the kingdom game. Christians lack the skill to be major leaguers, but their names are on the greatest roster

of all. God's grace in Jesus Christ has placed us on the greatest team on earth. Our past is pardoned, our present is filled with power, and our future is secure. Friends, when we know the cleanings of our scarred spiritual history, we possess God's blessings. Let's take a deeper look at these blessings, these special favors from God's heart.

**First, we have peace with God.** Paul wrote, "*We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Wow! We have peace with God. Someone once wrote that peace is that calm mind that is not ruffled by adversity, overclouded by a remorseful conscience, or disturbed by fear. Peace is not just peace with a family member or a co-worker or between countries or between neighbors. It is that peace within the soul that comes from the assurance we are right with God. Paul says that the salvation of Jesus Christ gives us peace with God.

A quiet, middle-aged woman often kept to herself. Some of her friends would ask her how she was doing and she would respond, "I'm fine under the circumstances." Yet each time her friends knew that things were not fine. Some even noticed that the distance between them was beginning to increase. Finally, one of her friends asked her again, "What is really troubling you?" The woman was hesitant. But after seeing the accepting love in her friend's eyes, she spoke, "I have done some things in my life that I am very ashamed of. You know that I have remarried. I love my husband very much. But, this relationship started as an affair in my first marriage. At that time, I was feeling so lonely in my marriage that I fell in love with my current husband. At first, I felt that my first husband would be jealous and start paying more attention to me. But he didn't.

He only withdrew from me even farther. I think I also was withdrawing from him. I feel so bad about my adultery.” Her friend reminded her that God says, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive all our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* In addition, she spoke these words from Romans, *“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Jesus the law of the Spirit of life sets us free from the law of sin and death.”* These words of grace cleansed her from the remorse of her shameful past. These words of grace gave her victory over her regret.

Our guilty feelings make us run from God, attempting to hide from Him, ourselves, and even others. We see God as an enemy so we hide. We avoid his presence. Even though our wrongdoing pains God, it never divorces us from His love. Our guilt and shame does not have to drive us away. It can drive us toward the one who alone can give us peace. Coming clean with God, with ourself, and with others, acknowledging failure throws us into arms of the Savior who loves us. Jesus was *“pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our sins.”* He endured the cross, *scorning our shame.*” Jesus offers peace with God.

**Second, we have a place with God.** Paul wrote, *“through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace.”* In the original Greek language, Paul gives us the image of being ushered into the presence of royalty. What a beautiful image. The living Jesus takes us by the hand and escorts us into the throne room, that place where the presence

of God dwells. There before a Holy, Righteous, Great, and Awesome God, we find grace, not condemnation; mercy; not punishment.

While I attended classes in middle school, I spoke words that I would never speak at home. One day I was sitting in study hall and this girl was writing me annoying notes. So I sent her a note that contained some unpleasant, vulgar language.

Unfortunately, the study hall aide, Mrs. Smith intercepted the note. I knew I was in trouble. My parents said that if I ever got in trouble at school, I would receive double the punishment when I got home. Fear swept through my body like the raging current of the Colorado River. I will never forget the study hall teacher's disappointment. She was a godly woman who coordinated the school's campus life ministry. She then ushered me to the principal's office. I noticed that when we entered the office she and Principal Davidson had a private conference.

Principal Davidson was a big man, standing 6'4" tall. He had broad shoulders and piercing eyes that intimidated the toughest eighth grader. He had the reputation of using corporate punishment. I walked into his office trembling with fear. I feared that he was going to take "Big Jake" and wrap it around my behind. I knew that when I got home, my father would execute his own punishment. Principal Davidson read my note, looked at me and asked if I wrote it. With a trembling voice I confessed. My hands were wet. Beads of sweat formed on my brow. Then he reprimanded me, urged me never to do it again and to go to the girl and apologize. I assured him that I would not

repeat my transgression. He then dismissed me. I went into his presence expecting condemnation and punishment. I left his presence experiencing grace.

Christ Jesus has ushered us into the presence of a Holy, Just God whose extends his hand of mercy. When we become friends with the Son, we gain access into heaven's throne. Jesus said, "*Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge him before my father in heaven.*" We can now enjoy our place in His presence.

**Third, we partake in His glory.** Paul wrote, "*And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.*" Because of God's grace we go from being people whose "throats are like open graves" to being participants in God's glory. We were washed up and put out, now we are called up and put in.

What does it mean to share in God's glory? Imagine for a moment that you are a homeless person existing on the streets of Washington D.C. You haven't eaten in two days. You've been sleeping in a large, cardboard appliance box you found behind a furniture store. You wear clothes that you found in a dumpster outside the Salvation Army thrift store. You're sitting there in the cold and some man comes up in his woolen, black overcoat, and white shirt and blue necktie. You know he's a government employee.

For reasons beyond your understanding he chooses you and invites you to come with him. He escorts you over to a waiting limousine. You enter the fancy car and they take you to the White House. A couple Secret Service agents take you down the hall to

a large room where you see a state dinner being served. You see fine china, the crystal goblets, silk linens, and lighted candles. You feel out of place. You're not wearing an eloquent evening gown or a black tuxedo. They seat you at the head table, the place of honor. You've never been among such royalty, such grandeur. Now to your surprise the President enters the room, walks over to your seat and serves you. Yes, he serves you through the entire meal. You have never felt such love, such joy. You came as a homeless person and you eat like a king.

This is what Christ Jesus has done for us. He welcomes us to come and dine with Him at His table. Out of love for us, he invites us into his glorious presence. All that is required is our acceptance of his dinner invitation. Paul's description of our state is not attractive: living against God, sinners, and God's enemies. Yet for such people Christ died. We were crippled by the fall, damaged by sin. Living reckless, meaningless lives, only to be remembered and called up by the King of Kings. He was driven not by our beauty, but by his promise to invite us to take a permanent place at his table. Though we often crawl more than we walk, we take our place at the table with the other sinners-made saints, and we share in the Glory of the King.

**The final blessing is that we personify joy and hope in our suffering.** Paul wrote, *"We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation."* Paul was writing to a group of Christians who understood that suffering for the faith was more common than what it

is today. He gave them hope with what they will become, but until then they overcome by the Spirit's power. In this life we will experience difficulties that will help us grow. We rejoice and give thanks for these difficulties not because we like the pain or deny its tragedy, but because we are confident that God is using life's difficulties and Satan's attacks to build our character.

Dr. Robert Lightner, former seminary professor was involved in a terrible plane crash. He was in a single-engine plane that flipped over during takeoff. He was badly injured and burned beyond recognition. His wife, Pearl, said when she first saw him, "I looked at this black mass of flesh, and I didn't even know who he was." He recovered, and today he is a living testimony of grace through the ordeal. He often said, "I learned things I didn't know I needed to learn." Isn't that usually the way it is?

Friends, God wants to rewrite our spiritual history so that we can leave this place blessed with His wholeness. Let's come to His table and embrace His peace, accept our place with Him, receive His glory, and reflect His joy that overcomes suffering.