CHAIN REACTIONS

Sometimes a single action can unleash a chain reaction of devastating consequences. Think of the driver waiting at a stoplight, minding her own business, when suddenly she is struck from the rear by another car whose driver wasn't paying attention. That one action unleashes a chain reaction of consequences. The ambulance is called, work and school are missed, bills pile up, family events are suddenly transformed as the injured strives to recover.

In Romans 5, Paul explores the dreadful consequences that resulted when Adam sinned. Through Adam’s failure, sin and death came into the world (Romans 5:12). Adam’s sin brought catastrophic consequences for all humanity — death, judgment, and condemnation for all people (Romans 5:15, 16, 18). His disobedience transformed all humanity from saints to sinners, and death became the tyrannical ruling power on earth (Romans 5:17).

In the same way that a single sinful action can unleash a chain reaction of evil, a single right action can trigger a chain reaction of good. In place of humanity’s disobedience, Jesus obeyed perfectly. His obedience unto death unleashed a chain reaction of righteousness (Romans 5:19). In place of death and condemnation, Jesus’ actions unleashed justification and life (Romans 5:18).

The world Adam bequeathed to his children is caught up in a never-ending chain reaction of sin, pain, suffering, loss, and death. Jesus triumphed over these by His faithfulness. All who put their faith in Him are a part of a new legacy, a new chain reaction of justification, righteousness, and life. Which will you embrace?
Write out Romans 5 from the Bible translation of your choice. If you are pressed for time, write out Romans 5:6–11. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
PEACE IN PAIN

Many struggle to be at peace with God because of their troubled past or their present weakness. To solve this struggle for peace, many people strive to reach some predefined level of moral development, imagining that if they achieve it, they will finally have peace. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, this struggle robs them of peace. According to Paul, we can have peace with God because of justification (Romans 5:1). Justification brings peace with God because it brings full, free forgiveness of our sins and credits to us righteousness that will safely see us through the judgment (Romans 4:5–8).

Peace with God means that the war is over. As a result of our sin, we were enemies with God, and through Jesus’ death, we were reconciled (Romans 5:10). Reconciliation with God can happen because on the cross, Jesus bore our sin, and by His blood He saved us from wrath (Romans 4:25; 1 Corinthians 15:3; Romans 5:9). All who believe are justified and are at peace with God. All wrath is gone, and in its place is reconciliation.

All who are justified by faith are standing in grace (Romans 5:2). This means that the lives of believers are immersed in the grace of God. Since we are justified and immersed in the grace of God, we rejoice in the hope of sharing God’s glory (Romans 5:2). This means we have the assurance that one day we will live out our created purpose in the new heavens and earth.

According to Paul, being at peace with God, standing in grace, and rejoicing in the hope of sharing God’s glory can change our perspective when life turns painful. When life hurts, believers can rejoice in tribulations, because tribulations produce perseverance in us (Romans 5:3). We also rejoice in perseverance because perseverance produces character (Romans 5:4). God uses the trials of life to transform us for good. As our lives are transformed through difficulties, we are filled with hope (Romans 5:4). The hope we have will never disappoint because it is fueled by God’s love, which is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). When we anchor our faith firmly in Jesus, no trial can steal our peace, because the Holy Spirit is a never-failing fountain reminding us of the love God has for us and the transforming power of suffering.
THE REIGN OF GRACE

God is love (1 John 4:8), and we are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26, 27). To be truly human and live out our call to be image-bearers, we are to love and be loved. That is why God made us. For us to fulfill our created purpose of loving and being loved, the law of cause and effect must be at work. The good we do must be able to impact those whom we serve. The love we express must be able to work in the lives of those we love.

Unfortunately, the law of cause and effect is a double-edged sword. When it works in harmony with God and His will, it fosters the everlasting flowering of love and goodness. When used contrary to God’s will, it unleashes death and destruction. The reality is that any world made for love must be a world where our actions can have actual consequences. If good actions can have good results, evil actions must be able to have harmful effects.

Many people question the justice of God in permitting the whole world to be plunged into death because of Adam’s sin (Romans 5:14, 15, 17). They wonder how God could be good in a world where one wrong action can create so much pain. Their questions notwithstanding, there is no injustice with God, because Adam’s sin brought death to all humanity. A world where love can flourish must be a world governed by the law of cause and effect. That is a risky world that could and did go wrong, with terrible consequences.

In the same way that one man’s evil action could bring so much pain, however, one man’s right action can justly start the dominoes falling in a new direction. That is just what Jesus did. Through Jesus’ obedience, many will be made righteous (Romans 5:19) and many will find everlasting life (Romans 5:18, 21).

Have you ever looked at your life and thought, “I’m moving from one mistake to the next, and my sins seem to be multiplying at such a fast rate I’ll never get them under control”? This is the reign of sin exercising its dominion in your life. Sin’s rule will culminate in death (Romans 5:21). Fortunately, Jesus has intervened! He has made a new reality through His death and resurrection. Because of Him, in the same way that sin abounded, grace can abound (Romans 5:20). Jesus’ grace is greater than all our sin! Just as sin reigned in death, grace can reign through righteousness and lead to eternal life (Romans 5:21). When we put our faith in Jesus, we receive the gift of righteousness, and this unleashes the reign of grace in our lives.
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What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

2 Corinthians 5:17–21
Hebrews 7:25
1 Corinthians 15:21, 22, 45
Isaiah 53:11

What other verses come to mind in thinking about living in grace?

Review your memorized verse from Romans 5.
GOD TOOK THE FIRST STEP

Have you ever had an enemy? Someone who actively sought your harm? Maybe it was a bully in grade school or a teacher who had it out for you. Perhaps it was an employer whom you just couldn’t please. Maybe it was a church quarrel. Those can be particularly painful. Possibly worst of all is a situation where you feel as though you have an enemy in your own home. It’s tough to have an enemy. It’s an extremely painful experience to endure and can sometimes leave lifelong scars.

This is exactly the circumstance in which God and humanity found themselves. Humanity wasn’t merely without strength and ungodly (Romans 5:6). That would have been bad enough. We are sinners who are enemies of God (Romans 5:9, 10). We haven’t simply made a few mistakes. We were actively engaged in warfare against God. We were hostile to God and refused to submit to His law (Romans 8:7). In this relational context, God chose to demonstrate His love for us through the death of Jesus (Romans 5:8).

It is understandable when a parent gives their life for their child or a spouse gives their life for their partner. It can make sense when soldiers give their life to protect their country from their enemies. But it is preposterous for someone to give their life for an enemy. Nobody but God loves their enemies that much (Romans 5:6–8). God would rather give Himself through His Son to be reconciled with His enemies than live without them (Romans 5:10).

If God took the first step and gave the gift of His Son to reconcile weak, ungodly sinners who were His enemies, we can be “much more” sure that He will complete the process and save us for eternity, now that we are reconciled (Romans 5:10). This may be some of the best news ever written. God was willing to initiate reconciliation by removing sin through the death of His Son. Now that we are reconciled, and Jesus is alive, we can be confident that we will be saved by His life (Romans 5:10). The living Jesus will not abandon you. He is interceding. He is pleading. He is doing everything He can to make sure that you are saved for eternity.

In light of God’s generosity in giving His Son, our responsibility is to receive the reconciling work of Jesus. When we do, we can rejoice in what God has done through Him (Romans 5:11).
OUR ONLY HOPE

“Our condition of eternal life is now just what it always has been,—just what it was in Paradise before the fall of our first parents,—perfect obedience to the law of God, perfect righteousness. If eternal life were granted on any condition short of this, then the happiness of the whole universe would be imperiled. The way would be open for sin, with all its train of woe and misery, to be immortalized.

“It was possible for Adam, before the fall, to form a righteous character by obedience to God’s law. But he failed to do this, and because of his sin our natures are fallen and we cannot make ourselves righteous. Since we are sinful, unholy, we cannot perfectly obey the holy law. We have no righteousness of our own with which to meet the claims of the law of God. But Christ has made a way of escape for us. He lived on earth amid trials and temptations such as we have to meet. He lived a sinless life. He died for us, and now He offers to take our sins and give us His righteousness. If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ’s character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned.

“More than this, Christ changes the heart. He abides in your heart by faith. You are to maintain this connection with Christ by faith and the continual surrender of your will to Him; and so long as you do this, He will work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure. So you may say, ‘The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.’ Galatians 2:20. So Jesus said to His disciples, ‘It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.’ Matthew 10:20. Then with Christ working in you, you will manifest the same spirit and do the same good works—works of righteousness, obedience.

“So we have nothing in ourselves of which to boast. We have no ground for self-exaltation. Our only ground of hope is in the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and in that wrought by His Spirit working in and through us.”

Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, 62, 63.
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Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

Have you ever found yourself in a chain reaction of bad consequences? How did you get out?

Have you ever found yourself in a virtuous cycle of good consequences? Why is this good? Bad?

When and how has the Holy Spirit brought you comfort during a difficult season of life?

Why is it fair that the whole world went wrong because of Adam’s sin?

Why is it fair that the whole world can be righteous because of Christ’s righteousness?

When you feel condemned and judged, how can Paul’s teaching about peace with God through justification by faith help you?

How does the Christian hope bring comfort during trials?

How can hope, righteousness, and peace be tangible in your life?