

Introduction: Paul moves from the privileges of justification (Rom. 5:1-2) to the challenges of life (Rom. 5:3-11).

The results of justification -- the privileges of peace in the past, grace in the present, and glory in the future -- are very full of comfort. For justified persons, our status before God is complete, and irreversible. If eternity is settled, what can Paul tell us about our earthly situation?

What about the challenges of life? We have difficulties, problems, and uncertainties. There are stresses, strains, and sorrows in daily life. Sometimes it seems that there is a big gap between the wonders of God's gospel and the weariness of our life. It is very encouraging to read Paul's honesty and realism. He summarizes the implications of being right with God, and next he goes on to the problems of life. How should we deal with all that life throws at us?

This is a very rich and condensed paragraph. We will outline the major features and their supporting ideas. Paul identifies three challenges that might appear to contest the privileges of the justified, which are peace in the past, grace in the present, and glory in the future. He addresses three issues:

- 1) The Challenge of Suffering (vs. 3-5)
- 2) The Challenge of Sinfulness (vs. 6-8)
- 3) The Challenge of Security (vs. 9-11)

A. THE CHALLENGE OF SUFFERING (Rom. 5:3-5)

The first challenge in verses 3-5 is suffering. Paul introduces the subject of sufferings, tribulations, or afflictions. He uses a very strong word [θλιψις {thlip'-sis}] for intense, painful, unending pressure. We experience many times pressures that may be physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual. Pressure influences our relationships, and our vocation. There are many kinds of sufferings. How should we manage our sufferings? How can we explain our sufferings? Think about the principles, pattern, and priorities of suffering.

The principles of suffering. Paul does not avoid this issue. His answer is astonishing. He writes, "And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations ..." To glory means to exalt, to boast, to triumph. We glory in tribulations. Notice the preposition "in." Paul doesn't say "after," as if we are going to have a hard time now, for a few years, but after that we will be happy forever. We will rejoice after our suffering. That is true, but that is not what he states here. Paul doesn't say "in spite of," as if there is suffering in life, but there are lots of other things. In spite of our suffering we can rejoice in something else.

Paul does say "we also glory in tribulations," as if we rejoice because of them. They make us to exalt. Remember Paul's acquaintance with suffering. We might think that Paul is preaching with no understanding of our tribulations. Paul has experienced many burdens. He is one who was beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, imprisoned, whipped, deserted, and betrayed. He has gone hungry. He has lost his family, his money, and his friends. He is one nearly crushed by suffering.¹ He knows about sufferings. He asserts that we glory in our tribulations.

How is this possible? Does he mean that we attend inspiring, special meetings that work

¹ 2 Corinthians 11:22-33

us up into emotional euphoria? No. “We also glory in tribulations, knowing ...” There is something that we know. There is a doctrine that supports us. There is truth we understand. Here is the practical value of doctrine. How often have we wished, not for some doctrine, but for something practical? There is nothing more practical than sound doctrine. When sufferings come, happy meetings will not help you. Psychological excitement will not help you. Pious saying won’t help you. Truth will help you. There is something that we know. What is it?

We know that in these sufferings, God is not punishing us. They are not sent to merely injure or hurt us. They are not evidence that God is angry with us. They don’t attack our salvation. We are justified. We are forgiven. God will never strike us in wrath. Whatever is the explanation for your suffering, it is not that God wants to hurt you.

He may, as our heavenly Father, discipline us. Discipline is not contrary to love. Discipline is not evidence of divine anger. It is because God loves us that He disciplines us. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* says, “God doth continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified; ... yet they may, by their sins, fall under God’s fatherly displeasure ...”²

Charles Spurgeon comments on Jeremiah 30:11, which reads “I will correct thee in measure.” Spurgeon says, “Yet, see, the correction is ‘in measure’: He gives us love without measure but chastisement ‘in measure.’ It is the measure of wisdom, the measure of sympathy, the measure of love, by which our chastisement is regulated. Far be it from us to rebel against appointments so divine.”³

Do you have a scar from a knife? The scar I am thinking about was not from misusing a knife, nor from an attacker, but from a surgeon. It was the best thing that ever happened to you. A scar, therefore, may indicate foolishness or wisdom depending on who caused it. When God disciplines us it is because He loves us. These are some of the principles of suffering.

The pattern of suffering. Paul explains the divine use of tribulations. Tribulation produces perseverance or endurance, the ability to continue. Perseverance produces character, the quality of being approved. Character produces hope, the expectation of something certain. As you pass through sufferings you know God better than before. You know more of His love, faithfulness, and wisdom. You can say with the psalmist, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted ...” (Psa. 119:71). Paul lists a simple pattern of suffering.

The priorities of suffering. Justification teaches us that even our sufferings are a blessing from our Father’s hand. They are sent for our good. They are not destructive but productive. Paul doesn’t say that we like them. We don’t enjoy them. We may not want them. Suffering may bring us to tears, but in our weeping we may glory in suffering. You know that God has a purpose.

Paul wants us to be filled with a wonderful sense of this love being poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. He wants us to know that the hope of glory will not disappoint us because this love is so great. What we must notice is that we do not measure the greatness of God’s love for us by our capacity to experience it. We develop a capacity to experience it by understanding the greatness of God’s love. The love of God that is poured into our hearts

² *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 11, Paragraph 5

³ Charles Spurgeon, *Faith’s Checkbook*, October 19

must never be measured by our experience of it. Rather the experience we have of God's love needs to develop a capacity to receive the sheer greatness of it. The greatness of it is not found in my heart. The greatness of it is found in what God has done for me in Jesus Christ. These are some of the priorities of suffering.

Whatever the pressures on our lives, they are not out of God's control, but God designs to use them to transform you from what you are to what He wants to make you. Under that pressure you can grow strong. Under that pressure your Christian character can be formed. Under that pressure your Christ-likeness is matured as you learn the principles of suffering, as you experience the pattern of suffering, and as you understand the priorities of suffering. The first challenge of life is suffering.

B. THE CHALLENGE OF SINFULNESS (Rom. 5:6-8)

The second challenge in verses 6-8 is sinfulness. Have you ever thought, or have you heard someone say, "I believe that God is love, but I just can't believe that He could love me. I believe that God forgives, but I can't believe that He could forgive me. I am too bad. I am too unworthy. What I have done is too wicked"? Paul asserts in these verses that God shows His love for us. God commends His love towards us. He demonstrates or sets forth His love. He wants us to be persuaded of His love. The word is used to introduce a friend. God introduces us to His love.

God wants us to be sure of His love. He commends it to us. He urges it upon us. How does God do this? He takes us to the crucifixion of Christ. That is where God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. In Paul's words, "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (5:8). The evidence of God's love is massive. It is overwhelming. It is persuasive. In the statement, "Christ died for the ungodly" (vs. 6), we can outline four thoughts: the person given; the suffering experienced; the salvation provided; and the people saved.

First is the Person given. He is Christ. He is not an angel, not the greatest of human beings. He is the Son of God. That is evidence of God's love.

The message of the Christian gospel is not to say to people who are bruised, weary, and broken: You need to learn to love yourself. That is not the gospel. The gospel does not turn you into yourself and teach you to love yourself. Our lives are overwhelmed with an awareness of sinfulness, and the way our lives are destroyed either by our sin or by someone else's sin. You do not need to love yourself. You need the forgiveness of your sins. The point is that it is not my experience that is the measure of love, but what God has done that is the measure of love. Christ died for the ungodly. He is the Person given.

Second is the suffering experienced. Christ died for the ungodly. He didn't just suffer. He was more than ill-treated. He was crucified in shame and public exposure. He died abandoned by all. He died under the wrath of God. He testified by quoting the question, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Psa. 22:1; Mark 15:34). That is evidence of God's love., the suffering experienced.

Third is the salvation provided. Christ died for the ungodly. The preposition "for" means on our behalf, on our benefit. He died to bring us a great benefit. His death was not pointless or meaningless. It accomplished something. That is evidence of God's love, the salvation provided.

Fourth is the person saved. Christ died for the ungodly. Sinful is the nature of those for whom He died. Paul remarks in verse 7 that human love is based on attraction and value. We love people who are beautiful. We love people who are kind. We love people who are attractive. God's love is different. His love is given to weak, ungodly sinners. Paul emphasizes our sinfulness. All that you can say that is bad about yourself is true. You only know a fraction of it. All that everybody could say about you that is bad, the reality is far worse. We are not good people. We are bad people. God -- knowing that we are weak, ungodly sinners, knowing the worst thing you will ever do, say, or think -- gave His Son to die for you. That is the evidence of His love, the person saved.

He didn't love us because He thought we were good. He knew we were evil. He loved us. Christ died for the ungodly. God is never going to be surprised. He will never be shocked about what sort of persons you are. He knew your wickedness before He gave His Son. How can you be uncertain that God can love you? He knew that you would not love Him enough. He loved you when you didn't love Him at all. You don't obey God the way you should. He gave His Son for you when you didn't obey Him at all. Your faith isn't strong enough. God loved you when you had no faith. He loved you when you were far worse than you are now. Are you not sure God can love you because of your sins? You are the kind of people He does love. "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (5:8).

Don't misunderstand this. The more convicted you are of your own sinfulness, the more you qualify for God's love. This is the wonder of the gospel. Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 1:15, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners ..." Jesus declared, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Mat. 9:13; Mar. 2:17; Luk. 5:32). Jesus' enemies criticized Him by saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them" (Luk. 15:2). God wants you to be sure of His love. The second challenge of life is sinfulness.

C. THE CHALLENGE OF SECURITY (Rom. 5:9-11)

The third challenge in verses 9-11 is security. Paul is talking about death, judgment, hell, and the wrath of God. We understand that suffering doesn't diminish the love of God. Suffering is one of God's ways of changing you. Our sinfulness doesn't reduce the love of God. When you think of death, are you afraid? Are you troubled about the Day of Judgment?

Paul gives us three reasons why we are secure when we think of the Day of Judgment. They are: the changed relationship; the living Savior; and the nature of justification.

The first reason for security is the changed relationship. "If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God ... much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (5:10). If God saved us when we were enemies, won't He save us when we are His children? If He saved His enemies, then He will deliver His beloved children. We have a changed relationship.

The second reason for security is the living Savior. If we were reconciled by the death of His Son, we will surely be saved by His life. What reconciled us was the dead body on the cross. Because of what Jesus did, God forgives us. The situation now is that the risen, reigning Son sits at His right hand interceding for us. If we were saved through the death of Christ, we certainly will be saved through the life of Christ.

The third reason for security is the nature of justification. "... having now been

justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him” (5:9). What does it mean to be saved? Salvation in the Bible is to be rescued from some calamity. If you are restored from sickness, you are saved. If you experience victory in battle, you are saved. Whenever anyone experiences rescue from a catastrophe they experience salvation. There are these lesser salvations and there is the ultimate salvation. This is the rescue from supreme danger, the wrath of God. The nature of justification is that God saves His people from His wrath. We are saved by God from God. John Stott summarizes by writing, “God himself gave himself to save us from himself.”⁴

Justification is God’s final verdict on a person. Justification is the Day of Judgment brought forward. When you believe on Christ, God pronounces His final, unchangeable, everlasting verdict on you. He regards you as righteous. That will never be canceled.

Jesus said in John 5:24, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.” Paul writes in Romans 8:30, “... whom He justified, these He also glorified.” When you believe in Christ heaven is certain. All your sins are forgiven. You will not be condemned for them. Charles Spurgeon said, “If you will look carefully into justification you will see heaven hidden within it.”

The reason for many of our spiritual problems is we don’t realize what justification really is. It is ultimate, decisive, and final. We keep acting as if we have something more to prove. You don’t have to do anything to satisfy God. Jesus has satisfied God for us. When you grasp this your life will be transformed. So Paul writes, “... we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ ...” (5:11). We rejoice not only in the gifts of God, but truly in the gift of God Himself. Because of justification you who repent and believe are secure.

Conclusion: This is the challenge of life, to rejoice in God. Is this how you are known? Do others recognize that you are rejoicing in God? Are we a congregation who, in the midst of the perplexities of life, really rejoice in God? Or, are we a congregation who is critical of others and burdened with religious duties? Do others see the joy of salvation in us?

An elder in another Reformed church illustrates the challenges of life. One of his two sons fathered a child, then married the mother, but she deserted them. The elder’s own wife left him and the divorce became final. Because of budget cut-backs he could only work part-time as a physical therapist and was scrambling to find work. In a letter he wrote the following.

“With much time to myself I have been able to penetrate a good many of the Puritan writers. Oh, I’m so at home with them. What gracious, humble friendship they offer. Such love for the Scriptures, and they give so freely. I weep for the condition of our churches, what we’ve settled for. Can our Father be pleased? Though Jesus brings us into that most eternal and pure relationship with His Father, I am an intruder. Oh grace beyond understanding.”⁵

The psalmist, Asaph, wrote, “Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Psa. 73:25-26). The great need of the church is to return to the

⁴ John Stott, *Romans*, p. 115.

⁵ David Helseth, 01/06/1999

truths of the gospel. The great comfort of God's people is summarized in *Heidelberg Catechism* 1, "What is thy only comfort in life and in death?"

"That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who with His precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and redeemed me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me, that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must work together for my salvation. Wherefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me heartily willing and ready henceforth to live unto Him."

Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God. We have access into grace. We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. We glory in our sufferings. We are saved from our sinfulness. We rejoice in our security. Through Jesus Christ we have received reconciliation. Our current suffering, sinfulness, and security are resolved in Jesus Christ who enables us to rejoice in God in the challenges of life.

Resources:

Edward Donnelly, **Coping with Life**, Romans 5:3-11, 09/12/2010, Trinity Reformed Presbyterian Church, NI, www.sermonaudio.com

Sinclair B. Ferguson, **Rejoicing in Suffering?**, Romans 5:1-5, 03/22/2009, First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, SC, www.sermonaudio.com

R.C. Sproul, **Christ in Our Place**, Romans 5:6-9, 03/05/2006, www.ligonier.org/learn/sermons/christ-place

The Book of Psalms for Singing: 73A, 73B, 73C, 119I