

## Justification and My Growth in Godliness

Romans 5:3-5

*Studies in Romans #19*

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Over the past several weeks you've noticed that I have tried to make the connection between what our text says and what we're going through as a congregation. You may have sensed a sense of urgency. Yes! It is urgent that we come together with one heart and with one mind so that we can flourish as a congregation, not languish. In 15+ years we've gone through seasons of growth and seasons of loss. And I pray you are aware enough to notice that we have been in a down season that I mentioned is affecting us numerically, financially, and most especially, spiritually. We need to grow as a congregation. But I want to say to you this morning that we should not expect to grow from the outside in unless we commit ourselves to growing from the inside out. In other words, we cannot expect people to find the healing for their souls in this place unless we are healthy. Too many of us are hit and miss in our attendance. Way too many of us will be absent when God is present tonight. There are members here that do not know who some of you are because you do not come out of yourself and greet. We are way too concerned with what is going on in our own lives to notice the needs and hurts of others. We need to grow.

And that's what our text is all about this morning. From Romans 3:21-4:25 Paul belabored the point that we are justified by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. And so when we come to Romans 5:1 we revel in its words: "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith." But we cannot just revel in the truth that "we have been justified by faith." Paul

also says “therefore, since.” As we revel in this truth our lives must also go on to reflect this truth. What Paul is saying used to be expressed by our old writers with the word appropriation. That means we need not only to believe with our minds God’s verdict for us in justification but that we need to receive it, embrace it, and make it our own so that it begins to change our hearts and lives.

And so we saw last week that justification benefits us in practical ways. It means “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 1). It means “through [Christ] we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand” (v. 2). And it means that through Christ “we rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (v. 2). This is enough spiritual food for us to sit at the banquet table and satiate our desires for a lifetime! Now comes the second course! **Not only that** (v. 3).

### **Rejoicing in Suffering (v. 3)**

When we appropriate our justification, we grow by *rejoicing in suffering*: **Not only that but we rejoice in our sufferings.** “Are you kidding me? How am I supposed to express exuberant praise when I suffer as a Christian?”

Don’t forget who is saying this? If there was anyone who knew what it meant to suffer as a Christian, it was the apostle Paul. Incidentally, this is why coming to the evening service is so important. You can’t flourish spiritually off one sermon a week any more than you can flourish off one meal a day in your ordinary life. You need to hear more of the Word and see how all it’s various parts inter-connect. What Paul says here has been illustrated for us so graphically in our evening series through the book of Acts.

In Acts 17 he was arrested unjustly in Philippi, placed in the innermost room of the prison, and chained by his hands and feet. But what did we hear echoing down the halls of that prison? Songs of praise! He said to the Corinthians that he boasted confidently in his labors, imprisonments, beatings even near death with the lash, with rods, and with stones, shipwrecks, dangerous journeys, hunger and thirst, and anxiety for the state of the church, saying, “If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness” (2 Cor. 11:16–33).

Can you imagine if you went through all that? I mean, I look at Paul’s list in 2 Corinthians 11 and identify with the anxiety and stress for this church, and then feel depressed and despondent but then start to misinterpret God’s providence: “He’s forgotten us and forsaken us!”

But what is Paul saying? You were once-and-for-all justified before the tribunal of God’s justice! Your suffering is not a sign that God is angry with you again or has revoked your status. No! Does he discipline? Yes, according to Hebrews 12:7ff. But he does not punish you. He corrects you, he does not condemn you. And so God wants us in this time in which we are in a season of feeling low to glory that we have him and that we have each other. Can you do that with me? What are our two biggest assets as a church? The Lord and each other! We have what we need to flourish right here! Rejoice!

### **Growing in Rejoicing (vv. 3–4)**

And as we rejoice in sufferings because of our justification, there is further *growing in rejoicing*. Look at verses 3 and 4. Now turn over to Romans 8:29–30. There we read what has been called “the golden chain of salvation”: those predestined are called and

justified and glorified. But back in Romans 5:3-4 Paul fills in the blanks, so to speak.

Children, have you ever had a sheet with a math equation or a sentence with some words but also some blanks? And your job was to fill in the blanks to make the sentence make sense? That's what Paul is doing here. "I know that I was predestined, I know that I was called, I know that I was justified, and I know that I will be justified (Paul is so certain that he speaks of it in the past tense), but my life looks way different." The reason is that the path to glory is on the road of suffering. Romans 5:3-4 is the golden chain of sanctification. How do I grow in my ability to rejoice in suffering on the way to glory?

**Knowing that suffering produces endurance** (v. 3). The Christian life is not a sprint; it's a marathon. I can only imagine what it's like in real war, but I know there are times when we are ambushed by the enemy and we have to stay put, pinned down, and wait for reinforcements. I think there's a lesson in here for us as a congregation. Why is the Lord allowing the difficulties we are facing? He wants us to learn **endurance**, which is patience for him to visit us again with the reinforcement of his Holy Spirit:

"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness." (Jas. 1:2-3)

"In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1:6-7)

**And [knowing that] endurance produces character** (v. 4). That word **character** speaks of approval. Paul speaks of Timothy's "proven character" (Phil. 2:22). For example, sometimes in a new job you have a probation period. During this time you are being tested to see if you will work out for the company, and if so, then you will be approved for

a fulltime job. When you are patient under the Lord's hand in every time of life, the Lord grants you a sense of his approval. The Lord wants us to come out of this season of congregational life with a renewed sense of his approving smile upon us!

**And** [knowing that] **character produces hope**. Notice how Paul brings us back full circle. Justification benefits us with the ability and reason to “rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (v. 2). That means because we are justified before God already we can rejoice in this life of our future glorification in the presence of God. And Paul is saying that our sufferings produce patience, which produces character, which produces the hope we rejoice in now for the future! It why he says in 8:18, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

Our Catechism says it like this:

How does the knowledge of God's creation and providence help us?  
We can be patient when things go against us, thankful when things go well, and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing will separate us from his love. (Q&A 28)

I'm clinging to that promise, are you?

### **The Reason for Rejoicing (v. 5)**

So my being acceptable to God in justification gives me the ability to rejoice in this life's sufferings as well as a continual growth in that ability. But I want you to see how Paul concludes this little section. Behind all this is *the reason for rejoicing* in verse 5: **and hope does not put us to shame**. Remember all the way back in 1:16 where Paul gave the theme and purpose of this letter? “For I am not...” What did he say there? “For I am not ashamed of the gospel.” I am not ashamed of the gospel now because it makes me

righteous before God and I will not be ashamed on the final day when I stand before God and he pronounces to me after all my sufferings, “Well done!”

What is the reason for all this? For the first time in Romans Paul mentions God’s love and the Holy Spirit: **because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.** While we are suffering down here below waiting to be received into glory up there, God is saying to us, “I love you, my child; I’m right here for you.” And the more the world turns its back on us causing us suffering, the more God turns his face to us to reveal his love.

And this love **has been poured into our hearts.** Note the past tense. And it’s the same verb used in Acts 2 of the once-for-all outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Paul is saying that when you put your trust in Jesus Christ and God declares you righteous because of him, you experience your own little personal Pentecost. And when you receive him, you have him forever: **who has been given to us.**

Why is the Holy Spirit so important? Because when Jesus ascended to heaven he then sent the Spirit in his place, so to speak, and when we received the Spirit, we are receiving a down payment from Jesus himself that he will come again for us and make us his completely and finally (Eph. 1:13-14).

And so he is the key to our growing in godliness as a congregation. He is the key to our joy in trials, to our learning patience, to our experiencing God’s approval, and to our hoping for the life to come, but also, to our hoping for a fresh outpouring of God’s grace in our midst. Amen.