

# **Romans: The Good News of God**

## **Rejoicing in Suffering**

*Romans 5:3-5*

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# Rejoicing in Suffering

## Scripture

In Romans 5:1-11 we read of several blessings of justification. Let's read Romans 5:1-11, paying special attention to verses 3-5, which is our text for today:

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup> Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup> **More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup> and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.**

<sup>6</sup> For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— <sup>8</sup> but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. <sup>11</sup> More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. (Romans 5:1-11)

## Introduction

Paul wrote the fifth chapter of Romans to teach those who have been justified by God through faith in Jesus Christ that they also have the blessings of justification.

We have already examined three blessings. They are peace with God, standing in grace, and rejoicing in hope. Today, we ex-

amine a fourth blessing, which is rejoicing in suffering.

Lake Okeechobee in south central Florida is this country's second largest lake. You may know that following last summer's drought, the lake hit its lowest level on record. In some areas the shoreline receded more than a mile, creating areas of dry lakebed. This allowed scientists and archaeologists to look into the state's past and uncover hidden treasures. Many historical artifacts have been recovered, with some dating back more than 500 years.

Pottery shards, arrowheads, weaving tools, and pendants now lay on top of the dry ground, providing clues about the Native Americans that lived in the area hundreds of years ago.

Evidence of the Florida tourism and fishing industries were also uncovered, including a fishing trawler from 1904 that probably sank during a hurricane in 1928, and evidence of paddleboats that once ferried tourists around the area.

All these items have rested just beneath the surface of the water for many years. It took a drought to bring them out into the light of day again.<sup>1</sup>

Personal droughts and difficulties and trials are never easy. But God often uses those times to reveal many new truths to us. And, if we respond properly, we shall learn to rejoice in suffering.

## Review

As I mentioned, in Romans 5 the apostle Paul explains the blessings of justification by faith. There are a number of blessings, and before we begin today's lesson, let's quickly review what we have learned so far.

### I. Our Position in Christ (5:1a)

Let us notice in the first place our position in Christ.

The apostle Paul said in Romans 5:1a, "Therefore, since we

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<sup>1</sup> "Beneath the Water: A Window to History," Jeffrey Kofman, *ABC News* (9-13-07).

have been justified by faith. . . .”

The apostle Paul begins by stating our position in Christ. If we are Christians, then we have been justified by faith.

## **II. Our Possessions in Christ (5:1b-2)**

But what are the blessings of our justification? What are our possessions in Christ?

The apostle Paul said in Romans 5:1b, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, *we have*. . .” certain possessions.

### *A. Peace with God (5:1b)*

Our first possession in Christ is peace with God.

The apostle Paul said in Romans 5:1b, “. . . we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

### *B. Standing in Grace (5:2a)*

Our second possession in Christ is standing in grace.

The apostle Paul said in Romans 5:2a, “Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand.”

### *C. Rejoicing in Hope (5:2b)*

Our third possession in Christ is rejoicing in hope.

The apostle Paul said in Romans 5:2b, “. . . and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

## **Lesson**

Today, in Romans 5:3-5 we come to a fourth blessing of justification, a fourth possession in Christ.

D. *Rejoicing in Suffering (5:3-5)*

Our fourth possession in Christ is rejoicing in suffering.

The apostle Paul said in Romans 5:3-5, **“More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”**

The apostle Paul said that Christians **rejoice in our sufferings**, however strange, abnormal, or even irrational that may seem.

Why do Christians **rejoice in our sufferings**? Because, according to the apostle Paul, that is evidence of yet one more blessing of justification.

I want you to notice how emphatic the apostle Paul is about this point. He begins by stressing that as great as our other possessions in Christ are, and they are great and wonderful, this fourth possession in Christ is greater yet. He begins by saying, **“More than that. . . .”**

We could ask, “More than what?”

The apostle Paul is saying, “More than the previous possessions we have in Christ, more than the previous blessings of justification, is the one I am about to share with you.”

And so Paul says, **“More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing . . . .”** The word **knowing** is the key word in the sentence. Christians **rejoice in our sufferings** because of what we *know* about it.

And what is it that we know about suffering?

1. The Problem of Suffering

First, let me make a comment about the problem of suffering.

For many people the problem of suffering and evil in the world is their biggest problem with Christianity. Some people call into question either God’s existence or his power in the face of suf-

fering and evil.

We saw this, for example, after the attacks in this country on 9/11 where approximately 3,000 people were killed. We saw it again in December 2004 after a massive tsunami killed more than 250,000 people around the rim of the Indian Ocean. Over the following weeks, newspapers and magazines were full of letters and articles asking, “Where was God?”

One reporter wrote, “If God is God, he’s not good. If God is good, he’s not God. You can’t have it both ways, especially after the Indian Ocean catastrophe.”<sup>2</sup>

Despite such a confident assertion, the presence of suffering does not prove that God either does not exist or that he is not good.

Frail, finite and fallen human beings simply cannot define the person and attributes of God. We cannot tell God who he is and what he is like. But rather, an all-powerful, infinite, and impeccable God must define and describe himself for us. God tells us who he is and what he is like in his Word.

And when God tells us about himself he is quite clear that he allows suffering and evil in this world.

But why? Why does God allow suffering in the world?

## 2. The Purposes of Suffering

Second, let me suggest the purposes of suffering.

There are a number of purposes that are given in the entire Word of God as to why God allows suffering. Let me state some.<sup>3</sup>

*First, God allows suffering to correct us.* This is suffering that is meant to get us back on to the path of righteousness when we have strayed from it.

Good parents do this when they spank their young children. A child may be doing something that he has been told not to do.

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<sup>2</sup> Ron Rosenbaum, “Disaster Ignites Debate: Was God in the Tsunami?” *New York Observer*, January 10, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> These purposes are suggested by James Montgomery Boice in his commentary titled *Romans, Volume 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 529-531.

However, he persists. And so a parent will firmly spank the child to teach him that what he is doing is wrong. A good parent doesn't spank his child because he takes delight in inflicting pain. No. He spans his child because he loves him *and* he is correcting wrongdoing.

In the same way our heavenly Father sometimes allows suffering because he loves us and he is correcting wrongdoing. The author to the Hebrews says, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives" (Hebrews 12:5-6).

I mention this purpose of suffering first, because the first thing we should do when suffering comes into our lives is to ask God whether it is for our correction. If it is, we need to confess our wrongdoing and return to the path of righteousness.

*Second, God allows suffering to glorify himself.* When we suffer we must first ask if God is correcting us. But, when we see someone else suffering, we must not simply assume that God is correcting that person. No. It is entirely possible that God is allowing suffering in that person's life in order to glorify himself.

How can that be? Think of the story in John 9. We are told of the healing of a man who had been blind from birth. This man was apparently sitting at one of the gates of the temple when Jesus and his disciples passed by. The disciples made the mistake I just mentioned. They assumed that he was suffering so that God could correct some sin in his life. They asked Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2).

Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him." (John 9:3).

Jesus was teaching that the reason for the man's blindness was so that God could glorify himself in this man's life.

Sometimes God allows suffering for no other reason than to glorify himself. Some people find that difficult to accept, but not so for the mature Christian who understands that our chief end is to

glorify God—and God may do so by whatever means he chooses.

*Third, God allows suffering as a part of cosmic warfare.* This is illustrated by the story of Job from the Old Testament.

The story begins with Job as a happy and favored man, with a fine family and many possessions. But suddenly he suffered the loss of his many herds and the death of his ten children. And he did not know why. His friends came to try to help him sort it through. The Book of Job is a record of frail, finite and fallen human beings wrestling with the problem of suffering.

But *we* know why Job suffered, because the book tells us why at the very beginning. It was because of a conflict between Satan and God. Satan had made the accusation that Job loved and served God only because God had blessed Job materially.

“But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face,” said Satan (Job 1:11).

God knew that this was not so. But he allowed Satan to have his way to show that Job loved God for himself and not for what he could get out of him. Job lost everything, and in a posture of abject mourning he still worshiped God, saying, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21). Then we are told, “In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong” (Job 1:22).

This story explains perhaps most of the suffering Christians endure. Clearly both Christians and non-Christians suffer and, for example, get cancer. The Christian affirms that God is sovereign control of this universe, and worships him in spite of his suffering. The non-Christian, however, is fatalistic at best (“What will be will be!”) or resentful at worst (“If there is a God, I hate him!”).

God is showing that the purpose of life lies in a right relationship to him and not in pleasant circumstances.

For every Christian who loses a son or daughter there is a non-Christian who experiences the same thing.

For every Christian who loses a job there is a non-Christian who also loses a job.



The Christian, however, acknowledges and submits to God, whereas the non-Christian does not.

*And fourth, God allows suffering to grow us.* This purpose of God in suffering is what Paul presents in Romans 5:3-5, namely, that God uses our troubles, trials, and tribulations to form Christian character.

This is what happened to Joseph, the beloved son of Jacob and Rachel. Joseph was the eleventh of twelve sons, and he was the apple of his father's eye. Joseph made himself unpopular with his brothers because he told Jacob stories about them. One day they sold Joseph to slave traders who were on their way to Egypt.

Joseph spent years in Egypt as a slave to Potiphar. Then, when Joseph refused the sexual advances of Potiphar's wife, he was thrown into prison, where he suffered for several more years.

Finally, Joseph was able to interpret the Pharaoh's dreams. He was elevated to Prime Minister of Egypt. Years later he was reconciled to his brothers. Eventually, Jacob died.

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him" (Genesis 50:15).

But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:19-20).

God allowed suffering to come into Joseph's life in order to grow him. God used the troubles, trials, and tribulations to form Christian character in Joseph. And God does that with us too.

### 3. The Benefits of Suffering

Third, let's examine now the benefits of suffering.

Having approached our subject from the perspective of God's purposes, we are now ready to see what Paul says suffering will do in the lives of Christians. What benefits does suffering bring?

*First, suffering produces endurance.* Paul says, "**More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering**

**produces endurance” (5:3).**

The word translated **endurance** is *hypomone*. The first part of this word is a prefix meaning “under” or “below.” The second part is a word meaning an “abode” or “living place.” So the word as a whole means to “live under something.”

If we take this word together with the word for “suffering,” we get the full idea, which is to live under difficult circumstances without trying to wriggle out from under them.

We express the idea positively when we say, “Hang in there, brother.” **Endurance** is hanging in when the going gets tough.

So here is one thing that separates the immature person from the mature one, the new Christian from one who has been in the Lord’s school longer. The new believer tries to avoid the difficulties and get out from under them. The experienced Christian is steady under fire and does not quit his post.

*Second, suffering produces character.* Paul says in verse 4a, **“and endurance produces character.”**

The Greek word for **character** is *dokime*, which means something “tested” or “approved.” In 1 Corinthians 9:27 Paul is speaking of self-discipline and says, “But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.” The word for “disqualified” is the same word for character, except in 1 Corinthians it is in the negative.

What does Paul mean then?

Silver and gold coins were made quite roughly in those days, not milled to exact sizes as our coins are, and people would often cheat by carefully trimming off some of the excess metal. We know they did this because hundreds of laws were passed against the practice. After people had trimmed away enough metal, they would sell it for new coins.

When coins had been trimmed for a long time, they eventually got so light that the merchants would not take them anymore. Then a coin was said to be *adokimos*, “disqualified.”

This is what Paul is referring to. He is saying that he does not want to be disqualified, but rather to be judged “approved” as a re-

sult of his sufferings.

It is the same in our Romans text, where Paul says that the sufferings of life or the pressures of merely trying to live for Christ in our godless environment produce endurance, which in turn shows that we are approved.

Ray Stedman, who discusses these benefits well in his Romans commentary, tells at this point of a time he once asked a nine-year-old boy, “What do you want to be when you grow up?”

The boy said, “A returned missionary.”

He did not want to be just a missionary, but a returned one—one who had been through the fires, had them behind him, and was shown to have been of real value in God’s work. That is what is meant by **“and endurance produces character.”**

*And third, suffering produces hope.* Paul says in verse 4b, **“and character produces hope.”**

Here we have come full circle. We started with **hope** in verse 2. We saw it as a certainty of what will one day be ours, though we do not possess it yet.

Then we looked at our suffering. We saw why we can rejoice in them. It is because they lead to endurance, endurance to an approved character, and character to an even more steadfast certainty. And all this is our possession in Christ.

## Conclusion

Suffering is not harmful. On the contrary it is beneficial.

In 1950 when missionaries were kicked out of China, there were less than 1 million Christians. Today, after almost 60 years of Communist rule and much suffering, it is estimated that there are as many as 100 million Christians.

Someone once asked, “If God loves the Chinese church so much, why has he allowed so much suffering to come upon it?”

But a better question is, “If God loves the American church so much, why has he not allowed suffering to come upon it?”  
Amen.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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**PRAAYER:**

Our Father, thank you for the blessings of justification by faith.

Thank you for the possessions we have in Christ: peace with God, standing in grace, rejoicing in hope, and rejoicing in suffering.

Oh God, we do not rejoice *for* suffering, but rather, we rejoice *in* our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

O Lord, these blessings of justification are ours because we have been saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

If there is anyone here today who does not know Christ savingly, please grant that person faith alone in Christ alone by your grace alone.

And all of this I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Go and glorify God in all that you think, do, and say! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.