

**Romans 5:3-5 (ESV)** <sup>3</sup> *Not only that, but 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.*

As Pastor John Piper open a sermon on these verses, he asks as important question. John asks, "What happens to make a person a Christian?" It is an important question because that is the question Paul has been answering in the letter to the Roman.

Paul has introduced us to the gospel of Jesus Christ, the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.

He sets out before us the right and reasonable wrath of God and the universal condition of human sin and guilt upon which that wrath comes.

He sets forth that every human being, without exception has need of salvation, and that that salvation comes to through one source: faith in Jesus Christ.

God sent His one and only Son, Jesus, into the world specifically to live and die for sinners as our representative and substitute. God sent Jesus into the world to die on the cross and to rise from the dead victorious over death and hell for everyone who believes in Him.

What happens to make a person a Christian? God the Holy Spirit opens the eyes and the heart of one whom God calls to see in the gospel that Christ is trustworthy. That Christ is Himself the most worthy treasure a person can gain in this life in the world. And because the Spirit of God makes alive the heart of man that is otherwise dead in its trespasses and sins, because the Holy Spirit of God gives us faith to believe in the Son of God, our hearts trusts in Christ.

What happens to make a person a Christian? God-given faith happens. And when that faith happens, we are justified before God. We are made right with God. Our sins are forgiven and we are made new.

I love how Piper describes this:

*... by that faith the Spirit of God unites us to Christ so that his death becomes our death, and his life becomes our life. God laid on him the iniquities that we performed, and God laid on us the righteousness that he performed. He takes our sin, though he didn't perform it. And we take his righteousness, though we didn't perform it. And so by the faith that unites us to Christ we stand before God forgiven for all our sins and righteous with the imputed righteousness of Christ.*

- John Piper, *We Exult in Our Tribulations*, Nov. 14, 1999

The question we are asking is a subsequent question, not less important question, but the right question to ask after we ask, "What happens to make a person a Christian?" We are asking this: What does a person gain when through the Spirit they put their faith in Jesus and are justified by faith? Is there only a right standing with God, which is glorious and wonderful and amazing and humbling in and of itself? Is there only the application of forgiveness and the removal of wrath, or does God have more for us as a result of justification?

Paul answers our question here in Romans 5:1-5. He tells us that those who put their faith in

Jesus, those who are justified by faith alone in Christ alone through grace alone have

- 5:1 Peace with God
- 5:2 Access to Standing Grace
- 5:2 Hope of the Glory
- 5:3 Change of Life Perspective
- 5:5 God's Love Poured Into Our Hearts
- 5:5 The Holy Spirit Given to Us.

Today we are focusing on an astounding personal outcome of justification by faith. Listen to what Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit and writing for us the word of God, says. Not only do we have peace with God. Not only do we have access to standing grace. Not only do we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God because we stand in grace and peace with God. Not only that and more than that, we rejoice in our sufferings.

**Romans 5:3 (ESV) *Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing . . .***

What is he talking about? A person who puts their faith in Jesus, who is justified by faith and has peace with God and stands in grace and lives in hope of the glory of God also has **a changed perspective on suffering?** What does he mean? Well, exactly what he says. Justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone yields a new perspective on life experiences.

Really, this doesn't come as too much a surprise, this idea that the work of God in bringing sinners to Himself for His glory and their joy will result in us seeing things differently, an altered perspective. God perpetually acts in the lives of those he loves and chooses to change our fallen and corrupt and sinful human perspective.

Adam and Eve sinned. They thought they could cover their sin and shame with fig leaves. God acted to alter their perspective.

Moses, in Egypt, the adopted Hebrew son of the Pharaoh, daughter, thought he could emancipate Israel in his own way through murder and violence and personal effort. God acted in his life to alter his perspective.

Peter, equally enthusiastic for the will of God, thought he could protect Jesus from the cross by taking the sword and the ear of a servant. God acted in Peter's life to alter his perspective.

Simon the magician heard the preaching of the gospel from Phillip and believed. Peter and John were sent from Jerusalem to Samaria where Simon lived. The two disciples laid hands on the new believers and those believers were filled with the Holy Spirit. Luke tells us that when Simon, a man greedy for power and fame saw them lay hands and the people filled with the Spirit, "He offered them money, <sup>19</sup> saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." (Acts 8:18-19) Peter spoke a dire curse upon Simon and called him to repentance and genuine faith. God acted in Simon the magician's life to alter his perspective.

And with the coming of the gospel and faith in Jesus God acts in our lives to alter our perspectives as well. We have had the mind of the world and now God gives us the mind of Christ. We have loved the

things of the world and now God empowers us to love the things of God. We have loved self above all others and now God moves us to love Him above all else. Paul writes of believers, of those justified by faith in Jesus, in **2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)**,

***Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.***

So Paul says of this new creation in Christ, not only do we stand in grace and hope in the eternal glory of God, we rejoice in our sufferings.

**What does he mean by sufferings?** Last evening, former President Donald Trump, campaigning in Pennsylvania was shot in an apparent assassination attempt. Not everyone want to see him come to a second term as President. Some will apparently go as far as taking his life to prevent the possibility. Often, when we think of suffering in the Bible, we think of this kind of opposition, this kind of persecution. Our perspective is that suffering is what persecuted Christians in other lands confront. Suffering is crisis, deadly, impossible.

But Paul means something else here. The word he uses for suffering, he uses elsewhere in 2 Corinthians 12:9 where he writes of a heavenly vision and relentless prayer and God's sovereign answer:

**2 Corinthians 12:9 (ESV) *But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.***

Where Paul writes of his "weaknesses," he uses the same word he uses here in Romans 5:3 for "sufferings." So, if he describes his weaknesses further in 2 Corinthians 12, which he does, we get a better sense of what he means by "sufferings" in Romans 5:3. Listen to what he says,

**2 Corinthians 12:10 (ESV) *For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.***

Sufferings are not just those critical moments of overwhelming circumstances that threaten to sweep you away like a flood. Sufferings are any test of faith, any circumstance or situation that causes you to ponder the character of God's goodness or His commitment to your joy or the existence of His love or the power of His promise. Anything that makes you go, "God, are you there? Do you even care? Can you hear me? Are you listening? Do I even matter to you? Is my faith real? Are you real?" Anything that tests your faith is included in this idea of "sufferings."

One pastor has observed, "Anything that makes life harder and threatens your faith in the goodness and power and wisdom of God is [suffering]."

And Paul says, those who are justified by faith rejoice in these sufferings? How can this be? Because of what we come to know through faith in Jesus. Through faith we know that suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us because of the promise of God we have in the Holy Spirit who fills us with the love of God.

Those who put their faith in Jesus learn that suffering produces *hupomone*. Patience, endurance, stamina, perseverance. Faith looks to Christ in suffering and finds in Him all we need to stand, to move forward. We find the anchor for our soul that is not swept away. We find the solid ground upon which to build the house of life. We find the foundation of God that is unmoved when all else give way. Faith turns suffering into strength.

We also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that endurance proves the power and authenticity of faith. When we come through sufferings faith intact and stronger, we know faith is real, genuine.

And when having passed through the fire of suffering and endured and been proven genuine, we will know that we are genuine. That we are real Christians, not fake, not false, not Simon the magician just looking for power and fame, not simply a fool leaning on a crutch as one former Minnesota governor said of Christians. Sufferings and the process they engage give us victory over fear of falsehood when we have stood the test of faith.

Every single one of us justified by faith in Christ will suffer. But we will suffer and rejoice because we have a new perspective altered by faith. We will see in our sufferings the goodness of God, the faithfulness of Christ, and the power of the Spirit. We will know that our sufferings are not random, meaningless chaos, but the hand of God at work to assure us that we are in fact filled with the Spirit of God, the love of God, and the life of the Son of God, Jesus our Savior.

In our sufferings and endurance and character building and hope we find faith is real, God is real, Christ is real, we are real and we rejoice because we stand in grace that is real, peace that is real, and an outcome of eternal glory that is more real than the sufferings we suffer.

Trouble will come. Sufferings will be endured. Faith will be tested. Your heart will be assured. Your walk with Christ will be strengthened. Your hope will grow. Grace will be enough.

Rejoice. Lift up your voice, rejoice. Again I say, Rejoice!