

Will the “By Faith Way” Work?

A Study on Romans 5:1-5

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To this point Paul has been dealing with the elementary, introductory truths of Christianity. In Romans 1:18–3:20, Paul proved all men to be sinners, separated from God, in complete ruin, and devoid of any righteousness that would make them acceptable to God. In 3:21–4:25 Paul pointed out that God has provided a way whereby men can have a righteousness that makes them acceptable to God and sets them free forever from God’s wrath. This righteousness is found in the death of Jesus Christ for sin. Christ died as a substitute for men to free them from the slave market of sin, and he will give his righteousness to all who will believe that he died for their sins. Salvation is by God’s grace, and is appropriated through personal faith in Jesus Christ.

From 5:1 to the end of the book, Paul no longer deals with truths about birth but truths about growth — the way to maturity, power, and effective Christian service.

Wherever the Christian church is weak (and it is weak in many places), and wherever Christians are weak individually, it is because they have not become spiritually mature. There are many Christians who have been saved for ten, twenty, and perhaps even forty years, who are still living in Romans 1-4. They have not graduated into Romans 5-16. They keep learning over and over again the same truths about salvation, but never go into much depth or maturity in the things of the Lord. They are babes in spiritual things.

In Romans 5:1-11 Paul deals with the question, “Will the ‘by faith way’ work?” If salvation, from the human response, depends upon exercising faith in Christ, what will happen when trials and testings come? Will faith hold out? Is this method safe? Will it bring me to the certainty of completed salvation? Paul answers this from both the negative (the “faith way” will not fail in suffering, vv. 1-5) and the positive (the “faith way” will succeed because if God has done the most for his enemies in saving them, he will not fail to do the least for his friends, vv. 6-11).

FIT FOR HEAVEN — Romans 5:1-2

Paul, when writing inspired Scripture, points out three things that automatically happen to a person the moment he believes in Jesus Christ as personal Saviour. He receives: 1) peace with God; 2) access to God; and 3) the certain hope of sharing the glory of God (heaven). These three things have to do with the believer’s position or standing before God. All Christians enjoy these same blessings immediately, permanently and continuously.

“Therefore being justified by faith.” The “therefore” takes us back to all that Paul has said about justification by faith. A person can be declared righteous before God by receiving the work of Christ for his sins.

“Having been justified” is the correct translation, for justification is a standing before God, not a state. It is a once-and-for-all act that takes place the moment a person trusts Christ, and it is irrevocable.

“We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” This is not the peace of God, but peace with God. It is objective, not subjective, and deals with position, not experience. Before justification, the sinner is God’s enemy; he is at war with God because of his rebellion to God. But through Christ’s death for sin man can be brought to the place of a friend. Where once there was warfare, there is peace. A person can know that he is at peace with God and not under God’s wrath if he will but believe in Jesus Christ.

“By whom also we have access by faith unto this grace wherein we stand.” Because of the grace of justification we, as positionally forgiven and righteous sinners, have access to God. We have free admission to God. As sinners, we are accepted before God because of what Christ did for us, and we have the right and privilege of coming to him at any time and any place.

Very few people have access to the President of the United States. The majority find it impossible to have a private interview with him. Only those who have some claim upon his time have this privilege. What a contrast to the newest or weakest Christian who can have an audience with the King of Kings. The weakest sinner who trusts Christ is placed in his presence and made to stand there. What a privilege!

“And rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” Christians have an absolute and certain assurance of heaven. If we have been justified, then we know we shall be glorified:

“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18).

“When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:4).

“Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Phil. 3:21).

The certainty of heaven causes the Christian to rejoice and sing, “When the roll is called up yonder I’ll be there!

Justification, peace with God, access to God, and certainty of heaven are the possessions of all Christians. These things fit us for heaven, but they do not fit us to live on this earth. This is why there are so many Christians who are ready for heaven, but not at all prepared to live on earth. They have never graduated from the simple truths of salvation and pushed on to the deeper and useful truths of sanctification.

FIT FOR EARTH — Romans 5:3-5

In these verses Paul shows that the “by faith way” of salvation will stand when trials and testings come, that the trials will not only be withstood, but will actually strengthen the true Christian.

“And not only so.” Here is the key to understanding this section. The translation could be, “Not only that.” Beyond the truth of rejoicing in the absolute assurance of heaven, we rejoice in our sufferings.

“But we glory in tribulations also.” The Christian is to have exultant rejoicing in tribulations, sufferings and afflictions. Learning to accept and rejoice in the sufferings of life is one of the first steps towards progressive victory in the Christian life. Paul says that in the worst things in life the Christian is to rejoice — in heartaches, in sorrows and disappointments, in tears and sufferings. This is contrary to the thinking of the world. The world pities itself and others in suffering, but the Christian philosophy is different because suffering is part of the outworking of salvation.

It is normal Christian living to rejoice in suffering. God expects us to glory in tribulation. Anything less than this is subnormal Christianity. Have you learned to rejoice in suffering, or do you still gripe, complain, grumble and murmur about all the circumstances that come?

“Knowing that tribulation worketh patience.” The Christian knows that suffering develops patience, endurance, and perseverance. When sufferings come the Christian accepts them from the hand of the Lord, and instead of folding under the pressure, he lays hold of God more diligently by faith, trusting God to deliver in his time and way. He perseveres in faith.

Most of us realize that all men will have suffering, but we do not understand that suffering is absolutely necessary for our Christian development. Somehow we feel that

because we are Christians God should excuse us somewhat from trials and testings. Not so! Suffering is essential for fellowship with Christ. Paul said, “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Phil. 3:10). We never lay hold of God more than when we are suffering. When trouble comes we go on our knees.

A Christian cannot glory in suffering until he believes in the sovereignty of God, that God is in control of everything that happens in his life. No circumstance of the Christian’s life simply happens; it comes by the choice of God: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). One of the marks of a mature Christian is that he is beginning to thank God for adversity as well as blessing; he can rejoice in sorrow as well as happiness. No person can change the sovereign plan and will of God for men. Things we have no control over are going to come into our lives. We cannot change God’s plan, but we can change our attitude about God’s plan. There is a big difference between acceptance of God’s will and rejoicing in God’s will. All circumstances have been brought by God to develop our Christian character.

I once went fishing on the lake with a fine fellow who was not a Christian, but who was definitely interested in the things of the Lord. We were caught in a heavy rainstorm while still on the lake. As we came near the dock, we realized that our car was parked on a clay road at the bottom of a steep hill. We jumped into the car and started up the hill, but the wheels began to spin and dig into the clay. I got out and started to push. Mud was splashing all over me. As I gave one big push I slipped and fell. Then I was covered with mud from my shoulders down. When we finally reached the top of the hill, my friend said, “I’m sorry this trip has been such a disappointment, Jack. We didn’t catch any fish, and then you fell in the mud.”

I turned to him and said, “That’s okay. The Lord had this day all planned out for me and I thank him for it.”

The fellow looked at me and said, “I’d give anything, anything, to believe like that — that God had my whole life planned.”

“You can, if you will believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins and believe what God teaches in the Bible,” I answered. How wonderful it is to know that everything is planned by God, and that we can rest in, rejoice with, and give thanks for his plan for our lives.

“And patience, experience.” “Experience” is a word that means “to test,” with the idea of approval. When testing comes, we persevere or endure by laying hold of God. When we

do this, we are approved of God, and this is a proof to ourselves that we are really Christians and that God can and does help us in the midst of tribulation and suffering. Tribulations build Christian character and confidence.

“And experience, hope.” When tribulations test us and we meet the test by responding more wholeheartedly to God, this builds confidence in God and in the reality of our salvation. Thus, we realize that God is at work in our lives, and we long for the time when we will be in the presence of God forever.

Paul begins (v. 2b) and ends (v. 5a) with hope. This indicates that sufferings are not to discourage the Christian but to encourage him, for they are used by God to stimulate his desire for full and complete fellowship with God in eternity.

“And hope maketh not ashamed.” This could be rendered, “And hope shall not disappoint us.” Tribulations are used of God to stir us to fellowship with him in time, which ultimately will cause us to long for fellowship with him in eternity. We shall not be disappointed! The “by faith way” will bring us to completed salvation.

“Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” Tribulations and sufferings, which are used by God to stimulate and intensify our desire for Christ’s fellowship, are all brought about because God loves us. He loves every Christian and desires every Christian to have this fellowship with Christ in time and eternity. Remember, a loving and sovereign God is taking care of his own children, and he knows what is best for us.

FITTED FOR DESTRUCTION

We have seen that every person who ever trusted in Jesus Christ as personal Saviour from sin was justified the moment he believed and was fitted for heaven before God. We have also seen that it is God’s desire to work in the lives of his own dear children to prepare them for life, thus they are fitted for earth through his love.

But the Bible tells us that those who have never trusted in Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Saviour have no forgiveness of sin, but are “vessels fitted for destruction.” Eternal punishment and separation from God is their lot unless they turn and trust in Jesus Christ as personal Saviour. If you will come to Christ, he will fit you for heaven and begin to give you the grace to fit you for earth.