

**Romans (22):
Several Blessings of Our Justification (cont.)**

Introduction:

Today we will have rehearsed before us the great love that God has and has sown toward His people. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, there is much in the passage of Romans 5 to encourage you and cause you to rejoice in all that God has done and has promised to do for you. If you are not presently a believer in Jesus Christ, there is much here to persuade you to place your faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. The present basis of hope and assurance is great for the believer and the future certain prospect for believers is glorious.

Let us read the first paragraph of Romans 5, which includes verses 1 through 5.

¹Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²Through 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. ³Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and 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.

Last Lord's Day we considered the great grace of *peace* that we enjoy as believers in Jesus Christ. Because the Lord Jesus died for us, suffering the wrath of God for our sins when He suffered and died, God's justice that was against us was satisfied, God's wrath against His people was appeased. We now enjoy a state of peace with our God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

This enables us to know that our future is a glorious one. *"We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."* This speaks of the future fullness of salvation that God will bestow upon us because we are in the state of His grace through faith. We are to fix our hope on what God has promised that He will give us in Jesus Christ. If we are thinking rightly, feeling rightly, believing rightly about these matters, then we will be characterized as a *"rejoicing"* people.

We now arrive to **verse 3**. Not only do we rejoice, first, in the prospect of receiving the promised glory of God, but we also rejoice, secondly, *"in our sufferings."* Verses 3 through 5 are a single sentence.

³Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and 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.

When Paul writes, "Not only that", he is saying that in addition to rejoicing in hope of the glory of God, Christians also *"rejoice in our sufferings."* Now, whereas our rejoicing in the hope of glory is with view to our *future* destiny, our rejoicing in our sufferings is in our *present* sufferings. And let us realize and acknowledge this truth, that

the sufferings of the Christian in this life are many and hard, but we may rejoice through them all, that is, if we are thinking rightly and believing rightly.

First, let us reinforce our understanding that the life of *the Christian is characterized by “sufferings.”* We may see this taught in a number of places. The apostle Peter taught that it was the common experience of Christians:

¹²Beloved, *do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.* ¹³But rejoice insofar as *you share Christ's sufferings*, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. ¹⁵But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. ¹⁶Yet *if anyone suffers as a Christian*, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. ¹⁷For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸And “If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” ¹⁹Therefore let *those who suffer* according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. (1 Pet. 4:12-19)

Sufferings come to us when we stand for the gospel. Paul wrote to Timothy, “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God” (2 Tim. 1:8). Paul could write of his own experience:

⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹²So death is at work in us, but life in you.

¹³Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, “I believed, and so I spoke,” we also believe, and so we also speak, ¹⁴knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. ¹⁶So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (2 Cor. 4:8-18)

In verse 3 Paul used the Greek word, *thlipsisiv* (ταῖς θλίψεσιν), which is translated in our English Standard Translation (ESV), as “*afflictions.*” In the New International Version (NIV) it is translated as “*sufferings.*” In the King James Version (KJV), New King James Version (NKJV), and the New American Standard Version (NASV), this word is translated as “*tribulations.*” I believe that it is best to translate the word as “tribulations.” The reason I say this is that there is in our evangelical culture a widespread belief that Christians in this church age are exempt from tribulation. Oh yes, most readily acknowledge that we have trials and troubles, but tribulation has become assumed to be only a time of great trouble at the end of the age, a time of the Great Tribulation, which, it is commonly believed, will be 7 years in length and will only occur after the church is raptured out of the world before the tribulation. It is popularly, but I would argue wrongly, understood that only those “left behind” will then experience the tribulation period. But there is good reason to believe that this is not what the Holy Scriptures teach. God tells us in His Word that in this church age Christians will encounter and must endure *tribulation.* Our Lord Jesus Himself taught His disciples,

“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. *In the world you will have tribulation.* But take heart; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

Certainly the apostle Paul taught that Christians would endure much tribulation. Paul assured the new Christians in Lystra and Derbe that we all must encounter tribulation.

²¹When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²²strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that *through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God*. (Acts 14:21f)

And Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica, You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, *having received the word in much tribulation* with the joy of the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess. 1:6).

Many argue, “Well yes, Christians undergo ‘tribulation’ in this church age, but they will not escape “The Tribulation.” In other words, they say that those places where the word is preceded with the definite article, “the”, it should be regarded as a specific and unique period of time at the end of the age. They claim that references to an end time 7-year tribulation is always preceded by the definite article, “the.” They say that this distinguishes general tribulation that is experienced throughout this church age by Christians and “the” final tribulation at the end of the age.

We may answer in this way. Aside from the fact that this end time 7 year period is based on a spurious interpretation of Daniel’s “70 weeks”¹ prophecy in Daniel 9, the New Testament uses the term “*the tribulation*” to describe trials experienced by Christians within this church age, not for the last 7 years prior to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. There are actually only a few places where the word “tribulation” is preceded by the definite article and in those instances “the tribulation” speaks of Christian suffering in this age. For example, we read in **Revelation 1:9f**.

I, John, your brother and partner *in the tribulation* and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. (Rev 1:9)

John was describing the difficult conditions that Christians were enduring in Asia Minor toward the end of the first century.

Others argue that although Christians experience “tribulation” in this church age, they will not go through “*the Great tribulation*”, which, they say, is the last 7 years before the Second Coming. But, I would argue that when the Bible uses the term, “great tribulation”, it is not referring to an end time 7-year tribulation period. For example, when Jesus was describing the destruction of Jerusalem that the Roman armies had wrought in AD 70, Jesus had told His disciples, “

²⁰Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. ²¹For then there will be *great tribulation*, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. ²²And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. ²³Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. ²⁴For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. ²⁵See, I have told you beforehand. ²⁶So, if they say to you, ‘Look, he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. ²⁷For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ²⁸Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. ²⁹Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give

¹ For a treatment that I gave on Daniel’s “70 weeks”, see sermon #629, on September 18, 2011, which I can make available to you on request.

its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (Matt. 24:20-29)²

Another place where the term “great tribulation” is found is in the context of the Lord Jesus pronouncing His judgment on the church at Thyatira in Asia Minor at the end of the first century. This is recorded in Revelation 2.

¹⁸“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: ‘The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze. ¹⁹I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. ²⁰But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. ²¹I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. ²²Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw *into great tribulation*, unless they repent of her works, ²³and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works.’” (Rev. 2:18-23)

The church at Thyatira existed in the 90’s AD. Jesus was not telling them they were going to experience an end time great tribulation of 7 years, He was telling them that they were about to undergo a great period of persecution as a judgment of God if they failed to repent of their sins.

There is only one place in the Holy Scriptures where the expression, “*the great tribulation*” is used; that is, where the definite article, “the” and the adjective, “great”, precedes “tribulation.” **Revelation 7:9-17** read:

⁹After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” ¹¹And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹²saying,

“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom
And thanksgiving and honor and power and might
Be to our God forever and ever!
Amen.”

¹³Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?”

¹⁴I said to him, “Sir, you know.”

And he said to me, “These are the ones coming out of *the great tribulation*. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will shelter them with His presence. ¹⁶They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their Shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (Rev. 7:9-17)

² Many believe that Matthew 24 is a prophecy of an end time tribulation period. I disagree and have argued in a paper I gave at the New England Reformed Fellowship (NERF) last year NERF

Now those who take a *futurist* approach to the bulk of the book of Revelation argue that this refers to future “tribulation saints”, that is, a future multitude of Gentiles who hear the Word preached by 144,000 Jews during the future end time Great Tribulation. If it is, it is the only place in the Bible this is taught. Those who take a *non-futurist* view of the book of the Revelation see this description of *all of the redeemed* whom God has saved out of this fallen world who are brought into the presence of their God, having received their full and final salvation. We might consider the words of **Greg Beale**, who wrote the best commentary on the book of Revelation, in my opinion, and who was one of our Bolton Conference speakers several weeks ago.

But the focus of the second half of chapter 7 is in vv 9-12 and 15-17, where all Christians appear to be pictured enjoying their eternal reward. And now, not merely a part receive this reward (as in 6:9-11), but the totality of the faithful who have lived throughout the ages. This is suggested by the fact that the section follows the vision of the last judgment (6:12-17) and the sealing of God’s servants (7:1-8). Therefore, the saints’ eternal comfort is contrasted with the terror of punishment for the ungodly and is set forth as a reward for enduring the tribulation, as a result of being sealed. That this is a picture of the consummated eternal reward of all the saints is borne out by the verbal parallels between 7:15-17 and the portrayal of the eternal state in 21:3-4, 6 and 22:3. 7:14-17 depicts those who “conquer” *throughout* the church age and have been promised that when they finish their witness they will receive white robes (3:4-5), a secure place in God’s eternal temple (3:12), and nourishment, so that they will never hunger again (2:7, 17).

The conclusion that all Christians are included in this picture of bliss is confirmed by the fact that the group with white robes in v 9 is the same as those who have come out of the tribulation wearing white robes and have entered into God’s presence in vv 13-17. In v. 9 this group is said to be innumerable and is “from every nation and all tribes, peoples, and tongues,” a formula that, as we have already seen, refers to all the redeemed throughout the church age (see on 5:9; 7:2-3, 9; 14:3-4). This inclusivity in v 9 does not suit the idea that vv 13-17 focus only on a final generation of martyrs or Christians or Jewish Christians.³

The sum of the matter is this. The Christian experience throughout this church age is characterized by tribulation, or afflictions. Again, Paul taught that “*through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God*” (Acts 14:21f). But Paul also declared that as Christians we may “*rejoice in tribulations* (afflictions).”

Let us return to Romans 5:3. We see that not only do we first rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, but secondly, we can rejoice in our sufferings, *as we come to understand the purposes of God through bringing us through trials*. We are told that we are able to rejoice through sufferings because we know what spiritual benefits God brings to us through our tribulations. Again, Paul wrote in **Romans 5:3f**,

³Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and hope does not put us to shame

Paul lists several spiritual benefits that come through our suffering. Ultimately, the suffering affliction leads to the fostering of hope in our lives. How does this happen? There is a progression that takes place.

(1) Paul wrote that we can rejoice in our tribulations “knowing that suffering produces *endurance*.”

³ Greg Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (William B. Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 443f.

“Those who undergo troubles are toughened up, so that they are able to withstand the storms of life.”⁴ If you are able to endure a great difficulty today, it is probably because you have experienced difficulties in the past. Paul commonly connects endurance with the hope of God’s future promises to His people.

⁶He (God) will render to each one according to his works: ⁷to those *who by patience in well-doing* seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; (Rom. 2:6f)

Here “patience” is continuing endurance in well doing.

Endurance is connected with hope in Paul’s writing.

“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through *endurance* and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have *hope*.” (Rom. 15:4)

It is God who gives grace to endure through trials. Paul wrote, “May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus” (Rom. 15:5).

We see that not only afflictions produce endurance, but we also read that...

(2) “endurance produces *character*”

What is meant is tested character. True character is shaped and developed through trials. When one maintains his integrity and his uprightness through difficulty, then he has been tested. We read of the endurance of Job (cf. James 5:11), but it is because he maintained his integrity through enduring great testing. We read in Job 2:

⁷So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. ⁸And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes. ⁹Then his wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die.” ¹⁰But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.” (Job 2:7-10)

(3) “character produces *hope*,”

Tested character engenders hope. “Why does tested character spark hope? Because moral transformation constitutes evidence that one has really been changed by God. Thus it assures believers that the hope of future glory is not an illusion.”⁵

Lastly we read,

(4) “and hope *does not put us to shame*,”

Again, it is God who enables His people to endure. And then their endurance is a basis for them being assured that they are in God’s favor. The Christian’s hope will never result in his shame before God in judgment. He has endured afflictions/tribulations, knowing that as God enables him to endure, that it gives increasing evidence one is in God’s favor, in a state of grace, for whom God has promised salvation in the last day.

⁴ Thomas Schreiner, *Romans* (Baker Academic, 1998), p. 256.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

God has promised that though His people suffer here and now, He will one day vindicate them before all their detractors and persecutors.

⁷“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens. ⁸“I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. ***I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.*** ⁹***Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie--behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet and they will learn that I have loved you.*** ¹⁰Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. (Rev. 3:7-10)

Hope does not result in us being ashamed. Believers anticipate the promise of the gospel that they will stand unashamed and without fear before their Lord on Judgment Day. The Christian has this assurance as a ground of his “hope.” Although he as everyone else in the world will stand before the Lord in judgment, he knows that he will stand unashamed, uncondemned, and vindicated for all that he endured in this life for Jesus Christ.

Paul states why “hope does not make us ashamed.” Why? It is ***“because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”*** This speaks of God’s love for us, we who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. When we were first converted, our Lord Jesus gave to each of us the gift of the Holy Spirit. With the reception of the Holy Spirit we discovered a genuine heart-felt love for God and love for the things and the people of God that was not ours formerly. God poured out His love into us by the Holy Spirit.⁶ We came to love Him, for He first loved us. Here are some words of **Jonathan Edwards** (18th c.), who wrote the classic book on the love of God, ***Charity and Its Fruits***.

In every heart in heaven, love dwells and reigns. The heart of God is the original seat or subject of love. Divine love is in him, not as in a subject that receives it from another, but as in its original seat, where it is of itself. Love is in God, as light is in the sun, which does not shine by a reflected light, as the moon and planets do, but by its own light, and as the great fountain of light. And from God, love flows out toward all the inhabitants of heaven. It flows out, in the first place, necessarily and infinitely, toward his only-begotten Son; being poured forth, without mixture, as to an object that is infinite, and so fully adequate to all the fullness of a love that is infinite. And this infinite love is infinitely exercised toward him. Not only does the fountain send forth streams to this object, but the very fountain itself wholly and altogether goes out toward him. And the Son of God is not only the infinite object of love, but he is also an infinite subject of it. He is not only the beloved of the Father, but he infinitely loves him. The infinite essential love of God, is, as it were, an infinite and eternal, mutual, holy, energy between the Father and the Son: a pure and holy act, whereby the Deity becomes, as it were, one infinite and unchangeable emotion of love proceeding from both the Father and the Son. This divine love has its seat in the Deity, as it is exercised within the Deity, or in God toward himself.

But this love is not confined to such exercises as these. It flows out in innumerable streams toward all the created inhabitants of heaven, to all the saints and angels there. The love of God the Father flows out toward Christ the head, and to all the members through him, in whom they were beloved before the foundation of the world, and in whom the Father’s love was expressed toward them in time, by his death and sufferings, as it now is fully manifested in heaven. And the saints and angels are secondarily the subjects of holy love, not as those in whom it is as in an original seat, as

⁶ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones taught that this reception of the Holy Spirit was a separate and subsequent gift of God for the Christian. This is not right. He gave us the Holy Spirit at our conversion. “Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him” (Rom 8:9).

light is in the sun, but as it is in the planets, that shine only by reflected light. And the light of their love is reflected in the first place, and chiefly, back to its great source. As God has given the saints and angels love, so their love is chiefly exercised towards God its fountain, as is most reasonable. They all love God with a supreme love. There is no enemy of God in heaven; but all, as his children, love him as their Father. They are all united, with one mind, to breathe forth their whole souls in love to God their eternal Father, and to Jesus Christ their common Redeemer, and head, and friend.

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. (Jude 20, 21)