

Writeup for Website**Series: The Roman Road****Title: Building Muscle**

The building of faith is like the building of muscle. There is inevitable self-denial, stretching & pain involved, but the results are health, life, peace & hope. In our continued exploration of faith, let's hear what the Scriptures have to honestly & forthrightly say about the righteous life lived in faith.

Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

The Gospel promises a rose garden, without trimming away the thorns. If Scripture talked only of the flowery things, we wouldn't believe it. It wouldn't be real - although life is a beautiful thing, it has its thorns, we know that. The Gospel isn't a salesman offering beachfront property in Arizona - it's hope amidst the necessary suffering to bring about glory as we follow Jesus.

Paul's been speaking of the hope of the Gospel towards the end of chapter 4, and into chapter 5. *Let's listen...Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.*

Here he turns his attention away from those who won't accept God's promises based simply on faith, and starts to address those who will, referring to one of the benefits of faith as having peace with God. Justification by faith alone is a central concept to the Christian life. We've heard Paul speak at length on the subject, yet it's one with which we struggle to understand fully. We have trouble grasping we're made rightly related to God *only* by believing Him; we intuitively know, nothing in life's free.

Let me make it easier then, since I understand, it's awkward taking a free handout, and after all we have our dignity to consider... After everything we've said - salvation is by grace through faith alone. You don't do anything to gain righteousness other than believe God's promises in Christ to you. You're freely granted salvation in Christ by simply trusting in him. You can't attain salvation by being good, following the law, or by observing some religious ceremonial practice....

All true, but to assuage your pride & dignity let me also say, it isn't free - salvation will **cost you greatly. Faith demands your life.** Paul said, the righteous will live by faith - a perpetual state of walking life out under Christ. A simple notion, not an easy concept. He says later in Romans 6:18, "*You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.*" To get there you have to go through your own personal crucifixion, as he says earlier in 6:6, "*For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.*" Jesus said to Nicodemus, you must be born again. In Christ we're crucified, buried, and raised to life anew in Him. So although we're crucified along with Jesus, the Good News

is we're born again in Him - we share, not only in his suffering & death, but also his resurrection.

Life can be boiled down to a stark contrast of allegiance to Satan or God. There are only two masters in this world - we're never in control of ourselves. We submit to one or the other. The question isn't who'll be my master, but which master is good?

We've all seen memes on Facebook quoting Jesus when He said, "Love you neighbor as yourself." Followed with a question from the disciples, "What if they're"... then a list of lifestyles traditionally considered incongruent with Christian living. Then Jesus answers, "Did I stutter?" Suggesting, of course, we're all hateful bigots, and that Jesus has nothing to say in judgement of such lifestyles. It interprets love as the acceptance of a person's behavior without question - the new catchphrase being, *Love Wins*. Love does win, since God is love, therefore it should read, *God Wins* - but not in the way some would want. Tolerance by definition isn't to accept bad behavior without question, but rather to put up with it for a time - but, like many terms, we've redefined it to mean that we accept all lifestyles & behavior without question, and if not, we're in the wrong. To define 'love your neighbor as yourself' as outright acceptance without question is irresponsible of us. I wouldn't want anyone to sum up my life in one phrase I've uttered any more than Jesus would, so let's not do him that discourtesy.

That quote can be found in Mark 12 when Jesus is asked what's the most important commandment, it reads in full, *"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."* If we believe there's one God, unchanging, with the same moral standard over all of the human race. We first begin by loving God with our full self - which means we follow Him in obedience. **Obedience = love.**

My wife had a mommy moment a few weeks back. She was overwhelmed with all she had to do, and was tired of cleaning up the house when it seemed no one else would. She told me. I listened. And apparently, I was, to my surprise, part of the problem. You see, before I go to bed every night I prepare a glass of ice water with lemon. I carefully cut off the ends of a lemon, cut it in half, and squeeze that citrusy goodness into my glass. I leave the little cut pieces on the counter - because, miraculously they're gone each morning when I come downstairs! I thought it was elves, but turns out it was my wife cleaning up after me! Go figure! Until my wife told me in no uncertain terms, "AND... you leave your little slices of lemon on the counter every night! I know it's not a big deal, but it gets to me!", I had no idea! So, would it be loving of me to continue to do so? Or, is the loving thing to listen, then do what she wants of me, to take the 2 seconds to scoop up the little lemon slices & throw them in the trash - to be obedient to what she's asking of me - which now I do. Obedience = love.

In addition to the love statements, Jesus also said not one iota of God's moral standard found in the Law would ever go away - in other words it stands as the standard for

humankind. It's why sometimes, when Jesus healed someone we hear him say, "Go & sin no more." He doesn't say, "You're healed, go do what you like." Why? Because some lifestyles, some behaviors are incongruent with righteousness - they don't bring freedom for the person, nor glorify God. The complete statement is to love God, and love others as yourself as you love God. Which means living in righteousness through faith, striving to be obedient to what God has called you to, and calling others to the same faith in & obedience to Him. Obedience = love.

Loving someone is to want what is best for them, and to direct them to it - some behaviors are destructive as God has outlined them to be. So, love is to accept a person, yes, as a fellow sinner in need of salvation, but it's not always to accept their ideas or behaviors. Brian Welch told us last week that as he opened his Bible & read the soul who sins is the soul who dies, was convicted at that moment to throw out his drugs. What Brian was telling us was that he's freely justified by faith through grace, yes, but that means coming under the lordship of Jesus - into loving obedience to God's leading. That Jesus died for him as he is, a drug addict, but expects & empowers him to be transformed by the same faith which saves him. As a slave now to righteousness, did he have any other choice? Definitely not.

Faith without repentance is an impossibility. Everyone stand for a moment. Turn & face your neighbor. What if I told you that although you like that person, they're not good for you. That although you can't see it, they will lead you into unhealthy behavior & hurt you. But, behind you is another which is great for you - who will lead you into health & life. If you believe me, you'll turn around. That's faith & repentance working hand-in-hand. You believe, or have faith in my words, and repentance is the turning away from one to another. We must turn away from something to turn towards God. That as we come into repaired relationship with the father, we come under His roof with his standards. We leave a former life outside as we come into life with him. Obedience = love, and what we find is...

Faith goes hand-in-hand with repentance & lordship - three distinct concepts which are bound together inseparably. We're freely justified by faith, made children of God once more, and now live in faith, which is obedience to God's directives bringing true freedom. We can love & accept someone without having to accept wrong behavior & attitudes. We can address these things, even sometimes harshly & still be loving. Parents are a testament to that fact. All parents demand some semblance of obedience to the rules of their homes, and lifestyles they desire their children to exhibit - never are we in doubt, even in chastisement, that parents love & accept us - no matter if we've transgressed those things & have come under their punishment, we live in assurance of their love.

The wise child knows that in obedience there's peace; because in **peace is personal security & freedom**. Jimmy Carter once said, "Peace is more than the absence of war. There is an inner peace that comes from personal security & personal freedom." In Gospel terms - personal security is what Christ has done on the cross, and personal freedom is what we experience when we allow him to have lordship over us - the

righteous living by faith. This is the peace we've been speaking of throughout this series. Peace isn't the absence of chaos, or thorns in life, nor is it being allowed to live as I please without judgement of my behavior & attitudes. It's a sense of deep personal security & freedom a person has living by faith under Christ's lordship.

That even when I fail, and come under chastisement, God is truly a father who accepts me no matter what, but his heart is to draw me deeper into purity & holiness, and therefore glory. Notice Paul doesn't promise a peaceful life - but rather peace with God. And to have peace with God, we must believe He's right when he speaks. *Faith is confidence in what we hope for & assurance about what we do not see - Hebrews 11:1.* It's an assurance that our new Master, Lord Jesus, knows best & has the freedom to speak into my life & behavior without the fear of being cut off from life with Him due to his work on the cross.

But, **peace doesn't deny the thorns of life.** We live in a hostile world. We even live with our sinful nature which fights against the will of God - our desires entice us & drag us away from faith when given freedom to do so. Likewise, we can often do little to control what others do to, or think of us. Evil lurks among the flowers & leaves of an otherwise beautiful world. Remember, last week we said, *We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed - 2 Cor. 4:8-9.* Persecution & the like is the attack from the outside. So we have an internal & external battle going on at all times - but all the while with the assurance of the grace in which we now stand in Christ. Our standing is a position of the redeemed, those bought back, made children of God, who now struggle in life to walk in faith under that assurance.

Which is why Paul continues...*3 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*

Last week we saw in Numbers 13 & 14 in the story of the Promised Land & 12 spies, how living in fear makes us gripe & complain. That insecure people are destructive people in their complaining & fear mongering, and affect whole communities of people to the negative. They blame God for their suffering, even if it's just perceived suffering. They don't believe God has the best in mind for them, their trust is turned away from Him. They have no security in God, aren't willing to go through the hardship to see His promises fulfilled & therefore turn back to the slavery of a past life since at least that's predictable. Even when freedom's one mountain away! In that story they chose to prolong their suffering 38 more years in the wilderness, given they couldn't trust God in the simple things. Although we agree, we don't want to be like Shaphat, Gaddi, Shammua & the other ten spies, the fearful, we want to be like Caleb & Joshua, the faithful, we often are like the 10 living in fear & not in faith!

Paul says in Philippians 2, *Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and*

crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.

Why did God bring me to Philadelphia? I was better off back in NJ, CA, CO, or what have you. I can't get along with anyone here, I'm going to another church. But wherever you go, there you are! It's not your circumstances, but your character which is the issue. We don't glory in our sufferings seeing them as opportunity for character growth, we complain about our situation & forgo our blessing. Just like a butterfly needs to fight it's way out of the cocoon or its wings won't be strong enough to fly, or a chick needs to stretch & peck it's way out of the egg to be able to gain the strength to live, we need our sufferings to strengthen & define character. The mature Christian submits to suffering & God's direction knowing it must do its job. They don't complain & feel entitled, but are grateful for the testing, and assured of future blessing as a result of it. When good things come we don't say, "It's about time!" We say, "Thank you!" Since we know God's at work in us to bring about completeness. When suffering comes we say, "I'll go through this, and do what you ask of me, knowing you're with me Jesus." And, "As long as God has me here in this place I will do my best to make it work. As long as God has me with these people I will serve them in love, endearing myself to them as I am called to do."

Satan, and our own sinful nature, wrought with insecurity, are always fighting against us, whispering lies into our ears constantly. "They don't like you. You were better off back in Egypt." But God calls us to perseverance, **and perseverance stretches our faith muscles.** We all know how muscle growth happens. Working out creates tiny tears in existing muscle tissue which then repairs itself to make the muscle bigger & stronger. Perseverance through financial hardship, late sleepless nights for new moms & dads, working a menial job awaiting a promotion or something new, struggling through finals at school, the difficult conversations with your spouse as you work out your relationship, or what have you, are the struggles which create strong character & character births hope.

Every guy wants the pill to take him from skinny weakling to ripped beach body. Every woman wants the elixir which makes her physically perfect. Won't happen. Our physical bodies respond over time to good diet & exercise, and little by little grow, change & form into health as we're attentive to it. Self-denial & struggle are much a part of that physical process. Living in righteousness is much the same, *as we are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed* - we grow into the character & likeness of Christ who withstood the cross to save mankind. He who sweat blood in the garden of Gethsemane mustering every ounce of self-control not to avoid the inevitable cross & its suffering for the glory which would come later.

So, **the justified live by faith daily.** We understand the present value of the blood of Christ. Faith doesn't just save me from eternal separation from God, it enables me to live a hopeful life in the midst of suffering. Maturity finds contentment in all circumstances. Psalm 19:23 says, *"The fear of the Lord leads to life; then one rests content, untouched by trouble."* Notice contentment comes as a result of the fear of the

Lord, which is simply to say, we listen, honor, and follow what God says. Psalms is a poetic book, does he really mean we won't be touched or hurt by trouble, or does he mean to say we'll endure it & come out stronger. Ask any mother if the pain of childbirth was worth it, and is she better for it, she'll say yes.

Philippians 4:12-13 says, "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength." Or 1 Timothy 1:6, "...godliness with contentment is great gain." Wouldn't it be nice to get to that point? Not that in our suffering we won't hope for greater, or better things, but we're willing to undergo difficulty knowing the Promised Land is just over the next mountain. There's hope to be found in the response of faith even in difficult circumstances. And as Paul says... "hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

Therefore, **the righteous live filled with the presence of God.** As we said last week, the same God who breathed life into Adam, formed Eve from a rib, scattered the nations in Genesis 11, parted the Red Sea, brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, raised Jesus from the dead, made flesh to grow on dry bones in Ezekiel 37, turned water to wine at Cana in Galilee, etcetera, is at work in you. If we respond in faith, God will work miracles, although in most cases they're slow in coming in order that our faith may grow in strength through the stretching of it's muscles.

Lindley Thomas wrote this to me in expectation of this passage..."The part of the passage which says "our hope does not put us to shame" was so powerful to me. It's not bad to hope for something - like a baby, spouse, job, better friends, physical healing, or whatever it may be, but our submission to God - believing in our very core that He IS WORKING FOR GOOD in this world (and using my life to do that!) no matter what, is my ultimate hope which trumps all other hopes I have. I can have hope for these good things while also hoping for God's goodness & glory to be made known, but if those things don't work out, I'm not shamed - because God's always working, using our lives & our stories for good." I think she said that well.

So, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (Hebrews 12).

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ... stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.... For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him...(Philippians 1).

To get physically strong, we train our bodies. To get faithfully strong we exercise our faith, doing so under the assurance of faith & our standing in Christ. Jesus wants all of you - He's training you through hardship. Just because something seems difficult doesn't mean He's abandoned you - God will carry on the work he has begun in you to completion, but the road of suffering doesn't have a detour - it must be taken.

Living by faith brings hope amidst the necessary suffering to bring about glory. It's freely granted, but it's not without cost - faith demands your life. Obedience = love. Faith, repentance & Christ's lordship go hand in hand. Peace is personal security & freedom in Jesus which does not deny the thorns of life. Perseverance stretches our faith as we live it daily, developing character which births hope. We do this filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit. God will not disappoint - but we could forgo a blessing if we react in fear & insecurity, and do not listen to our Master & King.