

GRACE TO YOU

ROMANS 5:1-5

THE LADDER OF LOVE



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

When trouble comes into our lives, we often conclude, "God doesn't love me." Trouble means God does not love me. Paul had a very different view of trouble. He saw trouble as a ladder to God's love. **How is trouble a ladder to God's love?**

It's important to figure this out because trouble is inevitable in this world and especially in the Christian life. We want to be prepared for it so that we not only do not come to wrong conclusions about God's love in trouble but that we actually learn to use these troubles as a ladder into God's love.

BACKGROUND

In general terms we can summarize the first four chapters of Romans as follows:

- Chapter 1. The Gentiles are guilty
- Chapter 2. The Jews are guilty
- Chapter 3:1-19. Everyone's guilty
- Chapter 3:20-31. Get from deadly guilt to healthy joy through faith in Jesus.
- Chapter 4: Follow Abraham's example of faith in the promises and you'll inherit the world.



1. THE LADDER TO LOVE STANDS ON JUSTIFICATION (1-2)

We have justification by faith. "**Since we have been justified by faith**" (1). Most ladder accidents result from the ladder being on unsafe ground. The ground is not strong enough to provide safety. But this ladder to God's love sits on the strongest and most secure foundation possible. It is perfect and powerful. It is the immovable granite of Christ's righteousness (unmixed with any of our own works). This is Paul's summary of Romans 3:21-4:25.

We have peace with God by faith. "**...we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ**" (1). Sin creates objective and subjective division and estrangement. Justification brings objective and subjective reconciliation and friendship. It doesn't matter how many or how mighty the forces that try to shake our ladder, with this foundation, our ladder will never move and we will never fall off. It's not a temporary and fragile truce but a present permanent and reliable peace. It's not a mere end of enmity but the enjoyment of friendship. It's not reliant on what we feel, but is true regardless of how we feel.

We have access to grace by faith. "**Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand**" (2). In the Old Testament access was strictly limited to certain priests and certain times using certain rituals. Now the doors have been flung open to us. Justification by faith opens the way to God's grace, God's favor, God's kindness. We "stand" in this grace, meaning we are fixed there and will never be thrown out. The whole atmosphere, every particle of air in this sphere is grace.

We have joy in God by faith. "**We rejoice in hope of the glory of God**" (2). Justification gives us unshakeable hope that we will see God in all his glory in heaven and even that we will be part of that glory. We go from falling short of his glory (3:23) to showing his glory to sharing in his glory. Justification is secured in the past. Grace is what we stand in at present, and glory is our future hope. We exult in this. We're excited, and ecstatic about this.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Get this foundation. The Babel builders tried to build a ladder to heaven with their own efforts. God shattered their hope and scattered them (Gen. 11). The very next character we're introduced to is Abraham who was justified by faith, who had the firm foundation of God's sovereign and gracious salvation and whom God used to build an innumerable family. Don't be a Babel builder but plant your feet on Christ as your only foundation.

Enjoy this foundation. Paul invites us to be thrilled and delighted with the foundation God has provided for us. His salvation by grace should be a constant source of increasing joy.

A CHRIST-FOUNDATION
IS OUR SALVATION



But will that ladder hold up in trouble?



2. THE LADDER TO LOVE STEPS THROUGH TROUBLE (3-5)

This is not normal. Trouble usually results in many negatives: impatience, giving up, failure, panic, despair, anger, rebellion, and even hatred of God. But here, trouble leads to many positives. We not only have joy in the the best salvation but in the most painful providences.

Step One: Trouble. "Not only that, but we rejoice **in our sufferings**" (3). The Christian will often experience more trouble than non-Christians (Jn. 16:33; Acts 14:22; Rev. 7:14). We are targeted by the world more, we are tempted by the devil more, we are tested by God more. The trouble can be physical, mental, emotional, relational, financial, vocational, spiritual.

Step Two: Endurance. "...**knowing that suffering produces endurance**" (3). This is a calm, steady, patient perseverance as opposed to panic, anxiety, erratic mood-swings, frustration. Pressure both reveals and develops endurance. "Show me an impatient Christian and I'll show you an untried Christian."

Step Three: Character. "...**and endurance produces character**" (4). This word means "proven worth." Through trouble, God proves to us and to others that we are the real deal, that we are the genuine article.

Step Four: Hope. "...**and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame,**" (4). Hope is the confident desire of coming good. Each time we pass the test of trouble, each time we are proven to be the real deal, our hope of future good grows. Because of that hope, we are not embarrassed when we are going through trouble. And we will not be disappointed in our hope. We will never have the sense that we were conned.

Step Five: Love. "**because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us**" (5). The focus here is not so much our love for God, but his for us. The Holy Spirit accesses our hearts and imparts a sense and appreciation of God's love. "Poured" is not a dribble but a deluge that falls from the dark cloud of trouble. God gushes his own love into our hearts. He floods our hearts with his love. He does it through truth (6-8)

Step 6: Joy. "**We rejoice in our sufferings**" (3). Joy at the bottom of the ladder and joy at the top of the ladder. As we experience God's love we respond with joy even in the middle of trouble.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Trouble as an opportunity to enjoy God's love. It's still trouble and it's still painful, but alongside it, mixed in with it are unsurpassed opportunities to enjoy God's love. It's not joy despite our trouble but through them.

Climb the ladder of love. Maybe you are stuck on one of the lower rungs. God is calling you to climb higher, to press on, so that you can enjoy greater and greater experiences of God's love.

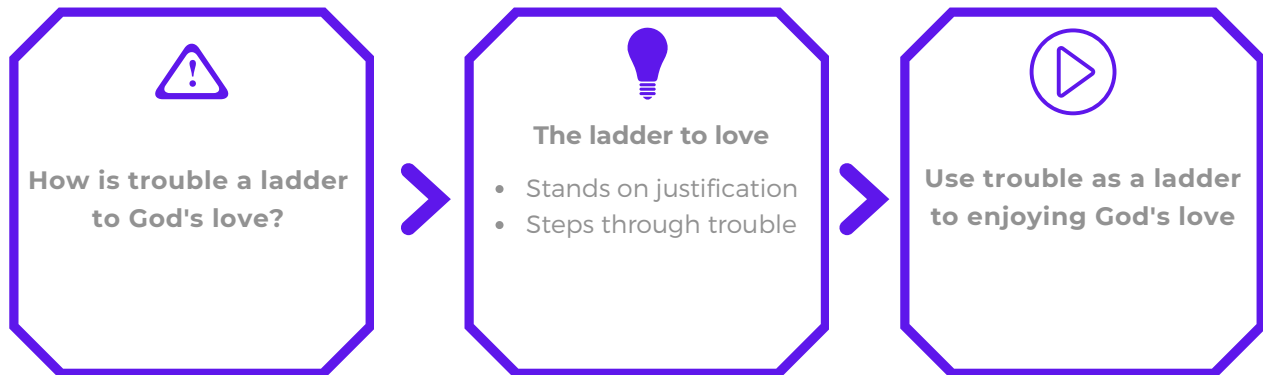
TROUBLE IS NOT EXCLUSION FROM GOD'S LOVE
IT'S AN INVITATION TO GOD'S LOVE



Hear God's Story > Change your story > Tell the story > Change others' stories



SUMMARY



A NEW CHAPTER

You can't climb the ladder without the Jesus foundation. You must start with justification by faith if you are ever to experience love by trouble.

We have multiple reasons for joy in trouble. It proves us and improves us. It makes us look back at our justification, look now at our character development, and look ahead to our heavenly glory.

Prayer. Loving Father, thank you for using the worst troubles of this life to bring me into the best experiences of your love. Help me to climb the ladder from painful trouble to your joyful love.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What troubles have you experienced and how have they affected your faith?
2. What is justification by faith (look at catechism answers) and how does it affect your life?
3. How has trouble improved your endurance? your character?
4. What rung of the ladder are you on? How can you step higher?
5. Describe a time when the Holy Spirit flooded your heart with God's love.
6. How has this sermon changed your view of trouble?

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