

Dynamic Christian Living

by

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Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company Grand Rapids, Michigan

CHAPTER ONE -

Faith in CHRIST as a Personal Saviour

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1)

SALVATION through faith in CHRIST as personal Saviour is the only way into the Christian life. We enter that way or we do not enter at all. Therefore, there could be no more suitable subject with which to begin our study of the Christian life.

The obvious corollary of that fact is that we must be eager and diligent about facing men squarely with their need of CHRIST, and necessity of making a decision for Him. If anyone has read this far who is not a Christian we urge an immediate turning to CHRIST in repentance and faith. Then you, too, may have the joy of living for CHRIST and of winning others to Him.

Men and women are making decisions for CHRIST in these days. On the street - in the Church - in Sunday School - at college - in evangelistic meetings - in young people's conferences - everywhere they are turning to Him. The numbers may not be great in each place, but together they make up the great host of the newborn of the kingdom of GOD.

For a number of years the writer has had the privilege of sharing in a young people's conference or retreat. It was planned as a training and inspirational gathering for church young peoples' leaders. But the invitation is always given to those who might be present who had never made a definite decision for CHRIST. With evident sincerity and determination a dozen or more young people in a recent conference made an out-and-out decision to follow CHRIST and then and there made an open confession of their faith. Many others indicated their purpose of giving their lives in service for Him if He should so lead. This, we are glad to say happens year after year.

After more than twenty-eight years without a city-wide evangelistic campaign a group of ministers and Christian business men in Chicago arranged for such a gathering, and while the attendance was not as large as had been expected, the decisions totaled more than those in the last previous campaign which was a great and successful meeting conducted by Billy Sunday on Chicago's lake front many years ago. There was in this recent campaign for souls an evident spirit of conviction and a desire to find the Lord and His grace. This was true of many older people - a significant fact.

The world is getting further and further from GOD, that seems to be self-evident, but there are those even now who are ready to seek Him, if they are faced with the privilege of power and the challenge of the Gospel.

The point we must always bear in mind is that many young men and women, yes, and older men and women as well, are waiting for an opportunity to make a confession of CHRIST if we make it possible and present Him in all His winsome attractiveness.

We feel that our series of studies begins right - with a study of the personal, spiritual life, then the family life, and finally the Church. The order is a natural one, for Christian faith is primarily personal, never simply a matter of family connection or church membership. However, salvation quickly shows its reality in the divinely established relationships of the home and then moves out into the wider fellowship of service in the church. The family comes before the church both in natural order and in importance. Let us ever keep that in mind.

One of the important developments of recent years has been that family life has lost so much of its finest meaning.

Parents have tried to shift the responsibilities for the training and guidance of their children to the public schools and to the Sunday Schools. Many of these important institutions are doing their best to help boys and girls, but they cannot replace the home. The home must come first in the rearing of a child in the fear and admonition of the Lord - yes, we would place it even before the church.

As the Scripture background of our first meditation, we turn to Acts 16:13-15, Romans 5:1-11. Here we learn how one comes into the experience of personal saving faith and then we have Paul's statement of the result of saving faith in the changed life of the believer. Observe first:

I. The Opened Heart (Acts 16:13-15)

Paul and his companions out on their all-important errand of evangelism, bearing the good news of the Gospel, had first known His guidance by hindrance, that is, by the closed door (Acts 16:7); and then by the direction of the Spirit into an open door, which was revealed to Paul in the vision of the man of Macedonia crying, "**Come over... and help us**" (v. 9).

Note that Paul was responsive to both kinds of leadership. Are we? Oh yes, we are quite willing to rejoice in the evidence of GOD's guidance when He puts before us an open door, but are we equally thankful for the guidance which comes by the closing of a door? Someone who reads these lines may just now be passing through the experience of standing bewildered before a closed door. GOD may have for a time seemed to hinder you in your purpose to serve Him. Do not forget that this may be just as much His guidance as an open door would be. Trust Him!

What seem to be disappointments and baffling hindrances are often - yes, more often than we think - the hand of GOD in guidance and blessing.

We are told that the great Philip Brooks wanted to be a school teacher but he was a complete failure in that field. If he had succeeded as a teacher we would never have had him as that

mighty, eloquent, tenderhearted preacher of the Gospel who so moved the hearts of men toward GOD.

Fredrick Robertson wanted to follow his distinguished father as an officer in the army. He was, in fact, listed with the commander-in-chief of Great Britain for military service, but for some reason he was not granted his commission. He was greatly disappointed. But what happened? He became GOD's minister to all classes of people, from the working man up to the most educated. It is said that his grave in the churchyard in Brighton, England, never has a weed on it and is never lacking for flowers because the working men of Brighton love to go there to decorate the grave of the one who was GOD's minister to their people.

If Nathanael Hawthorne had been able to keep his job at the customs house, we should probably never have had his delightful essays which have given such encouragement down through the years. Yes, the closed door is just as much GOD's guidance as the open door. Let us not forget it. Paul found it so and then when he was ready for it he heard the cry of the man of Macedonia.

Coming to Philippi they found not only an open door but an open heart - which the HOLY SPIRIT had made ready for the preaching of the Word of GOD. We read in Romans 10:17 that **"faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of GOD."** And we know that in the work of soul-winning it is always the prepared heart receiving the prepared message (both of these being the work of the HOLY SPIRIT) that brings about the blessed result of salvation.

Lydia was ready to hear and receive the message. What do we hear when we listen to the preaching of GOD's Word?

What are we ready to receive? One Sunday morning the great Henry Ward Beecher was preaching. After the service a stranger who had come to hear him got him in a corner and said, "I counted your mistakes in English today, Doctor, and you made exactly twenty." To this Dr. Beecher responded, "I'm afraid you're mistaken; I think I must have made at least a hundred."

Now, it happened that at that same service a young immigrant boy was sitting in a rear pew of the church. He was a lad just growing up into manhood. He was alone in the great city of New York, having come here from Serbia. His testimony given years later when he had become known as the world-renowned scientist, Michael Pupin, was this, "Nothing so inspired and stimulated me as those sermons of Dr. Beecher."

A fault-finder found twenty mistakes in English, but a lonesome immigrant boy found help, hope and inspiration. The one who really wants to find CHRIST will find Him in the preaching of the Gospel. Lydia heard, received and believed the Word of GOD.

Notice that Lydia was a woman of ability and culture and already a worshiper of GOD. Yet she, too, needed the message of redemption through faith in CHRIST. We need to constantly remind ourselves in these times, when we easily confuse the term Christian with culture or civilization (if we have any of that left), that even good people need to be saved. It is not the goodness, education or social position of a man which will save him; no, not even church membership, apart from regeneration. He must open his heart to the Word of GOD and come into the family of GOD by faith in JESUS CHRIST as His personal Saviour.

Someone has said that there are essentially two religions in the world: the religion of Cain and the religion of Abel. You will recall the sacrifices which the two brothers brought, Cain coming with the fruit of his labors, Abel coming with the sacrifice of a firstling from the flock. These typify the two kinds of religion.

The one like Cain comes saying, "Something in my hand I bring;" that is, recognizing GOD as creator I come to present my own work as an act of worship; while the other religion comes as Abel saying, "Nothing in my hand I bring . . . I can bring only a sacrifice which confesses before GOD and man my need of cleansing from sin."

We need a revival of the latter type of approval to GOD, for it is the only way to forgiveness, cleansing and peace.

There is so much of the wrong approach to GOD in the teaching and the church life of our day that one feels inclined at times to challenge the right of many of these organizations to call themselves a church. That is also true of the professed faith of individuals. Our churches are full of members, yes, and workers who know nothing of the real regenerating work of the HOLY SPIRIT, if one may judge by the lives they live. Yet they would be astonished beyond measure if anyone dared to challenge their Christianity and would probably be insulted if anyone told them that they needed to be born again. They may be good people - but are not saved people.

This good woman, Lydia, not only believed but quickly evidenced the truth of her profession of faith by an open testimony and by a desire for fellowship in putting forward the work of GOD, (see verse 15). Salvation is by faith without works. That truth is perfectly evident from Scripture. But it is also evident that a saving faith is one which works.

There can be little profit in arguing about the relative importance of faith and works. Salvation is by faith alone, but saving faith is never alone - it always works.

Now we turn to our second point. We have here:

II. The Transformed Life (Romans 5:1-11)

This is one of the great passages of Scripture, rich in doctrinal instruction presenting as it does an illuminating discussion of the doctrine of justification by faith.

We have here, as Christians, an opportunity to learn (or to refresh our memories regarding) a great Bible doctrine. Then we may teach the truth to others.

There is a great need for doctrinal teaching and preaching now. People seem to prefer just a little devotional study, or a discussion of current events or possibly current events in the light of prophecy. Do not misunderstand me, these are all good and they have their place, but it is of first importance that Christians be informed regarding Christian doctrine.

While we do not commend that attitude on the part of a listener to a sermon which is always looking for some doctrinal point upon which he may disagree with the minister, we certainly do

insist that it is not a healthy sign that so many who listen to preaching and teaching in our day are entirely lacking in the doctrinal equipment to form discriminating judgment regarding its value - yes, and its orthodoxy.

How often one has the experience of being in some gathering where some well-meaning but ineffective minister has rumbled around with a great text and said a few things about it without in any measure plumbing the depths of the glorious meaning of the Word of GOD. Or he may be a liberal purposely trying to lead GOD's people away from the teaching of His Word. Then one meets apparently intelligent and educated people, members of the church - who have been listening to sermons for years - who now express their joy at the wonderful message which was given.

Perhaps they are just being polite. It may be that we have just acquired that courteous phraseology to use at the close of a service, but I rather fear that the fact is that the majority of our church members are not sufficiently grounded in Bible doctrine to identify a bad sermon when they hear it or to fully appreciate a good one.

They are easily carried away by something which has no spiritual power or balance, especially if it is well presented. Why? Because they are uninstructed and deficient in their thinking concerning doctrine.

It has been suggested that doctrine is like a skeleton and that only upon a strong well-articulated framework can there be developed the well-rounded body of a balanced Christian life. A body without a skeleton would be shapeless, without strength, without ability to stand upright or to accomplish any good purpose in the world.

The bones of a skeleton ought not to rattle but certainly we cannot do without them. So we must not overemphasize doctrine (that's rattling the bones) but we must be sure that we and our Christian friends have a substantial framework of doctrine upon which to build our Christian lives.

Here, in Romans 5, we study sound doctrine as we find the glorious transformation of life which comes to the believer who takes CHRIST as Saviour. There are seven results of GOD's justifying grace mentioned here. First there is:

1. Peace (v. 1)

Peace is something we have been looking and hoping for among the nations. That is important, but above all the human heart craves spiritual peace. We must realize that it cannot be found unless sin has been dealt with and put away. GOD cannot condone or ignore sin and the sinner cannot be at peace with it in his heart. There must be a definite dealing with it and GOD's method of dealing with it is by way of faith in CHRIST - with the blessed result of justification. Then "**Being justified by faith, we have peace with God.**"

"Justification" is a legal word, a word borrowed from the courtrooms. It does not mean that an offense has been overlooked or punishment withheld. The one who is justified is declared to be righteous, that is, without sin. He is really and fully "not guilty."

There is a difference between justification and pardon. Pardon simply remits the penalty for a sin which is admittedly still present - the man is still guilty but set free from punishment. Justification declares him to be not guilty of the charge against him. Through faith in CHRIST we receive a complete cleansing from sin and are declared to be guiltless before GOD, not by our own merit but because we have received His righteousness. No wonder one who has had that blessed experience has peace in his heart. But this peace leads to something else, namely.

2. Grace (v. 2)

Peace with GOD through CHRIST brings the peace of GOD into our hearts. That peace we have because by faith we have now come into the place of GOD's favor. We are no longer strangers or outsiders. As Paul puts it, we have access to the place of His grace and favor.

Someone has put it this way: The Lord JESUS, standing in the very center of the sunshine of GOD's love, reaches out and draws the one who believes in Him into that blessed spot. Then, as it were, He steps aside and leaves us (you and me, fellow believer!) there in the place of GOD's favor in the center of His love. What a wonderful thing it is to be a Christian!

But not only is there peace and grace. That would seem to be enough but there is more, there is

3. Hope (vv. 2b-5a)

Our faith not only brings a present peace, it causes us to see the future glory of GOD. This puts a hope into the heart of the believer and then because he is in the right attitude toward GOD all the things of life come into their proper relationship, including tribulations. (v. 3)

When we are right with GOD, even our sorrows are rightly valued and understood. Our troubles then become an evidence of His love in which we may glory. It is a matter of the right perspective. Are you unhappy, distressed in spirit, because of your trials and your sorrows? Get them in focus and you will glory even in tribulations. Yes, it can be done.

As a matter of fact, it is not always necessary to have an understanding of why the troubles have come. One must come to the place when one can simply trust GOD, even in the day of unexplained distress. We are told of that old saint of Dublin, Samuel Rutherford, that once when he was in deep spiritual distress he was tempted to murmur against GOD and give up all hope. But before long he received new strength and grace and he began to realize that the experience had come to him from the hand of GOD and that therefore he need not question "Why?"

He then wrote these words, "Fool that I was, not to know that the messages of GOD are not to be read through the envelope in which they are enclosed." In other words, it takes time for GOD's purposes to be made clear to us. The envelope must be opened before we can read the letter. To try to read it through the envelope means only confusion and distress. Trust GOD, go on through your troubles - and in due time you will find and fully appreciate the message of His love which is enclosed in the trial which so presses and disturbs you.

Peace, grace, hope, yes. And now

4. Love (vv. 5b-8)

GOD's love which went so far as to give His SON to die for our sins is shed abroad and thus it becomes the portion of every believer in Him. Need we remind you that His was an immeasurably great love and that it showed itself in its richest, fullest form at Calvary? In fact, the love of GOD centers in the cross of CHRIST.

Only the death of CHRIST could bring us to GOD and it was His love which caused Him to give His only Son, "**For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, . . .**" What is needed is that we come to realize that love.

Let me illustrate. Dr. Harry Rainy, the aged father of Principal Rainy, was a picturesque old Scotchman well-known on the streets of Glasgow as he went about in his highland plaid, well set off by his snow-white hair and distinguished bearing. After he died, his son told of an experience which his father had which meant much to him in his spiritual life.

He dreamed one night that he was speaking with some Great Personage. Gradually it became clear to him that he was talking to the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD. The subject of the conversation was what could be done to make Dr. Rainy a holy man. The HOLY SPIRIT pointed out that GOD had used mercy and discipline with him and yet it did not seem to be sufficient. "The only way," said the HOLY SPIRIT, "is that somehow you should be brought to realize more clearly how much GOD loves you."

It was only a dream, but from that time on the old man had a new peace and joy in his life. Ah, my friends, is not that the need of each one of us - to know more fully, to realize how much God loves us?

But see now what comes next - for there is more to come.

5. Salvation from Wrath (v. 9)

The wrath of GOD is minimized, yes, even denied in much of modern theology, but it is nonetheless a very "real and awful affection of the divine nature," as Dr. Orr put it. One wonders whether we could not do with more of the kind of preaching that Jonathan Edwards is said to have done on some occasions. It is said that when he preached on the text, Hebrews 10:31: "**It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,**" the fact of the wrath of GOD became so vivid that men climbed up the pillars of the church because they felt the very fires of hell coming up under their feet. Well, we need something like that to remind us again that the wrath of GOD is revealed against sin and all manner of unrighteousness.

But thanks be to GOD, CHRIST, who died for sinners will surely deliver the believer from the wrath of GOD against sin, since he is justified by His Blood. How blessed that He does take care of the whole matter! Again we say, what a wonderful thing to be a Christian! And how terrible to be without CHRIST and without hope in the world!

This brings us to the sixth result of justification, namely,

6. Reconciliation. (v. 10)

The death of CHRIST which justifies man when he accepts it by faith brings him into the place of reconciliation with GOD.

For GOD and man to be reconciled there must be the removal of the barrier of sin which stands between the unbeliever and GOD. This is accomplished at the Cross.

If you really want to delight yourself, deepen your spiritual experience - yes, really stretch your soul in the fulness of blessing - go through the Bible and see what GOD has done with our sin because of the death of CHRIST on Calvary's tree. When you read how He has wiped out our transgressions like a cloud, that they are blotted out, that they are forgotten and will be remembered against us no more forever, and all the other blessed truths concerning our salvation in CHRIST, you will realize that here, indeed, the great wall of partition between sinful man and GOD was broken down; or, to use a Biblical picture, the veil which separated the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies in the temple was rent from top to bottom.

Here is a blessed fact. We are reconciled to GOD by the death of CHRIST. Atonement has been made for sin, and not only did CHRIST die for us, but He is alive again - a living Saviour. That makes the reconciliation even more wonderful and blessed for we have constant fellowship with the One who has brought us to GOD.

With all this before us what could we possibly look for as the last result of justification but

7. Joy (v. 11)

And why not? Such a revelation as we have had of what our redemption includes should make every believer in CHRIST rejoice in GOD. CHRIST, who is the sinner's judge is the believer's joy. Such is the glorious transformation which takes place when one believes in Him.

If we have this joy why do we not see more expression of it in our Christian life - in the home and in the church? Different people express their joy in different ways, but certainly there ought to be some indication that there is joy in the heart. There is altogether too little evidence of it among those of us who name the name of CHRIST. We actually drive people away from CHRIST by our sad and dismal lives.

We are too little moved by the wonderful thing which has come to us through CHRIST; our churches have become rather dead and cold. I read of a man who was to report for his church at some annual convention or gathering. He rose and made a nice little speech, closing with the words, "In our church we are all united." Then he sat down and under his breath he said to his neighbor, "Yes, we're united all right; we are frozen together." In other words, the unity of that church was not a unity of life, joy and enthusiasm, but the unity of coldness and of death. Oh no, the Christian has joy and it is a real, heart-warming, stirring, enthusiastic rejoicing in CHRIST.

By this time some unbeliever who may have read these words should be eager to have these things true in his or her own life. Well, why not? Here is the way: "**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved**"; that's the promise of GOD's Word. Just believe; take Him as

your Saviour. Then what? Then read again those majestic and joyful words of our lesson, Romans 5:1. "**Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with GOD.**" No, let us go back and read it this way: "Therefore being justified by faith, I have peace with GOD through our Lord JESUS CHRIST - yes, through my Lord JESUS CHRIST." That is - make it personal!

~ end of chapter 1 ~
