

CHANGING NEGATIVES INTO POSITIVES

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- Romans 5:1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:
- 5:2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.
- 5:3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing That tribulation worketh patience;
- 5:4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope:
- 5:5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

Born again by the Holy Spirit, bought by the Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, begotten again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, the Christian has much to be rejoicing about. The Apostle Paul reminds the Roman Christians of that fact; and reminds us as well. We all need that assurance both from the *Bible* and from Christians who have experienced the same thing. You see, we grow in grace as we gain the experience that our faith teaches us, both in word, as others have experienced it, and in deed. So, this former religious persecutor, this man who considered himself the appointed exterminator of these early believers, this strict Pharisee and totally loyal Jewish Rabbi, who must have captured and captivated others, is both captured and captivated by Jesus Christ whom he meets on the Damascus Road. That he finally knows the Truth, Paul rejoices in the Lord Jesus Christ, and, despite the sanctions of the authorities, will not be silent until he spreads his faith into every corner of the then known world. He rejoices in the faith of Jesus Christ, and he seeks others to rejoice with him.

To the Romans Paul writes, “Rejoice you are justified!” “Rejoice you have Peace!” “Rejoice you have Access to God!” “Rejoice you have hope in His glory!”

But then he says a strange word: “Rejoice in your troubles!” We come to church on Sunday mornings, in part at least, to find answers to our problems, help for our troubles, and the healing of our heartaches. Then we get this word from Paul that we are to rejoice, and to praise God for our tribulations. That is almost enough to get us to rise from our pews and walk out of the church house—unless of course we understand what Paul was saying. I know it is a rather trite expression, but what the Apostle is telling us to do is to Change our Negatives Into Positives. If I can praise God for my problems, if I can be thankful for my troubles, if I can rejoice in my sufferings, then I am becoming a part of God’s larger plan for me, knowing that tribulations work patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope doesn’t make us ashamed because then God’s love fills our hearts by the Holy Spirit. In a word, our problems are not so much problems as they are challenges, challenges that have been given us to make us more fully human beings, and more fully sons and daughters of God.

Let us look at some New Testament characters who changed their negative into a positive:

I. THE FIRST IS PAUL: HE CHANGED THE NEGATIVE OF SELF-RIGHTEOUS PRIDE INTO THE POSITIVE OF A TRUE GODLY HUMILITY.

Paul tells us of his great negative of self-righteous pride. (Gal 1:13 KJV) For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it:(Gal 1:14 KJV) And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

Paul was zealous and arrogant. He falsely believed that the Pharisaic Judaism he practiced was the only religion, and that the Jews were the only people on earth that God loved. Paul's arrogant pride and blind fanaticism caused him to persecute all who believed in Jesus. In fact, Saul's name sent shivers through the young congregations of gathered disciples. (Acts 8:1 KJV) And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Paul consented to the death of Stephen and became the chief persecutor of the Church. In Acts the 9th chapter we find these words. (Acts 9:1 KJV) And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,(Acts 9:2 KJV) And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

When his credentials as an Apostle are brought into question, here is what he answers: (2 Cor 11:21 KJV) I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also.(2 Cor 11:22 KJV) Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I.(2 Cor 11:23 KJV) Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.(2 Cor 11:24 KJV) Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. (2 Cor 11:25 KJV) Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;(2 Cor 11:26 KJV) In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;(2 Cor 11:27 KJV) In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.(2 Cor 11:28 KJV) Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.(2 Cor 11:29 KJV) Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? (2 Cor 11:30 KJV) If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.(2 Cor 11:31 KJV) The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not.(2 Cor 11:32 KJV) In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me:(2 Cor 11:33 KJV) And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.

Paul had changed that terrible negative of self-righteous pride, which so many of us religious folk have, and had turned it into a positive of humble faith in the Lord Jesus

Christ. In Galatians he writes: (Gal 6:14 KJV) But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

As a Baptist I can say this: Many Baptist need to change their self-righteous pride into a God-Righteous humility. There is a need for narrowness in some things, but someone said of Baptists that they were so narrow that you could put 20 of us into the front seat of a Volkswagen Beetle! I am thankful for my Baptist Heritage, but I am reminded of meeting an old Romanian Orthodox Priest in streets of Urzicheni, Romania, and of hearing him say after the introduction, according to my interpreter, "God has His sheep in other folds also." We must never think that we are somehow better than other born again believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are all one in Him. Like the Apostle Paul, it took me a long time to get that message. But thanks be to God, I too, like my great hero Paul, have changed that negative into a positive.

II. SIMON PETER ALSO LEARNED TO CHANGE A NEGATIVE INTO A POSITIVE. HE CHANGED THE NEGATIVE OF SHALLOUNESS INTO THE POSITIVE OF STRENGTH.

When we first meet Simon Peter, he is, like his brother Andrew, a fisherman and an inquirer at the revival that John the Baptist was preaching in the Jordan River Valley. The excitement was great! Even the religious leaders were being baptized, and John was reminding them that they were nothing but snakes fleeing from the burning desert bushes, and needed to come in true repentance by bringing forth fruits worthy of repentance. Then Jesus came to the revival, and though He needed no baptism, He joined Himself to John's movement, even though John knew that Jesus was much purer than anyone he'd ever met, and said, "I have need to be baptized by you. Why are you coming to be baptized by me?" Jesus simply said, "Let it be now, for it becomes us to fulfill all righteousness." Some who had accepted John as their leader were with him one day, and he looked out upon Jesus and cried out, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." God had spoken to John and said, "Upon the One that the Spirit descends, He is the Messiah." John witnessed that reality in Jesus, the Nazarene. Andrew was with the inner circle and when Jesus passed by, asked to go with Him and hear Him. Jesus invited them. Andrew immediately found his brother and persuaded him to follow Jesus. Jesus said, "You are Simon, son of Jonas, you shall be called a Stone.

The next time we hear of Peter he is in Galilee. For some reason he and Andrew, and James and John, were not following Jesus. They had left Judea and gone back to their fishing business in Galilee. But you can't get rid of Jesus. He will follow you. And He came to Galilee, to Capernaum, which would be His home base for His ministry. There He found His wandering disciples, and said to them again, "Follow me", and they followed Him. Peter was the impulsive one. At the Transfiguration he was his shallow self. "Let's build three tabernacles," he said, "one for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah." Such a shallow man. Then later, when Jesus was at Caesarea-Phillipi, poor shallow Peter first called Christ the Son of the Living God and was complimented by Jesus; but next he reproved Jesus for saying He must die in Jerusalem. Then Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind me satan." Later the shallowness of Peter was shown again in the Garden: there he misunderstood completely what Jesus was about and cut off the ear of Malchus, one of

the soldiers who came for Jesus. And again, in the courtyard, he denied three times that he knew Jesus, while at the time Jesus was being interrogated by the authorities at Caiaphas' Palace, accused of blasphemy for saying He was One with God.

Can you imagine one so shallow becoming a Rock upon which the faith of Jesus Christ could be built? With the help of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, Simon became that Stone that Jesus said he would become. With the help of God, Simon was able to convert that negative of shallowness into a positive of one upon whose shoulders the entire church stands today. He preached the first Gospel Sermon. He was not perfect, as Paul reminds us in Galatians, but he was a Rock, and he spent the rest of his life telling others about Jesus Christ, and the power of Christ to change the lives of all who would come to Him.

We live in the age of shallow humanity. Our citizens are becoming zombie-like in their relations to reality. They put a premium price tag upon worthless, pedantic, stupid things of humanity, and laugh at the righteous. They congratulate and worship at the feet of the powerful, the rich, the famous. They scream their acclaim and cry for encores to those who have nothing to offer; but for those who offer them Life, they label them as fanatics, and sneer at them. But God is righteous, and His righteousness will finally prevail!

We have the shallow in our churches. They know very little about God's Word, and sometimes even less about prayer. They need to receive God's help and to change their shallowness into strength.

III. JOHN MARK WAS ABLE TO CHANGE THE NEGATIVE OF FEAR INTO THE POSITIVE OF COURAGE.

There are two or three things about John Mark that we know for certain: He was mentored by Simon Peter, and scholars think that he was the secretary for the Book of Mark, which was authored by the Apostle Peter. He was very close to Simon Peter. Again we know that he was a cousin of Barnabas, and was selected by Paul and Barnabas as a member of the first missionary crusade. We also know that John Mark, for some reason, left the missionary campaign and returned to the home base. There could have been several reasons for his leaving. Perhaps he was young and homesick. Perhaps he was ill, and decided to return. Perhaps he resented Paul's taking the leadership from his cousin Barnabas after the conversion of Sergius Paulus. But I think the problem was a problem of fear. The missionaries had just started to go into the dangerous highlands of Asia Minor and John Mark left them. To Paul it was crystal clear that Mark was a deserter in the heat of battle, and he resented Mark's weak behavior with all his being. Paul considered him nothing less than a traitor, and would have nothing to do with such an underling! Dedication to Paul, the former Pharisee, was all or nothing at all. So when the 2nd journey came up, Barnabas wanted to give John Mark another chance. Rather than do that Paul took Silas and went another way.

Mark had a problem with fear and needed to convert fear to courage, needed to change the negative of fear to the positive of courage. We think that when Mark wrote about the young man who ran off naked he was speaking about himself. (Mark 14:51 KJV) And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him:(Mark 14:52 KJV) And he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked.

If scholars are correct in assuming that John Mark was writing about himself, they are simply showing that he was very human, and very afraid of what was happening to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Still, Peter was courageous enough to draw the sword. And for a while, the others were courageous enough to follow Jesus. Though all of them, except John, finally left Him in fear for their lives. When the Shepherd was captured the sheep were scattered.

But John Mark, the son of another Mary, whose property included the Upper Room where the Risen Jesus appeared to the Apostles, and later to Thomas, where the Spirit of God came upon the gathered Church at Pentecost, was of better stock than to remain a coward.

Even Paul would finally forgive John Mark. He would see how that Mark had matured in Christ, and he would write in 2 Timothy, (2 Tim 4:11 KJV) Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry. That was a huge turnaround. With the help of God and the mentoring of other Christians, Mark had turned the negative of fear into the positive of courage. He now could stand shoulder to shoulder with his brother Christian soldier, Paul.

IV. TIMOTHY WAS LIKE HIS NAME, RATHER TIMID, BUT HE CHANGED THE NEGATIVE OF TIMIDITY INTO THE POSITIVE OF BOLDNESS.

All Bible scholars remember Timothy. Paul called him a son in the faith. Here's why Paul called him that: Paul won him to Christ on the first missionary journey. He later became a good replacement for John Mark. As a young man with a strong back, he could be both physical and spiritual help to Paul. (Acts 16:1 KJV) Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek:(Acts 16:2 KJV) Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium.(Acts 16:3 KJV) Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek.

Paul was constantly reminding young Timothy to keep the faith, and to preach the Word. It seems, even in reminding Timothy so much, that Paul saw in him that reluctance and timidity that needed to be overcome. Some of the best Christians in the world are somewhat timid. Over the years I have known many teachers and preachers who refused to teach and to preach, because they were shy and timid. But Paul kept reminding Timothy of his need to do what he was called of God to do, even as I have to remind you that you must not let your shyness or your timidity keep you from fulfilling your role in the church, your God-given-role! (1 Tim 6:20 KJV) O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called:(1 Tim 6:21 KJV) Which some professing have erred concerning the faith. Grace be with thee. Amen.

(1 Tim 1:2 KJV) Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

(1 Tim 1:18 KJV) This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare;

(1 Tim 1:19 KJV) Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck:

In these verses Paul seems to be saying again, “Son, don’t be timid! Be bold Timothy!”

In 2nd Timothy, Paul writes: (2 Tim 1:1 KJV) Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus,(2 Tim 1:2 KJV) To Timothy, my dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.(2 Tim 1:3 KJV) I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day;

(2 Tim 1:4 KJV) Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy;(2 Tim 1:5 KJV) When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.(2 Tim 1:6 KJV) Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.(2 Tim 1:7 KJV) For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.(2 Tim 1:8 KJV) Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God;

Here, Timid Timothy is reminded to Stir Up the Gift of God that he received by the laying on of the hands of his dear friend and mentor and father in the faith, the Apostle Paul.

Young Timothy is encouraged over and over again to be bold--(2 Tim 4:2 KJV) Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

But look at the clincher in 2 Tim 1:7, where Paul again fortifies timid Timothy by saying, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” That verse is correctly translated, “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a Spirit of power and of love, and of self-discipline.” Did Timothy get the lesson? Of course he did. He became the Bishop of Ephesus.

All of us can relate to Timothy. But let us not use our timidity as an excuse. Timidity is not of God. To win the world requires all our boldness. We must be bold enough to fly across the oceans of the world to give the lost the message of salvation. We must be bold enough to tell our own family that Jesus loves them and died for them. We must rid ourselves of the timidity that keeps us from preaching Jesus Christ and Him crucified. This negative must be changed to the positive of boldness in declaring with power and self-discipline, the love of God in Jesus Christ. Without boldness we can do very little. We must change the problem of timidity into the action of boldness.

V. JESUS CHANGED ALL OUR NEGATIVES TO POSITIVES AT CALVARY WHERE GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE LET HIS SON DIE FOR OUR SINS, THEREBY CHANGING THE NEGATIVE OF SIN INTO THE POSITIVE OF REDEMPTION.

God is always in the business of helping us to change our negatives to positives and Jesus is the greatest example -- the example who changed Calvary into Victory. The

very form of the Cross is a positive. But had not Jesus risen it would have remained a negative. However, He changed the negative of death into the positive of everlasting life. In a sermon, "The Divine Strategy," James Stewart of Scotland writes, "All our words and theologies stagger before the mystery of the Cross; but that is because the Cross itself is the eternal word, dynamic and explosive enough to turn the world inside out and set its cosmic dislocation right." Jesus died for you on that Cross. He paid the price for your sins. If you will place your faith in Him, He will take away all your sins and give you a wonderful new life. At Calvary He changed darkness to light, hate to love, sin to salvation. Will you come to meet Him at Calvary who came to Calvary and died for your sins in order to meet you with salvation? Will you come to Calvary and turn your negatives to positives?