

RCC in the Word
Week of June 17
Romans 5:1-5

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

As with most paragraphs in Romans, there is much that could be said. For our sake in this devotional, I will summarize most of the paragraph with a brief emphasis on the chain beginning with suffering and ending with hope in verses 3-5. In verse 1 Paul states three consequences of the righteousness that is ours through faith in Christ - peace, access to grace, and hope. It is hope that gets the most attention in the following verses. The third and primary consequence of our righteousness, Paul says, is hope. The hope of the glory of God. Paul is emphasizing that those who scorned God’s glory (1:21-23) and have fallen short of it (3:23) are now promised a future share of it.

When Paul speaks of the hope of God’s glory, hope means a sure confidence. It does not mean that believers long to experience God’s glory but are unsure whether it will come to pass. Believers have a certain hope right now that the glory Adam lost will be restored to them. Indeed, the glory restored to believers will be even greater than the glory Adam once had, for believers will be conformed to the second Adam, Jesus Christ (8:29). In fact, this confidence of the future hope is communicated with the word “rejoice” in the ESV, but a more literal translation of the word is “boast.” It is the same word Paul used back in 3:27 and 4:2, where Paul criticizes boasting if it has an improper object (see also 1 Cor. 1:29; 3:21; 4:7; 2 Cor. 11:18; Gal. 6:13; Eph. 2:9), that is, the power and ability of human beings. But not all boasting is ruled out, for boasting in the Lord is the truest form of worship and that is what Paul emphasizes here. So do not boast in yourself, but boast in the hope of the glory of God. The believer can be so confident in this hope, that he is to boast about it!

And such boasting in future glory is to be expected from the Christian because all people boast about what we have to gain. But Paul goes on to say that believers also boast in afflictions. This is an astonishing statement, Paul wants us to boast in our afflictions? It is our future glorification that we desire and prize precisely because the afflictions of this world are left behind! The word Paul uses for afflictions here is a general term, meaning he is thinking about the pressures and troubles that afflict believers in this present evil age.

The reason believers can exalt in afflictions, then, is that they conspire to produce greater hope. But how can afflictions produce greater hope? The chain of reasoning in verses 3-4 provides the answer.

Let's look at that chain. First, afflictions produce what? Endurance. How do afflictions produce endurance? Those who undergo troubles are toughened up so that they are able to withstand the storms of life. After one endures many difficulties, a strength of character develops that was not present previously. Such tested character, in turn, generates hope. Why does tested character spark hope? Because moral transformation constitutes evidence that one has really been changed by God. As Christians, as we look at the transformation God has brought about in our lives, we can be assured that the hope of future glory is not an illusion. There is a pattern of growth in the here and now, however imperfect, that indicates that we are changing. Therefore, we can be confidently assured that the process that God has begun he will complete (1 Cor. 1:8; Phil. 1:6).

Some say, rightly so, that this logical chain works only if one responds to the troubles appropriately. This is certainly true, and Paul would not deny it. After all, if one responds to suffering inappropriately, then certainly it will not produce endurance, character, or hope. So why does Paul leave out this condition? Why doesn't he say something like, our sufferings will produce endurance if we respond rightly? He left out this condition because **he is assured that God will overcome in believers the tendency to wilt under pressure**. The parallel with Rom. 8:28-39 is crucial here. Those who are justified will most assuredly be glorified; nothing will separate believers from the love of Christ. To insert the condition at this point, then, is misleading because it implies that the logical chain can be broken, but it cannot. **Such a conditional phrase would undermine Paul's intention, for those who are justified will most certainly be glorified, and the fruits of righteousness will be manifested in them.**

It is here, brothers and sisters, that we who are in Christ can be confident, in fact, we can even boast. Our God **will** use sufferings in our lives to produce endurance. He **will** build a godly character in us. He will produce hope in us. The hope, not an uncertain hope, but a confident boasting hope, developed by sufferings, that one day we will bask in the glory of God!

-Written by Nathan Renfro