

Romans 5:1–5 Boastful Hope
12/30/18 D. Marion Clark

Introduction

Christmas is over. New Year's Eve is tomorrow, then 2019 arrives. Do you have hopes for the year? Do you hope it will be better than this one? Do you have reason to hope for a better one?

Our passage is about hope—the hope of the Christian. It is about how that hope came to be in the first place and about what aids in strengthening that hope. If you are someone struggling with anxiety, someone worried about what the next year brings and all the years after it, then this passage is for you.

Text

The first two verses establish the basis of our hope.

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² 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.

For a chapter and a half, the apostle Paul has presented the truth of justification by faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Where hope had been placed in the law, that is, in knowing and obeying the law—whether that law be the Mosaic law or the inner moral law—Paul is teaching that such hope in being a law-abiding person is misplaced. The law cannot, has never been able to, achieve anyone's acceptance with God.

We are justified before God not by our adherence to law but by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. Because of that justification, we can now know that we have peace with God. This is not about peace of mind, though the result is peace of mind. It is about the peace that has been brokered by Jesus on the cross, so that we are no longer under a sentence of condemnation, but we have been reconciled to God.

So, justification and peace have come to us through our Lord Jesus Christ. That is the point of verse 1. Verse 2 builds upon that thought. Through Jesus peace has been established between us and God. Also, through Jesus we have obtained access into an ongoing grace relationship with God.

That is a critical point to understand. We know that Jesus has done the work necessary for us to be saved. We know that we cannot save ourselves by our works and being morally good enough. And yet, somehow, we get it into our heads that we must now do the work necessary to keep peace with God. We worry that we are not being good enough to stay in God's good favor. We fret over our sins, our failures to keep the moral law. We should be grieved by our sins. But we have no cause to worry that our sins will somehow undo the work that Jesus did once and for all on the cross. We have gained access into a state of grace. It is grace that has saved us; it is grace that will keep us.

And all of this is through Jesus Christ. That is why it is certain. If our remaining at peace with God did depend on our performance, we would indeed have cause to worry. But it depends on Jesus. How then can we lose such peace?

The next line brings us to the main topic: *“and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”*

It is good to be at peace with God. It is comforting to know that God does not condemn, that he is not angry with us. We need not fear him. But the gospel message does not end with justification but something far more wonderful. It leads us to glory, our glory.

To understand what Paul means by that phrase in this verse, we go back to 3:23 when he begins to present our dilemma: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” That is the core problem for every person. It is not that we are unfulfilled or that we in some way feel miserable. Our problem is that we fall short of the standards of the glorious God who demands that we be fully righteous, fully in harmony with his glory.

And so, Paul now assures those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ that such a state is now guaranteed to us. We who are covered by the righteousness of Christ, who have gained access into a state of grace can expect that we ourselves will some day become glorified and so be able to dwell in the presence of God’s glory. That is the Christian hope.

Someone may be thinking that they want more than hope. They want a guarantee. They have placed their hope in stock markets, in investments, in football teams, maybe even in politicians, and they have learned that hope is not the same thing as certainty. Even so, for Paul and the other New Testament writers hope is synonymous with having a guarantee. Hope, for them, refers to the final hope of glorification, and such an anticipation is guaranteed. It is guaranteed by God the Father who, “while were enemies” reconciled us to himself through his Son. It is guaranteed by Jesus who promised that no one who belongs to him will perish but will have everlasting life. It is guaranteed by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us and is “the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it” (Eph. 1:13–14). Will God fail if he has determined, has done the work, and has personally guaranteed the end result? And so we keep the good word “hope,” knowing who backs up the promise that our hope rests in.

Indeed, as our text says, we “rejoice” in such a hope. Such knowledge certainly makes us happy. Even so, there is more to the Greek word than taking joy in our glorification. It means “to boast.” The one who hopes in Christ does not merely rejoice in their future prospects but boasts in them.

An illustration might help to understand what is meant. If a sports team beats your archrival, you might rejoice in that victory. It makes you happy. But if it is your beloved team that beats your archrival, you boastfully rejoice in the victory. Not just a team won; “we” won. We take it personally as if we were on the field. We are proud of the victory. We own the victory. In the same way, our hope of glory belongs to us. It is our glory that our Lord won for us. We cannot boast in ourselves winning the victory, but we more than gladly boast in our Lord the victory he has won and the guarantee he has made.

So far so good. Through Jesus we have been justified by faith, reconciling us to God, keeping us in good standing, and even assuring our future glory. Surely this is cause for boastful joy. But then, a new twist is added.

³ *Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings,*

Not only do we joyfully boast in our hope for glory, but we joyfully boast in our sufferings. Let's see if we can follow Paul's odd train of thought. There is something about suffering, though, that, in his mind, is good.

knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character,

This sounds like a father-talk: "Suffering is good for you; it builds character. Why, when I was a child, etc., etc." Suffering produces endurance. That is the philosophy behind boot camp and training camp. Suffer now so that when the really tough times come you will be able to endure. This is the very true lesson from the hard-knocks school of life. It is a lesson that we all believe in who have a few decades on us. We might even boast about that kind of schooling and how we turned out. Even so, I doubt that we rejoiced during those hard-knocks, nor that we are eager to experience more.

Paul, in this text, is not talking about appreciating our past sufferings. He is presenting what it should be like to experience sufferings in the present. He is giving a motivational speech, and he then presents the final product. It is not character. We do not rejoice in our sufferings because they produce good character in us, however good that is. We rejoice because of the hope that is produced:

"and character produces hope."

Now we go back to head-scratching. We can see how our hope allows us to endure our sufferings and build character. How do endurance and character that come from sufferings produce hope?

We will use the apostle Paul, who makes this claim, as a case study. Did Paul experience sufferings? Here is the list that he presents in 2 Corinthians 11: imprisonments, countless beatings, often near death, 39 lashes five times, beaten with rods three times, stoned and left for dead, shipwrecked three times including adrift at sea for a night and a day, living in continual danger wherever he went, toil and hardship, sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, exposed to harsh weather, and daily anxiety for the churches he planted. So, we can conclude that he speaks from experience. We can also conclude that such a life was not fun. I doubt that during his lashes he was thinking how wonderful it was or when adrift at sea he was exclaiming, "This is the life!" And he outright admits to anxiety and sleepless nights.

Even so, Paul does not come off as a morose personality. Life is not a bitter cross to bear. Indeed, the only reason he ticks off a list of afflictions is that his Corinth church was goading him for not being more apostle-like. He makes clear that he feels like a fool to talk about such things. Paul is not averse to talk about his sufferings but not as a woe-be-gone but rather as he

does now, in the context of hope and boastful joy. Somehow Paul's sufferings encouraged him. Consider the reasons he gives.

1. He felt the honor of sharing in the sufferings of his Savior.

"For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him... that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead." (Phil. 3:8–11)

To share the sufferings of Christ was a distinct joy and honor for Paul, as it was to the other apostles. When Jesus' disciples received their first persecution by the religious authority ordering their beating, this was their reaction: "Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name" (Acts 5:41).

We can understand this. If we deeply love someone or believe deeply in a conviction, to suffer for that person or idea, however unpleasant the pain, we feel honored, even a joy, to prove our love or conviction. So with Paul and the rest of the apostles.

2. He felt that his sufferings served the people and church of his Savior.

In 2 Corinthians 4, Paul's moving passage of ministering the gospel as jars of clay, he describes the sufferings he and his companions faces and then notes, "For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God" (4:15). His sufferings occurred in the process of spreading the grace of God. Indeed, the very sufferings demonstrated the hope and comfort that the believer has in Christ and so serve to spread the good news of God's grace.

3. He felt that his sufferings continued the suffering ministry of his Savior.

Paul says in Colossians, "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church" (Col. 1:24). It is a hard saying to get a hold of. Surely Paul is not thinking that Christ did not suffer enough to redeem his people and so he, Paul, has to finish the job.

What Paul likely has in mind is that the sufferings of our Savior continue in us his followers. Paul may be thinking specifically of himself, but the same principle applies to all of us who claim Jesus as our Savior and Lord and who consciously are trying to advance the gospel work. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

Jesus has ascended into heaven. His work of extending his redemption to the lost is now taken up by us, and that work involves suffering. Paul embraced his sufferings, as it meant for him that he had the high privilege to carry on Christ's suffering ministry.

4. He felt that his sufferings somehow prepared him for glory.

Go back to 2 Corinthians 4. “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (vv. 16–17).

That brings us round circle back to “the hope of the glory of God.” It fits now. The Christian hope is being brought into the glory of God. The Christian’s sufferings are somehow preparing for us that glory. That is why Paul says we joyfully boast both in our hope and in our sufferings.

5. In the midst of his sufferings he felt the comforting love of his Savior.

Paul finishes our passage:

⁵ 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.

The world may scoff at our sufferings, claiming that they indicate that our God has abandoned us. Suffering can make us feel that way, and some have even left the faith because of it. What has always intrigued me, though, is how suffering does not cause most believers to abandon their faith, at minimum, and many find their faith only stronger. When Christians have come to me for counsel on how to deal with the afflictions they face, I often am left with no answer. But when I ask why they have not left their faith in God, they eloquently speak of the love of God shown to them in Christ. And as often as not when I visit those suffering with illness, they will assure me of the love of their heavenly Father. This verse explains why. The Holy Spirit is at work pouring God’s love into our hearts.

At the end of chapter 5 Paul will make the statement, “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.” He could have said now, “where sufferings increase, God’s comforting love abounds all the more.” Only once in history has God withheld his comfort. That was at the cross when his Son bore our sins. He bore our sins so that we would never experience the abandonment of God, but instead find comfort in our deepest affliction.

Lessons

What strikes me, as we look not only at this passage but throughout the New Testament, how alien the world of the early church is to us in our society. We may talk of persecution, and we might rightfully be concerned at the trend our society is heading in this post-Christian era. But for the New Testament church—its apostles and the common Christian—suffering was a way of life. Most people lived in poverty, and even those considered well-off lived under conditions we would find distressful with our modern medicine, sanitation, law enforcement, and so on. Add to that having a minority religion that was ridiculed, slandered, and led many adherents to their deaths. Such persecution would continue to be the way of life for 300 years.

We simply cannot fully grasp the hardships of these brothers and sisters to whom Paul and Peter and John wrote their letters. And here are these apostles encouraging them, not merely to bear up

under their sufferings, but to rejoice in them, to embrace them. Which leads me to realizing how little how I grasp their perspective on life.

Somehow, they were able to look beyond this life to glory. Listen again to Paul: “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Cor. 4:17). Listen to Peter: “now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith ... may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:6–7). Listen to John: “Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when [Christ] appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure” (1 John 3:2–3).

“Everyone who thus hopes” is able to joyfully boast in their sufferings because their eyes, their hearts are fixed on the eternal glory that awaits them. Paul once told the Philippians that he had “learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need” (4:12). Do you think this hope was his secret? As we begin an unknown new year, may we all learn this secret of the hope of glory.