

# Fourth Sunday after Pentecost – Epistle

## “The Peace That Defines Our Character”

Romans 5:1-8

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 6)

Analysis by Michael Hoy

1Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. 3And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. 6For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person-though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. 8But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

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## DIAGNOSIS: “The Truth of Our Character “

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** – *Boasting Characters*

St. Paul is not unaware of human boasting (cf. 3:27, this problematic behavior is addressed in the epistle-and not only this epistle). But here, the problem on the surface is that

one's character is determined by their boast. Käsemann says, "If as Paul sees it existence is defined by its lord, the basic understanding of existence comes to expression in boasting. In this, a person tells to whom he belongs." Most boasting, however, defines a bad character-and not only ethically, but theologically. Consider many of the American nationalistic boasts before and after 9-11; or the ones we make out of pride (for whatever reason). We are boasting characters. We think that we are that "righteous person" or perhaps a "good person" (v. 7)-but on what grounds? Sometimes our boasts betray our false lords.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – Weak**

What is really missed is just how weak we truly are. In fact, weakness, as well as sufferings (also referred to in this text) is not generally encouraged by our society. It is to be avoided. Perhaps it is only a further testimony to the fact that our biggest weakness is our inability to see just how weak we are-weak to tweak the divine favor of blessing; weak to stand upright before God in faithfulness.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – Ungodly**

And if weakness is not enough, imagine how our boasting character-that front for our weakness-is finally repulsed by the final verdict that we are "ungodly," and therefore, unfit for the kingdom. Repulsed or not, that will not stop the One Lord from rendering the just verdict. It is we who repulse God.

## **PROGNOSIS: "Characters in Christ"**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – Peace with God**

But if that One Lord is the One we have in Jesus, see how the divine dynamic is changed. Love replaces disgust. Peace replaces hostility. And why is that? Because "at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly." Instead of taking us on our word in our weak boasting, God takes us on the Word of another. And through

the Lord who gives his life for us, Who pays for the price of peace, the verdict is no longer the same. Love is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. And Love accepts sinners as sanctified through Christ's death.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *Standing Upright in Faith***

Doesn't that take the arch out of our weakened backs, to give us the joy and hope of standing upright (dikaiothentes) by faith? For now we have access to a Grace, a Gift, in which (Whom) we stand and in Whom we may truly boast of a hope in sharing the glory of God. That upright stance and solitary boast in the One Lord, Jesus Christ, may itself fly in the face of much evidence to the contrary-about ourselves, even about death itself. But in the final analysis, our faith affirms that it will stand, and the final verdict will not be weak or ungodly, but upright, good, righteous.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *Having Character that Boasts***

All of which changes the nature of our character. For even when we experience suffering and weakness, we see even these as occasions by which we may point to an eschatological future that is not so far off on the horizon, and is already present in our hearts and souls and bodies through our endurance and hope. And so we can even claim these sufferings as marks of our future hope, counting it all joy. For even when it would seem that there is no reason to see hope and promise, we take those very sufferings and parlay them into something promising. And further, we add the hilarious boast-that it is all on account of Him who died for us, when we were weak and ungodly! What delightful characters we have become! For the delight is glowing from the beaming face of God through our One Lord.