

Trinity Sunday – Epistle

Glory, Revised

Romans 5:1-5

Trinity Sunday

Analysis by James Squire

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.

Author's Note: In the NRSV the phrases, "we have peace," "we boast in our hope," and "we also boast in our sufferings," vary from the original Greek; some manuscripts show the verb in a slightly different form, so that it could read "let us have peace," "let us boast in our hope," and "let us also boast in our sufferings." But we hardly need to launch a grammatical investigation to figure out Paul's intent. All three verbs are conditioned upon the reality of justification by faith; thus they describe a different kind of reality from the one we know as sinners. Apart from justification, Paul's three statements expose the law for sinners. The words may sound like encouragement, but they really point out our guilt, because as unredeemed sinners we do not have peace, we do not boast in our hope, and we do not boast in our sufferings. So goes the diagnosis...

DIAGNOSIS: Self-Justification

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *We Do Not Boast In Our Sufferings*

“Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character” (v. 3)? Such words sound foolish to us. Suffering should be avoided—even the common, everyday kind. It only produces emotional pain, hurt feelings, helplessness, anger, frustration, and other worse symptoms. We certainly can’t control such emotional reactions. But we are suspicious of those who seem to endure and grow in character better than we do in the midst of suffering. Suffering is an injustice, and it prompts us to ask questions of the “Why me?” variety. And if others inflict suffering on us, such questions may be necessary to create a civil society. All the same, we would rather have success produce endurance, rather than suffering; or, even better, we’d prefer the rewards that come with success, rather than endurance. After all, a few exceptional individuals may be able to turn adversity and suffering into success—but even then their suffering becomes a means to achieve success, which is not what Paul is talking about; Paul is talking about servanthood.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *We Do Not Boast In The Hope Of Sharing The Glory Of God*

Success achieves personal glory. And personal glory is what we feel comfortable with. By contrast, the glory of God makes us uncomfortable. Personal glory is common currency in our society. Everyone seeks it. Of course, we may demur when the glory spotlight is directed at us publicly. But if that spotlight shines silently in the eyes of our admirers, we’ll gladly bask in it. We’d rather experience glory in others’ deferent treatment than hear it from their lips. That, to us, is “character” (v. 4). The Great American Dream is the “hope of

sharing in personal glory” we want to boast in (as opposed to v. 2). In casual conversation, we may boast in all kinds of things. But when we are serious, we boast about what (or who) we trust. And commonly what we trust is the American ideal—that each of us has earned the right to succeed on our own, without anyone’s help or hindrance.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *We Do Not Have Peace With God*

We seek personal glory because we do not have peace with God (v. 1). In the true biblical sense, peace is a powerful word, especially when it is peace with God. It means that we are in sync with God. It is as if we are “on the same page.” Righteousness, right relationship, obedience toward God’s will—all these phrases and many more describe peace with God. But we do not have it. Because of sin there is a radical discontinuity between our way of living and God’s way of living. We may accomplish a reflexive peace (“at peace with ourselves”)—if we have any peace at all; but we have no peace with God, because God is a jealous god who wants our complete trust, regardless of whether it causes suffering. (Even reflexive peace, which in comparison to peace with God is no big prize, is sometimes elusive, because it seeks personal glory, which often disappoints us [as opposed to hope in Christ, v. 5].)

PROGNOSIS: Justified By Faith

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *Christ Brings Us Peace with God*

Into our glory-seeking reality comes the incarnated Christ, bringing with him peace with God. Before he is finished here on earth, he finds himself abandoned on the cross. On his way to this destination, he bears the brunt of our self-destructive nature. Everything he does is according to his Father’s will,

and yet it only earns him more suffering on the road to Golgotha. Paul states that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope (vv. 3-4), but for Jesus the only thing suffering produced was death on the cross—or so it seemed! But, in fact, Christ's death on the cross won a victory over death that produced from the tomb resurrection into new life. And all for us!

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – Christ Empowers Us To Boast In God's Glory

Such a fortunate – and fortuitous – exchange (death for life) gives us a hope that does not disappoint us (v. 5). Just as Christ's lifeblood was poured out of his body at his Last Supper, and poured from his wounded side when the soldier pierced him, so also is God's love poured into us through his Holy Spirit (v. 5). That love comes free of charge, just as Christ was freely given for us, and being loved result is faith in Jesus Christ (v. 1). Faith may not always allow us to live comfortably in the world, but we have something better than comfort: We have a hope that never fails. We have a faith that gives us access to the grace of God forever (v. 2). Furthermore, when others direct the spotlight toward us, we don't need to feign objection or privately bask in glory because the glory is not ours but God's. Therefore Paul is bold to boast, and he encourages us to boast as well, in God's glory. And, because it is a glory that never disappoints us, God's glory is always worth boasting in.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – Christ Empowers Us To Boast In Our Sufferings

In faith, Christ transforms our sufferings. Now they produce endurance (v. 3) because through Christ our sufferings are put to death. We still experience them, but it is the sinner in us that suffers. That sinner is being crucified in Christ while a new creation has already been born in us—one that endures

precisely because of those sufferings! Likewise, that endurance produces character (v. 3, never mind that the world may apply that label derisively to one who endures suffering the way a believer in Christ does). In this lifetime, we may still fight for justice, but we know our suffering is in Christ's hands, and we endure because of that. Knowing we belong to Christ frees us to fight for justice all the more, rather than compromise ourselves in order to avoid suffering. More importantly, Christ frees us to take such sufferings in stride—without fear. After all, we belong to a hope that promises not to disappoint us.