

## Growing through the Life's Challenges

I love the way that Paul is so practical in his understanding of the Christian life, even though he also received some vaunted revelations into our eschatological destiny through Christ. In this passage from Romans Chapter 5:1-5 that we are looking at, we encounter the inherently trinitarian basis of Paul's thinking in his overview of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, where he outlines the applications to our lives past, present, and future through the Spirit's ministry within us:

*<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us,<sup>2</sup> and through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.<sup>3</sup> Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;<sup>4</sup> perseverance, character; and character, hope.<sup>5</sup> And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*

(Rom 5:1-5 NIV)

Let's work our way through what Paul is wanting us to understand:

***<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us,***

Whenever you see a **'therefore'** you always check to see what it's there for!!!

Paul has just spent four chapters showing how the whole world stands guilty before God's righteousness, with or without the law - no one is inherently righteous in their own selves.

He then reveals the good news that there is a righteousness from God available through faith in Jesus, and backs that up with the example of Abraham, who also believed God's word to him, and because of that faith had righteousness credited to him, so becoming the father of the faithful, which brings us up to the 'therefore' of Rom 5:1 -

- we have been ***made right with God*** through faith in Jesus.

Notice this is **past tense** - righteousness is always about a right relationship with God!

- And because we are good with God, ***we have peace with God.*** Notice - **present tense!** Based on what Jesus has done in the past, we now have peace with God as a present reality! We are no longer at war with God; peace is a done deal!!!

***and through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.***

- We stand in the most favourable position of living in the sunshine of his loving acceptance – his covenant of love. It's all about our relationship with God through the

faith that God has placed in our spirit – faith is the spiritual capacity given us to trust God’s word to us.

- ***And we boast in the hope (elpis) of the glory of God.*** Here comes the **future tense** – this is our confident **eschatological hope** – we will participate fully in Jesus' glory!!!

So here is a snapshot of salvation – made right with God; at peace with God; free access to God through his grace; and the joy of the future hope of sharing in the fullness of God’s glory.

But Paul makes a very interesting shift of emphasis right at this point!!!

- <sup>3</sup> ***Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings,*** - this seems to be a really surprising turn in Paul's discussion here – really, we glory in our sufferings????

We need to unpack this a bit more to get our heads around what he is thinking about!

The Greek word he uses here is *thlipsis* - some translations say ‘persecutions’, others ‘tribulations’, or ‘afflictions’, or ‘trials’, or ‘troubles’ -

The root word of *thlipsis* primarily means ‘pressure’ - typically, external pressures which often create their own internal pressures, so it has a wide range of potential meanings; e.g.:

2Cor 8:13-15 - the pressures created by financial burdens and expectations

Matt 13:21 - the pressures and challenges of living as a Christian in a fallen world (sower)

Jam 1:27 - the practical and emotional vulnerabilities faced by orphans and widows

1Cor 7:28 - the pressures and challenges of marriage and family life

Jn 16:21 - A woman in child-birth - she forgets her anguish because of the joy of her child.

So what Paul is referring to here are the struggles, the challenges, the difficulties, the problems, the conflicts, and sometimes even the persecutions that we all face as limited creatures in our God-created, but limited, physical and fallen world.

Here now comes the reason why we need to learn how to cope well with these pressures of life that result from our limited creatureliness -

- <sup>3b</sup> ***because we know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup> perseverance, character; and character, hope.***
- ***So, suffering produces*** – these pressures, that are part of everyday life, are actually working for us - they are producing something in us that nothing else can.

They are actually working for us – they are part of the plan!

Paul suggests three things that these challenges, and struggles, and difficulties produce:

- **Perseverance** – the ability to stand up under pressure; to bounce back – resilience
- **Character** – proof of genuineness through testing - becoming one that is tried and true
- **Hope** – the confident expectation of God's faithfulness to his promise through the repeated experiences of God's presence and provisions in our daily lives.

Paul goes on to explain in detail the nature of the eschatological hope he has in mind and why it is so effective and real -

- ***<sup>5</sup> And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.***

Here Paul completes the circle of **God's amazing grace and his provisions for us in Christ through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit!!!**

Paul summarises his thoughts and puts them into an eternal perspective in **2Cor 4:17-18** -

***<sup>17</sup> For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. <sup>18</sup> So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.***

Here is the practical application of what we learn from Jesus' willingness to humbly put aside his own glory, in order to participate in our fallen reality, so as to lift us up into his trinitarian fellowship with the Father through the Spirit.

**This is the purpose** of the struggles and pressures and difficulties and conflicts that we all experience in our now fallen world, so that we can learn how to be the agents of God's love and grace - having first experienced that grace within ourselves, we are then empowered to minister that same grace, through God's grace, to others in our needy and fallen world.

These are the things we can all be thanking God for this week!!!!

- He created a world for us in which we can not only survive but learn to thrive in Him
- He created us in his image with the ability to communicate responsively with God
- Although we stumbled and fell at the first learning opportunity God designed for us, he sent his Son into our world in human form in order to meet us at our point of need
- He took responsibility for our sinfulness in order to reconcile us to himself
- He calls us back into relationship with himself because he loves us

- He understands we are but dust – after all, he did create us! (Ps 103: 13-14)
- He has poured out his Holy Spirit into us because we cannot do it in our own strength
- He empowers us to grow through the necessary challenges of life
- He will fulfil his promise to transform us fully into his image in the resurrection