



In an NPR interview, David Brooks, author of *The Road to Character*, observes how our society has changed when it comes to boasting in our own success. He said: “The day after Japan surrendered in 1945 and World War II ended, singer Bing Crosby came on a radio show and said, ‘Well it looks like this is it. What can you say at a time like this? You can’t throw your skimmer in the air—that’s for a run-of-the-mill holiday. I guess all anybody can do is thank God it’s over.’”

Brooks says he was struck at this supreme moment of American triumph they weren’t beating their chests; they weren’t boasting; they were humble. He says he found that moving and worthy of admiration.

A few days later Brooks watched a pro football game. He observed something very different: A quarterback threw a short pass to a wide receiver, who was tackled almost immediately for a two-yard gain. The defensive player did what so many pro athletes do these days in a moment like that. He did a self-puffing victory dance as the camera lingered. Brooks says, “It occurred to me that I had just watched more self-celebration after a two-yard gain than I had heard after the United States won World War II.”

I think we can all agree this isn’t a good thing. This kind of proud, puffed up boasting is far from admirable. Boasting, even in its most subtle forms, is at best annoying and at worst deplorable.

You’d think the apostle Paul would be the first to denounce boasting in all its expressions. Paul himself had once been a proud and puffed up Pharisee with a long religious pedigree. But when he came to Christ he said all his religious accomplishments were like garbage to him.

Right here in the book of Romans Paul has spent the first four chapters arguing that human beings have nothing to boast about before God. He derided the Jews in chapter 2 because they boast in both God and in the law he gave them, though they failed to keep it (2:17, 23). In chapter 3, he said, “*No one is righteous, not even one. No one has done good.*” And then he asked, “*Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded.*” Finally in chapter 4 he argues Abraham had nothing to boast about before God because righteousness was credited to him as a gift. The only way to be made right with God is by trusting in something he’s done for us, and there’s no room for boasting in that.

But what if I told you starting in chapter 5 of Romans Paul says the normal Christian life is a life full of boasting? In fact, three times in the first eleven verses of chapter five Paul encourages those of us who’ve experienced this justification in Christ alone, through faith alone, by grace alone, to boast. How can that be?

### **Justification Means We have Peace with God and Stand in Grace**

But before he starts boasting he reminds us where we really stand in relation to God as a result of our justification by faith.

**Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand (verses 1–2a).**

One of the benefits of our justification is peace with God. This isn’t the same as the peace of God, which is the sense of calm he gives us in our heart. This is peace with God; the hostility between us and God is gone. The peace of God is subjective, while peace with God is objective; in other words, it’s true regardless of how we feel.

The Romans highly valued peace. They boasted in the Pax Romana established by Caesar Augustus. It was said to have been a “miracle” because prior to it there’d never been peace for so long in a given period of history. But it was a false peace, enforced with an iron fist, and it didn’t last much more than 200 years. But this peace Paul speaks of was won by another King named Jesus. And it’s a peace with God, won not by an iron fist but by a wooden cross. Paul uses the present tense to show this is something we enjoy continually; it’s not short-lived. “We are having peace...” We who were at odds with him, alienated, even enemies, are now brought near. Now, in Christ, there’s nothing to come between you and God. He has no bone to pick with you. The air is clear for a friendship with him.

Paul expands on this by saying it’s through Jesus we’ve “gained access by faith into this grace in which we stand.” “Grace” means favor. Here it means we enjoy a privileged position of acceptance and favor with God. He says through Jesus we’ve “gained access” into this grace. The picture is of a person formally given access into the presence of a King with whom he enjoys approval. Paul says we “stand” in this grace. When you stand somewhere that’s the sphere or the reality in which you live. We stand in grace. We don’t just have a periodic audience with the King based on our

loyal service; we live in his palace and enjoy a favored position there, like sons and daughters. We don't fall in and out of his grace like a courtier can fall out of favor with the King. No, we stand in it. So this peace with God is more than just the ending of hostility, it's also having favored status as a reconciled friend.

### **As a Result of Our Privileged Status Before God, We Boast**

Now Paul is the first to give all the credit for this to Jesus. It's "through him" we enjoy this privileged status. But here's where it gets weird. Here's where Paul begins to talk about boasting. He says those who have peace with God and stand in grace can actually boast in all that means for us. At the end of v. 2 he says, *"We boast in hope of the glory of God."* And then in v. 3 he says, *"Not only so but we also glory (boast) in our sufferings..."* Finally, down in v. 11 he says, *"Not only is this so, but we also boast in God..."* So here we have a list of three different things believers can boast in. And there's this mood of joy permeating the whole thing, like a victory dance.

Before we look at each of these boasts it's important we understand in what sense we can participate in this celebration. We know we can't boast in our own achievements because we've done nothing we can take credit for. But isn't it true we sometimes boast in the accomplishments of others? Isn't it true sometimes what others do gives us a sense of pride because we're somehow connected to them and so what they do brings personal significance to us?

For example, my son and my son-in-law are football coaches at the University of Notre Dame. I was never a Notre Dame fan until they began to work there. Now I **love** Notre Dame! And the fact they're near the top of the college football rankings makes it all the more fun! And, yes, that gives me a sense of personal significance, and free tickets to the college football play-offs doesn't hurt either! So I boast in all of that, sometimes quite annoyingly so to my friends. But I know I had nothing to do with any of it. I haven't put in the long hours they do. I was never good enough to play at Notre Dame. But do you see what I mean? Do you see how as those who stand in this sphere of grace before the King we can boast in what **he's** done and how that brings significance to our lives? It's in that sense Paul says we boast in three things.

#### **We boast in hope of sharing God's glory**

First, he says in verse 2, *"And we boast in hope of the glory of God."* That word "hope" is going to show up a lot in the rest of this passage. A lot of our boasting has to do with hope so it's important we understand what this concept means. This isn't the kind of thing we mean when we say, "I hope we get more rain soon." It's not a wishful thinking sort of hope. In the Bible hope is an eager, joyful and confident expectation of something God has promised. We don't have it yet. Hope focuses on what we **will** have rather than what we **do** have. But the prospect of having

it gives us great encouragement. We hope in the glory of God. What does that mean? God's glory is his reliant splendor which in the end will be fully displayed. Already his glory is revealed in the heavens and the earth. Already his glory is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. John said, "We beheld his glory..." But here's the deal: the day is coming when God's glory will be fully disclosed. First, Jesus will appear "with great power and glory." Then, not only will we see his glory but we'll be changed into it! So that means you and I, who through sin fall so far short of the glory of God, will one day share in full measure of his glory. That means we'll become like him. We'll be morally transformed from broken and sin-bent people to men and women who reflect the goodness and glory and beauty of God. This is our confident and eager hope, and it brings us joy just thinking about it!

Do you look forward to that? Do you boast in that? I think this follows on the heels of what Paul says about our access to this grace in which we stand before the King because the more we taste our access to God now and realize how intoxicating it is just to have a few sips of his presence, the more we'll desire to drink from the fountainhead. You see, if we have an appetite for glory, it's only because we're taking advantage of and enjoying our access to him—**now!** When we do that, we just want more. That prospect of drinking, guzzling in the glory of God is our sure hope.

#### **We boast in our trials because of what they produce**

That's a wonderful benefit of our justification, but life is complicated. Life can be hard. Life deals us blows. What difference does this access and hope mean then? It makes every difference. Look what Paul says next.

**Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope (verses 3–4).**

Not only do we boast in hope of the glory of God, but we boast in our sufferings. Why? Not because we're masochists but because of what they produce. Suffering is productive. It's the only path to growth and maturity. We don't face suffering just by gritting our teeth, but by looking through the suffering to what it produces.

He says, "suffering produces perseverance." This is talking about endurance, the ability to hang in there and be steadfast in the midst of adversity. Why do all four branches of the military start their new recruits with something called boot camp? To produce this quality of perseverance. Suffering can toughen us up. But that's not all. He also says perseverance produces "character." The idea here is to be tested. Last year when the Warriors went into the championship series people were concerned because they had not been in that position before and weren't tested. But this year we know they've been tested. God wants us to have that quality of having been tested which means proven character. And

what's interesting is he says this leads us back to hope. Character produces hope. So now we're back where we started in v. 2. But we'll never grow in hope if we don't suffer because suffering has a way of narrowing our focus on what's really important; what really lasts. We get weaned off the false hopes of this world and focus on what matters.

In her book *A Place of Healing* Joni Eareckson Tada reflects on how we tend to worry that suffering will wear us down and rob us of the radiance we once had as believers. "In fact," writes Tada, "it may be the very opposite. It isn't the hurts, blows, and bruises that rob us of the freshness of Christ's beauty in our lives. More likely, it is careless ease, empty pride, earthly preoccupations, and too much prosperity that will put layers of dirty films over our souls." A little later she writes, "Affliction has a way of jack-hammering our character, shaking us up and loosening our grip on everything we hold tightly. But the beauty of being stripped down to the basics, sandblasted until we reach a place where we fall empty and helpless, is that God can fill us up with himself. When pride and pettiness have been removed, God can fill us with 'Christ in you, the hope of glory.'"

Now at this point Paul expands a bit on this idea of hope in the midst of our sufferings. This expansion extends all the way through v. 10 because it's not until v. 11 Paul finally gets to his third boast. Meanwhile Paul tells us more about this hope.

**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.**

**You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (verses 5–8).**

It's important to see the connection between hope and love. Hope won't put us to shame or disappoint us. Why? Because of God's love for us. This is really talking about assurance. How can we be assured our hope of glory will be fulfilled; that it will really happen? Answer: God's love. And how do we know he loves us? This love is expressed in two ways. First, it's expressed through the Holy Spirit who pours God's love into our hearts. The Holy Spirit is a gift to all believers. When we're justified by faith, not only are we given access to the King, but his Spirit comes to live in us. And one of the distinctive ministries of the Holy Spirit in our lives is to pour God's love into our hearts. I remember so well when I became a Christian in 1974—my heart was flooded with a sense of God's love for me. This is a subjective thing. It's a feeling thing. And while we don't always feel it, and we don't all feel it in exactly the same way or to the same measure, all believers have felt it in some way. It might be overwhelming; it might be gentle, but it's there. The Holy Spirit, by the way, does

not leave us. In Ephesians, Paul says he's the down payment of our future inheritance. God could never make a down payment and refuse to pay the rest.

Second, this love was demonstrated by Christ's death on the cross. So we have a subjective experience of the love of God in our hearts and an objective demonstration of the love of God on the cross. Paul says Jesus came at just the right time in history and died for us when we were ungodly sinners and completely powerless to do anything to change our condition. Then Paul reasons this out a bit in verses 7-8 and talks about why a person might die for someone else. It's very rare anyone would die for someone who's righteous and upright, but if they're kind and good, it might happen. But who in their right mind would die for an evil, wicked person, like one of those terrorists in Paris? It just doesn't happen. But that's what proves God's love. While we were still rebellious sinners shaking our fist at God, Christ died for us. So, if you ever doubt God's love for you, if you ever feel distant from him, or if you're going through a difficult trial and wondering if God is angry at you, go back to the cross.

Before he gets to his final boast, Paul takes this one step further. He wants to nail shut any notion that God won't make good on our future hope. It reminds me of the 84-year-old grandmother who fiercely maintained her independence and lived alone in the old family home. Her four children lived in the same town, but she rarely called them except in emergencies. It was with some apprehension one of her sons drove to her house one morning in answer to her phone call. When he arrived, she said she suspected there was a burglar in her bedroom closet, since she'd heard noises in there the night before. Her son was upset and said, "Why didn't you call me last night?" She replied, "Well, it was late and I hated to bother you, so I just nailed the closet shut and went to bed."

That's what Paul does here in verses 9-10; he nails the door shut.

**Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!**

God has promised to save us. And as we've seen part of that is our glorification, which we're still waiting for. How do we know God will finish the work he's started in us? How do we nail the door shut to our fears that we'll screw this whole thing up? Here's how: If Jesus shed his blood for us when we were still God's enemies, how much more will he save us from God's future wrath now that we're his friends? If he saved us when we were hostile to him, why would he fail us now that we're reconciled? If he didn't give up on you when you were at war with him, why would he give up on you now that you're at peace with him? Not only that, if Jesus achieved our salvation through his

death, how much more shall we be saved through his life (now that he's alive)?

So, really, were talking here about assurance. You won't be able to boast unless you know this assurance of hope that's rooted in God's love, demonstrated both subjectively and objectively. We all have scary noises in our closet late at night. What are those scary noises in your life? Maybe it is an overwhelming pressure to perform better. To be a better husband, better wife, father, mother, employee, student, or Christian. The noise sounds like failure, disappointment, feelings of unworthiness. Maybe the scary noise sounds like guilt. Guilt over bad choices and misplaced priorities. The rattling sounds like this, "I could of. I should have. Why did I?" Maybe the noise is discouragement. Those plans you so carefully made and even prayed about aren't coming to pass. "Why God? Why would you not make this happen?" Maybe the scary noise is anxiety over your future. So many pressures, so much debt, so many health issues. Some of us lie awake at night and hear the noise of desperation. What if my marriage really fails? What if my son continues on this destructive path? Some are kept awake because you're in bondage. What if someone finds out about my secret life? You lay in bed and think, "If anyone really knew what was really going on with me they wouldn't even think I'm a Christian. Maybe I'm not a Christian? God couldn't accept me like this!"

To those fears and doubts, God's word says hope won't disappoint because of the nature of his love for you. So when you mess up and begin to doubt because of any one of those scary noises, you can calmly fall back on the truth of the gospel. He loves me. I know he loves me because I've felt it in my heart. I know he loves me because he died for me when I cared less about him. Because of that I have nothing to fear, not even my own weakness and sin. Charles Spurgeon once expressed his assurance in this way. He said he could grab on to a cornstalk and swing out over the fires of hell, look down into the face of the devil, and sing, "Blessed assurance Jesus is mine!" Or, like another hymn put it:

*Well may the Accuser roar,  
of sins that I have done;  
I know them all, and thousands more,  
Jehovah knoweth none!*

## **We boast in God**

But we're not finished yet. There's one more thing to boast about. Look at v. 11.

**Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.**

The focus here isn't on our future hope but on the present. He says we boast in God because he's given us **now** this reconciled relationship. We have this **now**. Reconciliation means friendship, fellowship and walking side by side in companionship with God. We boast in **him**. The gospel gives us God—**now**. We don't have to wait until glory to enjoy him; we reconciles **now**! And he doesn't change. Augustine said, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you." There's joy in knowing God, even if we lose things and people dear to us.

So, dear believers, I ask you, have you learned the art of boasting? Here we are, the week of Thanksgiving. Most of us will sit around the table on Thursday and give thanks. But many of us, if we're honest, will struggle with that. Maybe there's an empty chair where someone you loved used to sit, but they're gone now. Maybe you're sitting with people and the truth is you don't really get along very well. Maybe you're facing a threat to your health. Maybe the relationship you thought would be the one failed. There's so many things we might be facing that make it hard to give thanks. But, if you know Christ, if you know peace with God and you stand in his grace, then not only do you have much to be thankful for, you have much to boast about. You have the hope of glory, which grows even in times of testing, and which cannot (will not) disappoint because of God's unfailing love. Not only can you give thanks for that, but you can boast in it.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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