

How the Trinity Produces Hope

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² 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. ³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ 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.

Pressure. We all live under pressure at one time or another. There is pressure at work. There is pressure in raising your family. There is pressure to make ends meet. But pressure isn't always bad. Sometimes pressure is good. Take a piece of coal and place it under extreme pressure and it becomes a beautiful diamond. That is how they decaffeinate coffee, by placing in under pressure. That is how laboratories sanitize their test tubes and instruments, pressure and heat

Paul says in our text, ... **we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope.** The Greek word for "suffering" literally means pressure. It means to press down, squeeze. Take a garden hose and run water through it. Normally it streams out. But put your thumb over the opening and you can spray water a long way. That is because the water is under pressure. That's how pressure comes to mean suffering, things bearing down on us and squeezing us.

Normally pressure hurts. But Paul says we rejoice in our suffering. Here is why. Today is Trinity Sunday and we see the Trinity at work in our text. We see the Trinity taking pressure and suffering and turning it into hope that will never disappoint us.

I. The pressure we are under.

... **we also glory in our sufferings** ... Paul knew suffering, and most of it was because Paul was a Christian missionary. He experienced sickness, beatings, whippings, stonings, shipwrecks, imprisonments, to name a few. He was pressured by these things and they made life much more difficult. And the people to whom he was writing this letter, the Romans, also knew what suffering was. At that time the average life expectancy of the Christian Roman was less than the national average because of persecution. You can sense the pressure on these Christians. Give up Christ or else.

We know what pressure is. In general there is the pressure of a fearful world. Over thirty years ago our great nemesis, the Soviet Union collapsed. Just as soon as that threat disappeared, other threats took its place. Dictators rose and threaten us from Osama Bin Laden to Al Qaeda and now it is China. It is stressful out there.

There is pressure in our own community. Factories have closed. It seems only the super farms can survive. There is the stress of retirement portfolios that are dipping with the economy. But there are other pressures coming from a fallen and sinful world. After Adam and Eve sinned, the Lord pronounced the consequences of their sin. Man will grow old and die and in the process slowly break down as he faces aches and pains. Women will experience pain in childbirth. All will have to work hard by the sweat of their brow just to scratch out a living. That's pressure.

There is also the pressure of being a Christian. More Christians have died in the twentieth century than in the previous nineteen! They are not dying here like that, but do you feel the pressure of being a Christian? If someone came up and asked you why your church practices close communion or why our marriage vows ask brides to submit to their husbands, do you say with excitement, "I'm glad you asked," or do you try to change the subject? If you or your family eat at the mall, will you bow your heads and speak the dinner prayer like you do at home or do you feel pressure not to?

There is the pressure of the devil and his worldly temptations. Wherever we turn, we face temptation. You can't watch a rated G Disney movie without having to point out some of the errors in it about religion or God or whatever.

And there is the pressure of trying to please God all the time. God says that we should be holy like he is holy. Really, that bar isn't set all that high. All that means is to love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. Easy, right? It is not that the bar is set too high, it is the fact that we are incapable of the very basics. We can't love God and neighbor as we should. And talk about pressure. If we are not holy, we are damned.

II. The Father's love and grace.

That is just a summary of the pressures we face. But the Trinity goes into action and we see God the Father's love God's pouring into us. ¹ **Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.** Paul here tells us we have peace with God. Just what is peace? Is peace simply the opposite of war or fighting? It is more than that. In the Old Testament, this concept of peace has the idea of wholeness, soundness, health. It is the idea that things are what they ought to be. If neighboring nations are not at war with each other, but actually get along and trade with each other, that is peace, that is the way it should be. Imagine this kind of

peace in the family. Parents don't have to badger their children to pick up their toys or put their shoes away. There are no arguments. No time outs, no groundings, no discipline is necessary. That is the way it should be. Imagine that peace around us. We will never have to lock our doors because there will be no robberies. The way things should be is when don't have a care, worry, concern, or fight or conflict. That's peace.

That's the way God intended it for man. That's how he created the world and mankind. But sin ruined all of that, and with that came stressful pressure. The first thing Adam and Eve did was hide from God and blame each other. Man and God became enemies and man and woman became enemies. But God the Father wants it to be the way it is suppose to be before sin. So, he sent Jesus into the world to establish peace between himself and the sinner. That's how the angels announced his birth, peace on earth. That is why he is called the Prince of Peace.

And now look at the second person of the Trinity go to work. Jesus established peace with his suffering and death on the cross. As a result, man is justified before God. The best picture of justification is in the prodigal or lost son. The most the runaway son hoped for was to be a slave in his father's house. But to his joy he discovered that the Father made him his son again. Instead of greeting him with a contract saying, "If you want to be my son again, you got to do this and this and this," he greeted him with a kiss, put a ring on his finger, the robe, feasting, music and dancing. He treated his son as if he never left, as it was before, as if he never wasted his inheritance, never sinned.

And that is how God establishes peace with us. We are justified, that is, not guilty of our sins, and God immediately puts the holy ring on sinful fingers and the robe of righteousness on sinful shoulders and celebrates. Every day God continues to forgive and reinstate us as his sons. ... **we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.** We had a couple tornado warnings this year. We were warned to seek shelter. That is wise. We have a shelter we can run to. It is God's grace. The prodigal son knew he could go back to his Father. We can, too, because of Christ. By faith in Christ and through him alone, we are at peace with God. Our relationship is what it was suppose to be, and nothing can take that away from us.

III. The hope we have.

But we still suffer. Do our sufferings put a question mark behind peace? Does it raise questions about God's love? No. That is because of God the Holy Spirit. ³ **Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope.⁵ 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.** Paul confessed to the Corinthians that he had a thorn in the flesh, something God gave him to keep him from becoming conceited. Do you think that thorn was pleasant? No. Yet he was able to boast about it because it reminded him that he lived in God's grace. I heard something profound at convention this week. God doesn't waste dark moments. Rather, God uses them. He used Paul's thorn. He will also use all suffering we face.

"... **we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.**" First, it says that we "know." This is a fact. We know that suffering, when God allows it, has a good purpose. We know that it first produces perseverance. Perseverance is that resilience to plough ahead. It is like a set of stairs. Each step, each bit of suffering, is leading us closer to heaven.

Perseverance produces character. Character means that we are no longer raw recruits; we are seasoned veterans. We are the real deal. Suffering brings experience to the Christian. What kind of experience? Well, to trust God more than before.

Character produces hope. Hope in the Bible isn't wishful thinking, like, "I hope the sun shines today." Hope is based in fact. Christian hope knows that sins are forgiven. It knows there is a resurrection. It knows. And such hope will never disappoint us. It knows it will get to heaven, and with each painful step, it knows we are getting closer. And that is why this is the work of the Holy Spirit. He gifts, nourishes and strengthens faith through the Word and Communion and Baptism. Suffering and pressure tear down any confidence we have in ourselves and the world, and the Holy Spirit directs us to put our confidence in the only thing we can rely on, God and his promises.

I imagine it would be hurtful for a piece of coal to have all that pressure placed on it. But if it knew that such pressure will make it into a diamond, I am sure it would be willing to undergo all of it. No, the Christian isn't going around looking for suffering and persecution and pressure; these will come all by themselves. But we can rejoice because we know that God is using them to develop perseverance and character and hope. Feel the pressure? Let God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit use it to build up a hope that will never disappoint you. Amen.