

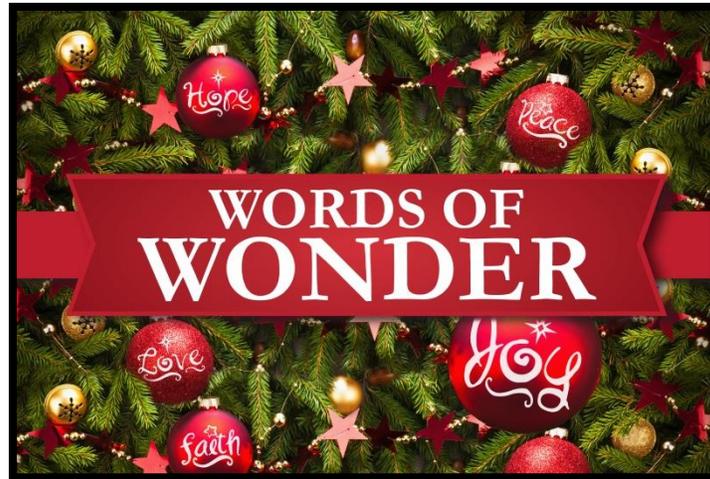
Words of Wonder

Christmas 2015

Written By

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December 20, 2015



Speaking in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. (chapters 1-8 cover 520-518 B.C. and chapters 9-14 are concerned with the time around 480 B.C.), the prophet Zechariah, echoing Isaiah's prophecy about the coming messianic king in Isaiah 9:6-7, disclosed almost six hundred years before the Messiah's birth that he would do something unheard of ... really, shocking:

⁹ The word of the LORD came to me: ¹⁰ Collect silver and gold from the exiles—from Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah—who have arrived from Babylon; and go the same day to the house of Josiah son of Zephaniah. ¹¹ Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest Joshua son of Jehozadak; ¹² say to him: Thus says the LORD of hosts: Here is a man whose name is Branch: for he shall branch out in his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD. ¹³ It is he that shall build the temple of the LORD; he shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne. There shall be a priest by his throne, with peaceful understanding between the two of them (Zechariah 6).

Contextually, God's angel informs the post-exilic High Priest, Joshua, that his priesthood, which suffered from years of corruption, along that of the regal Davidic line, will, in the future, be united with that of the Davidic bloodline. Setting a costly, newly fashioned crown on the High Priest's head, prophetically pointed forward to the greater Joshua, the Messiah, who would and

could, rightfully unite these two offices in a perfect, utopian rule of worldwide peace. Yes, even though the nation's post-exilic political power seemed to be a stump of a once mighty tree, One would eventually come, as Jeremiah prophesied in the seventh century B.C. (626-586 B.C.), growing from a shoot from this "dead stump" to a mighty and powerful Branch. This Branch would be none other than the messianic King (Isaiah 4:2; 11:1; 53:2; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15). And, as the prophets said, He, and He alone, would bring and establish peace.

What will be the nature of the Messiah's peace? From our second study on the wonderful word for Christmas called faith, we learned this peace will be political. Currently and historically, peace has been in short supply. WWI was supposed to be the war to end all wars, but it merely seemed to open the floodgate for more wars, more dictators, and more religiously crazed people bent on establishing their version of peace through domination and destruction. The Messiah's coming kingdom will accomplish what no other kingdom can or could accomplish. He'll summarily defeat all evil at His glorious revelation (Revelation 19), and then immediately institute His reign of universal peace while He rules from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2).

As you know, there is more to His peace program than this. From Matthew through Revelation we are acquainted with His future political work in behalf of peace; however, books like Romans boldly illustrate the peace He institutes is personal long before it is national. Romans chapter 5, verses 1 through 5, is, in many respects, a classical, pivotal passage worthy of our exegetical analysis this Christmas.

Before we sink our interpretive spade into this spiritually nutrient rich soil, we must first acquaint ourselves with the structural flow of the book from chapters 1 through 4.

- In Romans 1:1 through 3:20, Paul validates the theological premise that man stands spiritually condemned, before God, by his sinful status.
- In Romans 3:21 through 5:21, Paul develops the concept that guilty sinners only obtain a relationship with God when they willingly place their faith in the redemptive work of the Messiah, Jesus.

Within this last pedagogical core, Romans 5:1-5, illuminates our understanding of the question before us this Christmas:

What Is The Nature Of Christ's Peace?

His Peace Is Spiritual

Paul acquaints us with this truth in the fifth chapter of his letter to the Romans:

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ...

Let's hold it right there and make some important hermeneutical observations.

The opening word in the NASB and NIV is "*Therefore*" (οὖν), serving to grammatically introduce us to the conclusion of what Paul has articulated in the former four chapters. It's as if he says, "In light of the fact that sinful man is justified by faith alone, I must now turn and tell you about all the wonderful benefits of this relationship." The participial phrase, "having been justified by faith" (δικαιωθέντες), which precedes the key connective, "therefore," is casually

related to the main verb we have (ἐχομεν), meaning it should be translated “since.”¹ This sets up his discussion about what faith in Christ’s redemptive work accomplishes in a matter-of-fact fashion. However, before we turn over that soil, we need to slow down and consider the meaning of justification by faith, which is a profound theological concept woven throughout the book (Romans 3:20; 4:16; 9:30; 10:6).

What does it mean to be justified, which is from the Greek *dikaioo* (δικαιώω)? Lexically, it speaks of the vindication of a guilty party as we learn from William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*:

Δικαιώω ② to render a favorable verdict, *vindicate*. ① as activity of humans *justify, vindicate, treat as just* (Appian, Liby. 17 §70; Gen 44:16; Sir 10:29; 13:22; 23:11 al.) θέλων δ. ἑαυτόν *wishing to justify himself* Lk 10:29 ... ② of experience or activity of transcendent figures, esp. in relation to humans α. of wisdom ἐδικαιώθη ἀπὸ τῶν τέκνων αὐτῆς *is vindicated by her children* (on δικ. ἀπὸ cp. Is 45:25. S. also Appian, Basil. 8: δικαιώω=consider someth. just or correct) Lk 7:35; also ἀπὸ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς Mt 11:19 (v.l. τέκνων). On this saying s. DVölter, NThT 8, 1919, 22–42; JBover, Biblica 6, 1925, 323–25; 463–65; M-JLagrange, *ibid.* 461–63. Of an angel Hm 5, 1, 7. β. of God *be found in the right, be free of charges* (cp. TestAbr A 13 p. 93, 14 [Stone p. 34] ‘be vindicated’ in a trial by fire) Mt 12:37 (opp. καταδικάζειν). δεδικαιωμένος Lk 18:14; GJs 5:1; δεδικαιωμένη (Salome) 20:4 (not pap). Ac 13:39 (but s. 3 below); Rv 22:11 v.l.; Dg 5:14.—Paul, who has influenced later wr. (cp. Iren. 3, 18, 7 [Harv. II 102, 2f]), uses the word almost exclusively of God’s judgment. As affirmative verdict Ro 2:13. Esp. of pers. δικαιούσθαι *be acquitted, be pronounced and treated as righteous* and thereby become δίκαιος, receive the divine gift of δικαιοσύνη through faith in Christ Jesus and apart from νόμος as a basis for evaluation (MSeifrid, *Justification by Faith—The Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme* ’92) 3:20 (Ps 142:2), 24, 28; 4:2; 5:1, 9; 1 Cor 4:4; Gal 2:16f (Ps 142:2); 3:11, 24; 5:4; Tit 3:7; Phil 3:12 v.l.; B 4:10; 15:7; IPhld 8:2; Dg 9:4;²

Simply put the word in question means: *Just as if I never sinned*. Once your faith is placed in the vicarious, sacrificial death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9), God sovereignly forgives your past, present, and future sins, thereby making you a worthy recipient of heaven. With a booming voice, God the Judge then exclaims: “Welcome, forgiven son\daughter into an eternity long relationship with Me.” Legal forgiveness is what you receive with a new standing, but that event is not all. It’s followed, as we see from the ensuing verses by magnificent results, and the first shouldn’t shock us at all. It’s called peace (εἰρήνη), and it’s a significant word of the Christmas story.

¹ Daniel Wallace, *Selected Notes on the Syntax of New Testament Greek* (Unpublished Class Notes: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1981), 52.

² William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 249.

Please, take the time to notice the cause\effect relationship here between justification by faith and spiritual peace. Because you are justified by faith, i.e., *the cause*, you have peace, etc., i.e., *the effect*. God just doesn't save you from His coming wrath and move onto the next person. No, He gives you results you can't put a price tag on. He starts by giving you a real, lasting peace in your soul, a peace that your soul is right with Him, a peace that you have a sound, stable standing with Him. Do you have that peace?

Note Paul didn't say, "You might have peace." The verb is purposefully in the present tense, denoting an ongoing action\presence. Just what kind of peace is this? Does this mean the Christian life is a tranquil, easy life? No way, in fact I agree with Jerry Bridges in his excellent book *Trusting God* when he says, "God's people are not immune from such pain. In fact, it often seems as if theirs is more severe, more frequent, more unexplainable, and more deeply felt than that of the unbeliever."³ When you become a believer, God usually turns up the burner on your life. Why? To shape, mold, and to discipline you so that you'll spiritually grow. Texts like Hebrews 12:3-8 and Jeremiah 18:6 (*Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel*) tell us this much.

My brother-in-law, Steve, also verifies this hard truth when he said after the death of his 33 year-old wife, "My life before I was a Christian was so much easier. I was making six figures, have money in the bank, a BMW, a vintage Jaguar, and a condo by the beach in Solano Beach. Then I trusted Christ. I lost my job, then my next job, and then the next one. I then lost my cars, so I could financially survive, and then I lost my thirty-three year-old beautiful wife. Life has definitely been more difficult (less peaceful) after I trusted Christ, but I wouldn't trade these trying years for the world for in them I have learned how to trust and rely upon God's perfect sovereignty."

What kind of peace is Paul talking about, you ask? Steve introduces us to it.

- It's unmovable, unflinching inner peace which no amount of adversity in life can ever touch.
- It's peace in the shape of the rock of Gibraltar, which wind and weather conditions of life never budge.
- It's the inner peace of an underground shelter while the tornado passes over above your head.
- It's the kind of peace nothing in this world can even begin to touch. Why? How could this be? Simple. Because the saint is now intimately related to the man known in prophetic circles as "The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

This inner peace is also a reality because of other factors related to the event of your justification:

- You really know that your sins have been forgiven (Psalm 103:12)
- You know your conscience is clean for the first time in your life (Hebrews 9:11-14)
- You know the Lord is with you and in you. Sounds mystical, but you can't be convinced otherwise (Hebrews 13:5)

³ Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God Even When Life Hurts* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988), 16.

- You have power to overcome the old, carnal you and you've seen this power in action (Romans 6:11-14)
- You have light for your path for a change (Psalm 119:105).

No wonder, then, that Paul says “we have peace with Him” (verse 1).

Take a hard look at your life right now. Got peace? If not, I think I know where you can find it. It's found at the foot of a lonely, blood-stained cross on the windswept hill called Calvary. There on that hill the Prince of Peace, Jesus, the ultimate Joshua, died and three days later He rose again so that you could have the opportunity to really know peace in your life. Peace is a by-product of faith in this historical event being true for you. But that's not all. You'll note in the ensuing verses how justification leads to spiritual peace, and, then, logically other key concepts flow readily from this unique standing. Put in other words, it's not by chance that peace is the first thing mentioned in relation to our justification by faith. Divine peace naturally opens us to some amazing, life-changing benefits.

His Peace Is Beneficial (Romans 5:2-5)

You'll readily see three benefits flowing from your peaceful status with God which comes from being justified by faith, not works.

You Have Access (Romans 5:2). The opening prepositional phrase “*through whom,*” (δι οὗ) grammatically refers back to the person and work of Jesus, and it gives us the means by which we have divine access. We have it by means of our faith in Christ's work ... not ours. That faith results in justification and peace, which, in turn, grants us heavenly, spiritual access. Regarding this Paul declares:

“...through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand: ...”

The NIV translation gives us a little different nuance when it says:

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

These two translations adequately give us the two nuances of the Greek word *prosaagogen*, (προσαγωγή) translated “introduction” and “access.” Concerning the meaning of this picturesque word, William Barclay cogently remarks:

“(I) It is the regular word for introducing or ushering someone into the presence of royalty; and it is the regular word for the approach of the worshiper to God. It is as if Paul was saying, ‘Jesus ushers us into the very presence of God. He opens the door for us to the presence of the King of Kings; and when that door is opened what we find is grace; not condemnation, not judgment, not vengeance, but the sheer, undeserved, incredible kindness of God.’ (II) But *prosaagogen* has another picture in it. In late Greek it is the word for the place where ships come in, a harbor or a haven. If we take it that way, it means that so long as we tried to depend on our own efforts we were tempest-

tossed, like mariners striving with a sea which threatened to overwhelm them completely, but now that we have heard the word of Christ, we have reached at last the haven of God's grace, and we know the calm of depending, not on what we can do for ourselves, but on what God has done for us"⁴

I couldn't have said this any better.

When you trust Christ as your Savior, when your life is justified before God by faith, you have a peace with God resulting also in Him ushering you into the safe, peaceful harbor of a heavenly relationship. And it's something He'll never take away from you. Why do I say this? Check out the grammar or the tense of the verb related to the noun called "access." It's the verb "to be or to have" in a perfect indicative form (ἐσχίκαμεν). This is most significant for the perfect tense can denote a past act with an abiding, uninterrupted result. Wow. How comforting. Just this one little grammatical point also gives you peace, doesn't it?

Let me illustrate this concept of divine access with a story from my life.

When I was in high school, my father took me with him one day to check on something in the government's weapons\drug vault at the Port of Entry in Calexico, CA. We walked in a special building, down a long hallway, and then stood before a massive, steel door, replete with a combination dial and a huge wheel used to turn the locking gears. Now I could have stood there all day attempting to get into that vault, but to no avail. You had to have the right combination to gain access. Only two men had that combination: one was my dad and the other was the Port Director, Charlie Smith. Only these two men could open the vault so entrance could be gained.

In the same way, heaven and a relationship with God are impossible for the sinner, for it's as if God is in a vault. Man, who lacks peace with God, attempts, as we see in Romans 2-3, to gain entrance through his good works, but those works are never going to turn the dial and the massive gears. Only Jesus, because of His work on Calvary, can open this heavenly vault to allow you to walk spiritually into God's very presence. Only Jesus, can open this thick door and permit you to see and understand the wonders of God's tremendous grace.

Question is, "Do you have access?" Remember that when you are justified by faith in the person and work of Jesus, you are immediately at peace with God, and because of this peace you have eternal, lasting access to the Godhead. How humbling. This is so important I must ask you again, "Do you have access?" I do, and I can tell you it's a wonderful, life-changing reality. Because of Christ, I walk freely daily into God's presence and talk with Him, and He with me. After detailing the great work of Jesus as our High Priest, the author of Hebrews excitedly remarks:

"Therefore, let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

⁴ William Barclay, *The Letter To The Romans* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 73. "προσαγωγή, ἡς, ἡ (Hdt. et al.; ins, pap, EpArist 42) intr. a way of approach, access (the intr. aspect is certain in Polyb. 10, 1, 6 access point for ships; Plut., Aem. Paul. 261 [13, 3] of ground that offered no access to enemy forces) abs. Eph 3:12. εἰς τι to someth. Ro 5:2. πρὸς τινα to someone Eph 2:18. A status factor is implied (cp. X., Cyr. 7, 5, 45 of access to Cyrus for an audience).—DELG s.v. ἄγω p. 18. M-M." William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 876.

Yes, once you have secured a relationship of peace with the Father based on your faith in the redemptive work of Jesus, the Son, you have the privilege of walking boldly, confidently, and directly into the presence of the Godhead as a son or a daughter.

What do you do once you stand here in this unique, awe-inspiring location (Isaiah 6:1-4)? Sometimes you are just quiet, taking in His greatness and holiness. At other times, you read Scripture to worship Him. Sometimes you might sing Him a song which reflects how you feel. At other times you talk. What do we talk about? Everything! He gives you wisdom, He confronts you, He encourages you, and He helps you to understand His Word as well as people. Let me tell you, you can't put a price tag on this privilege. Eternal entrance into God and His grace. This is what Jesus waits to give to you, too.

The next phrase in Romans 5:2 supports this conclusion. Again, when Paul says, "...into this grace in which we stand," he employs the use of the perfect tense (ἔστηκαμεν). Standing in God's rich grace isn't something you lose, ever. The perfect tense lets you know it's a done deal, never to be taken from you. Hence, you who know Christ today not only have His abiding peace, but an abiding understanding of the wonder of His grace which has saved you. Praise Him!

Additionally ...

You Have Hope (Romans 5:2). Hope in what? Specifically, "...hope of the glory of God." What does this mean? We talked about this in depth in our former study on the word hope. Suffice it to say here it connotes the seed of hope is planted in your heart at salvation that one day you will truly see the Shekinah glory of God face to face. Now you can only read about what it was like when God appeared. Moses, who was privileged to get a glimpse of this glory this side of heaven, writes in Exodus 24:16-17:

“And the glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top”

Scary and ominous, huh? Clouds shielded the people from God's magnificence, yet you will one day be able to look upon and talk with this glorious Lord face to face, toe to toe without fear. Oh, what a day that's going to be, and I have the unshakeable hope of its reality because Jesus gave it to me at the moment I was justified. How about you? Do you have that hope? Do you know for sure you stand with God as His friend and not His foe? Or are you unsure? Again, I know how you can remedy your spiritual problem. His name is Jesus and He came to earth to bring real peace and hope to your life at the moment you place your faith in Him as your Savior. This is why we love the old carol *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*:

Hail, the heav'n born Prince of Peace!
Hail, the Son of righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
ris'n with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays His glory by,
born that men no more may die,
born to raise the sons of earth,
born to give them second birth.

Hark! The herald angels sing, ‘Glory to the newborn King.’”

Carols like this give us all we need to know about the peace Jesus brings to a person’s life.

When you’ve received the second birth by faith, peace floods your soul, never to leave. And once this floodgate is opened, other wonderful truths pour over the once thirsty soil of your life. You have access to God because you’re at peace with Him now, and He with you. You have hope that beyond this life there is eternal life whose beauty and magnificence we cannot even begin to describe. You also have one more thing because of this new found peace.

You Have A Proper Perspective On Trials (Romans 5:3-5). Follow Paul closely on this one. He says,

“And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance, and perseverance, proven character, and proven character hope ...”

Sounds illogical, doesn’t it? If anything, people today boast, which is what the word exult means in Greek⁵, in good health, don’t they? They watch what they eat, purchase and use

⁵ **καυχάομαι** (s. two next entries; Pind., Hdt.+ mid. dep.; 2 sing. *καυχᾶσαι* **Ro 2:17, 23; 1 Cor 4:7** (s. Mayser 328; JWackernagel, TLZ 33, 1908, 639; Thackeray 218; Mlt-H. 198); fut. *καυχήσομαι*; 1 aor. *ἐκαυχησάμην*; pf. *κεκαύχημαι*. In our lit. restricted to Paul, except for two pass. each in Js and Ign., and one in 1 Cl (a quot. fr. the OT).

① **to take pride in someth., boast, glory, pride oneself, brag**, intr. (Sappho, Fgm. 26, 10 D.²) *ἐν τινι in or about a person or thing* (schol. on Apollon. Rhod. 3, 976 οἱ καυχόμενοι ἐν ἐτέρων διαβολαῖς; LXX; TestJud 13:2; ἐν τοῖς θεοῖς Theoph. Ant. 1, 1 [p. 58, 6].—B-D-F §196; s. Rob. 532) *ἐν θεῷ* **Ro 2:17**. *ἐν τῷ θεῷ* **5:11**. *ἐν κυρίῳ* **1 Cor 1:31b; 2 Cor 10:17b**; 1 Cl 13:1 (cp. on the three Jer 9:23). *ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ* **Phil 3:3**. *ἐν ἀνθρώποις* **1 Cor 3:21**.—*ἐν νόμῳ* (cp. Sir 39:8) **Ro 2:23**; in afflictions **5:3**; in the work of others **2 Cor 10:15**; in weaknesses **12:9**; in high position **Js 1:9**; in wisdom, etc. 1 Cl 13:1 (Jer 9:22f). *ἐν τῇ ὑμετέρῃ σαρκί* **Gal 6:13**. *ἐν τῷ σταυρῷ* vs. **14**. *ἐν τῷ προσώπῳ* κ., opp. *ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ* *pride oneself on externals ... on the heart* **2 Cor 5:12**. *ἐν ᾧ καυχῶνται* **11:12**. On **2 Th 1:4** v.l. see *ἐγκαυχάομαι*.—The *ἐν* is to be taken somewhat differently **Js 4:16** (s. *ἀλαζονεία*).—*εἰς τι* *boast with regard to someth.* **2 Cor 10:16**. Differently *εἰς τὰ ἄμετρα* κ. *boast beyond limit* (s. *ἄμετρος*) vss. **13, 15**.—*ἐπί τινι* *based on someth., in someth.* (Cratinus Com. [V B.C.] 95; Diod S 15, 6, 2 *ἐπὶ τοῖς ποιήμασιν*; 16, 70, 2; iambic poet in Ps.-Callisth. 2, 20, 11 *ἐπὶ τέκνοισι*; SIG 1268, 23 *ἐπὶ ῥώμῃ*; Ps 48:7) **Ro 5:2** (JBover, *Biblica* 22, ’41, 41–45). *ὑπέρ τινος* *on behalf of someone* **2 Cor 12:5ab**. *κατά τι* *in accordance with someth.* **2 Cor 11:18a**.—*ἐνώπιον* τ. θεοῦ *before God* **1 Cor 1:29**.—W. ὅτι foll. (Strabo 13, 1, 27) IPHd 6:3. (W. inf. TestJob 41:3; Just., D. 101, 1.)—Abs. (TestReub 3:5) **1 Cor 1:31a; 4:7; 2 Cor 10:17a; 11:18b, 30a; 12:1, 6, 11** v.l.; **Eph 2:9**; IPol 5:2.—**1 Cor 13:3**, a variety of witnesses have *καυχήσωμαι* (read by N. and defended e.g. by Harnack, SBBerlAk 1911, 139ff; Goodsp., Probs. 162–65; KClark, *Studia Paulina* [deZwaan Festschr.] ’53, 61f) instead of the v.l. *καυθήσομαι*, which is preferred by others (e.g., EPreuschen, ZNW 16, 1915, 127ff; JKelliott, ZNW 62, ’71, 297f; et al.).—S. *καίω* 2.

② **to make a boast about someth., boast about, mention in order to boast of, be proud of**, trans. *τι someth.* (Philemon Com. [IV–III B.C.], Fgm. 141 p. 521; Diod S 20, 63, 4) *τὰ τῆς ἀσθενείας μου* *boast about my weaknesses* **2 Cor 11:30b** (cp. Pr 27:1 κ. τὰ εἰς αὔριον). *τι* *περὶ τινος* **10:8**. *τι* *τινι ὑπέρ τινος* *say someth. boastingly (or in pride) to someone concerning someone* **7:14; 9:2** (here a ὅτι-clause defines *τι* more closely). *μικρόν τι* **11:16**.—For Gr-Rom. cultural background on Paul’s theme of boasting in 2 Cor s. Plut., *Mor.* 539–547 ‘On Inoffensive Self-Praise’; FDanker, *Augsburg Comm. on the NT: II Cor* ’89, esp. 147–214; idem, *Paul’s Debt to Demosthenes* ‘De Corona’, in *Persuasive Artistry* [GKennedy Festschr.], ed. DWatson, ’91, 262–80; JLambrecht, *Dangerous Boasting, Paul’s Self-Commendation in 2 Cor 10–13*, in RBieringer, ed., *The Corinthian Correspondence* ’96, 325–46.—JBoesch, ‘Gloriarse’ según San Pablo, *Sentido y teología de καυχάομαι*, ’70. BDowdy, *The Meaning of καυχᾶσθαι in the NT*, diss. Vanderbilt ’55.—B. 1281. DELG. M-M. EDNT. TW. Spicq. William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 536.

exercise equipment (and rightly so), work out, see their doctor regularly and the like to stay healthy. However, just let some of them get sick or experience a tragedy and they quickly lose their joy and zest for living, and the last thing you'd ever hear from their lips is something like "I am so thrilled about this adversity God has brought into my life." Sounds illogical, but it really isn't if you have peace, access, and hope with and to God.

Paul says the saint should possess a different perspective on life. He is to boast in tribulations. Interestingly enough, the Greek word for tribulations, *thlipsis* (θλίψις), literally means "pressure." Got any pressure right now in your life? Perhaps it's a broken down car, a tattered relationship you didn't do anything adversely too, a tough schedule, or a diagnosis you'd never thought you'd hear. Right now you're feeling the pressure of the vice called tribulation. And please note Paul says, tribulations, plural, meaning you will encounter numerous ones in your life and you shouldn't just exult in one but in the many. Really, Paul?

Why should you evidence joyful exultation? Because we know we are justified, or declared righteous before God based on our faith. We joyfully exult because we know beyond a shadow of a doubt we have lasting peace with God. We joyfully exult because we of all people know that not only is God in sovereign control, but the pressure situation, be what it may, has a definite divine purpose. We understand, as Paul shows here, what tribulations accomplish in our lives of faith.

First, *tribulation(s) brings perseverance*. Perseverance literally means in Greek "steadfast endurance." This means a dogged hanging on and pushing forward toward the goal.

Clyde Tombaugh illustrated what this Greek words means, when in 1929 he examined scores of telescopic photographs, each showing tens of thousands of stars, all in his quest to find the planet Pluto. Day after day he stared into the eyepieces of the microscope looking at the photographs. Months and some *twenty million images* later, Clyde Tombaugh discovered a blinking light in the constellation of Gemini, a light which became known as Pluto. Had he given up, we might now have discovered the illusive planet.

This, my friend, is what steadfast endurance means. It means pushing ahead despite obstacles to reach your goal. It means not giving up, despite what is thrown at you. Tribulation might destroy the unbeliever, but it should only serve to strengthen and deepen the saint. That's why Paul says we should boast in tribulation, which, by the way, was something he knew how to do firsthand (Acts 16:16-40).

Second, *tribulation(s) brings perseverance which is logically followed by proven character*. I like the word Paul employs here. It's the Greek word for "test." He uses it freely in other places because he knew what it meant (2 Corinthians. 2:9; 8:2; 9:1, 3; Philippians 2:22). Why is the Greek word for test translated "proven character?" We don't have to think long and hard on this one, do we? Why? We, who know the peace of Christ, know how pressure cooker situations cause us to think about and really analyze the divineness of the test as it relates to the breadth and depth of our character.

The meaning of this Greek word for "proven character" is something akin to the Latin *testum*. Concerning this word we read in *Webster's Dictionary Of Word Origins*,

"Latin *testum* was used as a general word for an earthen vessel. In the Middle Ages its French descendant, *test*, became the word for a specific type of vessel which was used in the assaying of precious metals, namely, a cupel. The cupel or test is a shallow, porous cup. When impure silver or gold is heated in it, the

impurities are absorbed in the porous material, leaving a relatively pure button of silver or gold.”⁶

This is what tribulations accomplish. They place you, the gold or silver, in a figurative cupel (pronounced *cue-pul*) and proceed to burn out the dross. Once this is accomplished, the stronger facets of who you are are refined, hardened (matured) and made invaluable to God. Has your character ever been proven as a saint? Mine has, many times. Sure, it’s always tough. Sure, it’s always painful. But you know what? I can always praise and boast in God because I know that I am saved and He is using the event, as hurtful as it may seem, to further grow me into His image. Test the character of an unbeliever and they are tempted to loose perspective and to wonder what’s happening to them. Test the character of a saint, however, and all of a sudden you have somebody who knows how to learn from the difficulty and how to praise God at the same time!

One final reason why the saint can exult or boast in tribulations is because they know proven character deepens their hope in God. Drop a maturing saint in the fire and they will listen and learn from God and will grow in their hope that their faith is secure. I know this to be sure, because I’ve been in the boiling pot all too many times and I’ve seen what Jesus does in my life when I’m there. After all, the Lord says,

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the LORD, nor faint when you are reproved by Him;’ for those whom the LORD loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives” (Hebrews 12:5-6).

I expect discipline because I need it, but in the discipline I know the God of my salvation is working in my life, thus my hope grows because my maturity level grows. My hope also grows because of what Paul says in verse 5:

“...and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

Discipline without love leads to despair, but discipline bathed in love, grounded in divine peace, leads to growth. And since the Lord has poured love into me and into you through the Holy Spirit, we need never waver in the trial at hand. Instead, we should boast in Him, knowing that His love is with us and is also moving Him to shape us to be like Him.

Divine peace is a powerful thing. Too many in our world don’t have divine peace and its attendant by-products because they attempt to approach God on their own efforts. Perhaps man’s spiritual situation is best understood by considering the massive statue of Atlas struggling to hold the world on his shoulders at the entrance of the RCA building on New York City’s Fifth Avenue. Figuratively, this statue represents how many restless are carrying the weight of their sin on their shoulders, incapable of properly dealing with it.

On the other side of Fifth Avenue, however, is man’s spiritual answer in a small statue of Jesus on display at Saint Patrick’s Cathedral. Instead of having the weight of the world on shoulders, Jesus simply and effortlessly holds the entire world in just one, powerful, loving hand. What a powerful picture of His redemptive, restorative work for sinners.

⁶ Webster’s Dictionary of Word Origins, (New York: Smithmark Publishers, 1995), 461.

Admit it. Peace is hard to come by when you are carrying the weight of the world on your back; however, it's not hard to come by when you, by faith, know the One who capably took that sinful world in His nail scarred hands.