

The confidence to call shots (Romans 5:1-5)

Paul encourages his readers to trust an outcome they cannot yet see.

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When playing pool, depending on what variation of the rules you're following, you may get to call your shots.

Announcing in advance exactly how you will cause the cue ball to interact with the other balls and the table offers an opportunity to look impressive—or foolish. In Romans 5, Paul describes justification by faith as if it were a theological form of shot-calling. He encourages his readers to have confidence in an outcome they cannot yet see.

Paul writes, "Since we are justified by faith...we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God." Boasting in hope is a little like counting one's chickens before they hatch—except that those who place their faith in God are assured of the result. The Greek word Paul uses is "καυχάομαι," which, although frequently translated as "boast," also means "living with one's head held high." Rooted in the word for "neck," *boasting* describes the stance of those whose confidence is visibly manifest in their posture.

Normally, such strutting-before-the-fact would foreshadow an undesired outcome. But Christians boast not of their own accomplishments but of God's. And for Paul, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is all the confidence we need.

Justification by faith means being declared righteous by God not because of what we have done but because of our confidence in what God has done. Our hope, therefore, depends not on the fruit of our own labors but on the fruit of the resurrection. This enables us to see, in Christ, what the world cannot see—that even in the midst of struggle our future is assured.

Of this otherworldly confidence, Paul writes boldly, if not ridiculously, that “we also boast in our sufferings.” Because of our confidence in the one who is faithful, we hold our heads up high as if we inhabit a position of strength—even when the path before us leads to hardship. Even when we feel as if we are being taken further from our share in God’s glory, we have confidence in God and God’s promises. How else could the ones who suffer look their persecutors in the eye?

This brand of hope and faith is not easily found, however. It is produced through the agonizing process of suffering, endurance, and character-building. In Christ, God has given us every reason for confidence, but those who hope in God place their faith in something that cannot be seen. We are justified not merely by agreeing with the blind prospect that things will get better but by trusting—by knowing—that God will bring us to glory.

In the face of such difficulty, how can we know how things will turn out? Where does faith like that come from? It comes from knowing that even though we are the ones who call the shot, we are not the ones who make it.