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Boasting in Tribulations

Romans, Part XXVI

Romans 5:3-5

Stuart W. Bryan

I. A Primer on Stoicism

- A. Stoicism – Zeno, Seneca, Epictetus, M. Aurelius
- B. Stoicism and Suffering

The Oxford Dictionary defines Stoicism as, “*The endurance of pain or hardship without the display of feelings and without complaint.*” This approach to suffering was the fruit of Stoicism’s materialism and determinism. The rational man resigns himself to his fate and responds to the circumstances of life with calm repose (*apatheia*).

- C. Stoicism’s Fatal Flaws – Atheism and Pride

“*Religion is regarded by the common people as true, by the wise as false, and by rulers as useful*” (Seneca). Stoics claimed their insights remained true whether there is a god or not. Hence, Stoicism was _____ centered. To rise above suffering, Stoicism emphasized the power of the mind, the importance of the will, and the glory of self-determination.

II. The Development of Fortitude

³And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴and perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Rom 5:3-5)

- A. Tribulations (8:35; 12:12 cf. Job 5:7; 14:1-2; Ecc 2:22-23; Acts 14:22)

The word “*tribulation*” is the Greek word *thlipsis* which refers to “*trouble and suffering, suffering, persecution.*” To the first converts in Turkey, Paul declared, “*We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God*” (Acts 14:22). Tribulations are many and varied. As Job reminds us, “*Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward*” (5:7 cf. 14:1-2).

- B. Perseverance (cf. Jas 1:3; 1 Pet 4:12-16)

These “*tribulations produce perseverance*” (3b). The Greek is *hoop-om-on-ay’* and means the “*capacity to continue to bear up under difficult circumstances—‘endurance, being able to endure.’*” James declares “*the testing of your faith [through trials] produces hoop-om-on-ay’*” (1:3). It is translated “*perseverance, patience, endurance, constancy, courage*” – in a word, _____.

- C. Character (cf. Jas 1:2-4)

Fortitude produces “*character.*” The Greek means “*tested in battle, reliable, trustworthy.*”

²My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³knowing that the testing of your faith produces [hoop-om-on-ay’ - fortitude]. ⁴But let [hoop-om-on-ay’] have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (Jas 1:2-4)

D. Hope

Paul concludes his list with *hope* (v. 2). God's work in our lives through suffering has a purpose: that we might become more virtuous people who more fully reflect God's character. In our sufferings, the Spirit communicates God's love to us, assuring us that our hope is secure. As Paul writes later in Romans:

¹⁵For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."¹⁶The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,¹⁷and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.¹⁸For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us...²⁴For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance [hoop-om-on-ay' - fortitude].

III. Stoic Fortitude vs. Christian Fortitude

A. Impersonal Fate vs. Personal Father (8:32; cf. Lk 12:6-7; Heb 5:8)

While Stoic Fortitude _____ itself to tribulations, Christian Fortitude *rejoices* in the face of tribulations knowing that they come our way from the hand of our loving Father who intends them for our good. Jesus assured the disciples: "*Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows*" (Lk 12:6-7).

B. Pointless Suffering vs. Purposeful Suffering

While Stoic Fortitude declares, "*Life is _____, deal with it,*" Christian Fortitude declares, "*Life is _____, but God in Christ has a good purpose for it.*" As Christians, we know the goal and trajectory of history. Recall the precious promise that Paul will state in Romans 8:28, "*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*" As Paul writes to the Corinthians:

¹⁶Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.¹⁷For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,¹⁸while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Cor 4:16-18)

C. Boasting in Self vs. Boasting in God (cf. Jer 9:23-24; 1 Cor 1:29-31)

When we endure through suffering, boasting is inevitable; the credit for our endurance goes somewhere. While Stoic Fortitude boasts in _____, Christian Fortitude boasts in _____. "*Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith*" (Rom 3:27). While the Stoics trusted in themselves, we trust in the Lord:

²³Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches;²⁴But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the LORD. (Jer 9:23-24)

IV. Conclusion