

Why are you a Christian? Or perhaps if you aren't one, why do you think people are Christians? Is the choice to become a Christian one that has been thought out? Sometimes Christians are accused that they are only "saved" to be safe, that just in case there is an after life, they will be fine, sort of a fire insurance policy.

(Run through table of possibilities, and since the other three are pretty bad, you might as well be Christian)

Is there after life	Yes	No
Worst that could happen	Hell, fire, agony – if you aren't a Christian	Cease to exist whether you were Christian or not
Best that could happen	Heaven	Cease to exist whether you were Christian or not

So for people who might think this way, it would seem that there is no real benefit for our current lives, and it doesn't really have any place in the here and now. What Paul looks at, and what we are going to look at is how being a Christian really should be affecting our lives right now and some of the amazing gifts that we have received by being justified through faith.

Paul has been looking at in the past chapter about how people are saved, that we are justified through faith, like Abraham was. Now he goes on to talk about how that justification – that being made right with God, means that we can have peace with him.

In 1 Colossians 1:21 it talks about how we had become enemies of God in our minds due to our evil behaviour, but that we are reconciled through the death of Christ. Paul earlier in Romans tell us that we are no longer an enemy of God because are sins are no longer on record with him. Therefore we are at Peace with God. You may not always feel peaceful, but God has given us a peace treaty signed with the blood of Jesus that will never be broken. The peace we have with God, Paul tells us, is a *fact* not just a feeling.

That fact means that we are able to live in God's presence without fear of rejection, condemnation and punishment, today or in the future.

In today's world one thing people seek is peace and they often look everywhere else rather than in the gift that is offered freely through faith in Jesus. We too can often become distracted, unhappy and think that we can find some peace in *things*, yet we know that ultimately is untrue. Perhaps this T-shirt sums it up well:
"He who dies with the most toys...still dies!"

Paul tells us of this peace in Jesus, of the certainty of the promise, and because of that we can "rejoice in the *hope* of the glory of God". In our day "hope" is a weak word. This 'hope' is not the uncertain, wishful thinking such as we express in 'I hope it doesn't rain' or 'I hope I get this position'. Biblical hope is a certain and fixed confidence and assurance. So Paul is saying 'we rejoice in our certain expectation'? We rejoice in our calm and confident assurance. Hope not with a question mark, but

with an Exclamation mark!!! Christians expect to one-day stand in the presence of God's awesome glory!

Paul goes on further with this hope. So strong is the certainty of this hope that we can even rejoice in suffering. Not because suffering is to be rejoiced in, but because we have the relationship with God, we can look beyond the suffering and realise that we can spiritually grow while suffering.

A lot of people might think of suffering as all bad. We can see this quite easily in the frequently asked questions 'What have I done to deserve this and 'Why is it always so hard?' Yet Paul says in verses 3 and 4 that suffering produces perseverance, character and hope.

Think of it perhaps like an athlete training and working out.

He pushes through the agony of running day after day, of lifting weights heavier and heavier so that his body will become more honed for the competition. When suffering comes to us, it is in our response that perseverance is developed. Suffering produces character. We become "fit" for God's use as a result of spiritual self-discipline. A godly response to suffering produces a testimony that can be used for God's glory and to comfort and encourage other Christians. (2 Corinthians 1:4-5) Paul knew there would be suffering but he also knew that this suffering would not compare with the glory that will be revealed in us. (Romans 8:18) Thirdly, suffering produces hope in the character of God as the Christian experiences God's faithfulness to take us through the trial.

So we can rejoice in our suffering, not rejoice as a jumping up and down happy feeling necessarily, but we can rejoice because we know the part of the reason why we may suffer, and what to expect from suffering. And we can certainly rejoice because God is with us – as Paul points out a bit later in Romans chapter 8 that God Himself is for you and, if He is for you, who can be against you?

So what is the source of this hope, this hope that helps us persevere, this hope that allows us to rejoice, even in suffering, the hope that means that our Christian lives are not just a “fire insurance” kind of deal?

Paul addresses this now, and also touches on one of the greatest reasons for hope in the bible. Read verse 6 with me again.

“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.”

The hope that we have has not been achieved easily, not cheaply, and not before Jesus had to die on the cross. Jesus' death and resurrection are the source of our hope. Basically Paul is saying "Look, even when we were at our rank worst, even then God bent down, hugged us close, and loved us to death. If that's how God treated us even

before he adopted us into his family, then why would we ever doubt that he loves us now?"

Christ died for us 'when we were still powerless ... ' God didn't wait for us to improve our behaviour and increase our merit before he took steps to save us.

Christ died for us 'while we were still sinners ' not after we had achieved some degree of self improvement, not after we had turned over a new leaf, not after we could show some evidence that we were serious about God and religion - no. While we were still sinners Christ died for us and gave us this everlasting hope, that we can be saved from God's wrath, that we can find peace with him.

The hope that we have in this gift from Christ is a lasting hope. It's not something that will disappear the moment that we hurt him through our actions again.

Imagine a woman who works for an inner-city shelter. Imagine that she befriended a drunk. Every day the drunk's body smells like a cross between rotten chicken and stale gin. More often than not when she comes to the alley to talk with him, the drunk would abuse her with profane language and lewd suggestions.

Many times on Friday nights she would help him stagger into the shelter only to have him vomit all over her. But as she is a compassionate person she sticks with him. And suppose that with her help he straightens up and flies right at last. Suppose he becomes a clean-shaven, sober man who successfully lands a job. And then suppose that he and her maintain regular contact as close friends.

Now what do you suppose would happen if here and there he backslides a bit and has a drink or two too many? Suppose that sometimes, after a stressful day on the job, he feels a bit surly and so snaps at her when they meet for coffee. Finally suppose that on such occasions he rather quickly puts his hand to his mouth, blushes in embarrassment and says, "I'm sorry, for saying that. You hate me now, right? Don't want anything more to do with me?"

What could she say except, " For goodness sake I cared deeply for you when you were nothing but a stinking, foul-mouthed drunk. If I loved you then, why would I ever stop loving you now that you are a different person? If I put up with nothing but abuse once upon a time, why would you think a little lapse would make me dump you now?"

And that's pretty much Paul's point about God: while we were still at our worst God was at his best. Through Jesus he took our sin on himself when we were nothing but offensive to him in most every way. Now, because of Jesus, we stand every day neck-deep in grace and love. Any fears we might have once entertained about God's anger are now properly put away by the gracious spectacle of the cross and the overflowing hope it gives.

While we were still sinners Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8) God's love for us is totally undeserved. Nothing could be more positive than that statement of fact. If we think that God loves us because we are somehow lovely or desirable, then our appreciation of the love of God will be reduced. If we think we deserve God's love,

we can never be secure in it. It is only those who know that God loves them in spite of their sin can gain comfort.

But that's not all. "We were reconciled," says verse 10. This means that we, who were God's enemies, have now become God's friends.

So what how does all this effect us now? How can we help assure the non-Christians around us and ourselves, that our belief isn't just an insurance policy?

We need to know the hope, but we also need to show it.

Because we are forever moving into an unknown future, we need hope to keep us moving lest we become stuck, struck dumb with a paralysing fear of the future. Hope is God's gift to us in this broken world--it keeps us moving.

However, far too often it seems like even we Christians let worry edge out hope. Older believers near the end of their lives start to mumble to ministers, wondering if they've been "good enough" for God.

To folks like us Paul would say, "You're forgetting something, my friends: grace is where you live. Your relationship with God is one of peace--everything is in order now because of Jesus. Where's your hope? Why are you letting worry forever edge it out? This is the time for rejoicing, not nail-biting; for joy, not fear."

Of course, all of this is complicated by the fact that we are justly dissatisfied with how we live many times. We do have sins to confess every day. We can't be content with how things go in the wider world or very often in our private worlds. The trick, according to Romans 5, is to let this discontent fan our *hope* not our fear.

The sins of our world and the sins of our hearts should lead us to fall back on our hope of glory through Jesus not to fall back on our fear of hell. In this sense hope rooted in grace is what keeps us moving in this grim world. Even when what we need to move through is our own sin, we nevertheless move forward into God's light knowing that we walk hand-in-hand with a God with whom we already have peace.

Paul has established earlier that we everyone has sinned and is not worthy of a relationship with God. He has then shown that through Faith that Abraham has a relationship with God. We saw in chapter four that Abraham was a saved man. How was Abraham saved? It wasn't by his heritage, ability, godliness, or any good works unique to him. He was saved by grace through faith in the words, promises and character of God. He had a different time perspective on the promises than we do today. He believed what God would do; do we believe what God has done? Abraham looked forward and believed in Christ who would bring salvation through his seed. We can look back in history and believe in Christ who has completed the work of salvation.

When you understand that you do not deserve God's love, you can begin to be secure in it. Because you cannot earn God's love, you cannot lose God's love.

"We rejoice...", writes Paul in verses 2, 3, and 11. Do we? Honesty compels us to admit that often we do not. Why do Christians so often fail to rejoice? One reason may be because we don't fully trust that God will do what He has promised. Abraham left his home; Noah built the ark; Joshua took the land. When I think of how God has worked in my life, why am I so unwilling to step out in faith with joy and love? Each of us must take hold of what God has done and live our life with the joy of our salvation in our hearts.

How will you rejoice in the hope of the glory of God? Will you ask God to help you grasp the truth of "justification by faith alone"? How will you prepare to rejoice in suffering? Will you think about these truths, meditate on them and learn how great the love and grace of God is?

We have peace with God even when we don't feel it. It is a fact, not just a vague hope. In our daily sins we can lose God's peace, but we can never lose our peace with God. Rejoice, in that hope, that certainty that Christ died for you and that because of that, anyone who follows him can be reconciled to God, that we can have peace.

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Amen