

A Living Hope Through Grace

The world as we know it seems to be drowning in despair. All around us we see the evidence of a culture, indeed a world, slipping deeper into hopelessness and despair. For centuries, as man has rejected the Bible as the Word of God, and therefore as the centre-piece of understanding life, he has turned here and there seeking meaning and fulfilment. And all around, the evidence of hopelessness is there.

People fill mental hospitals and psychologists' or psychiatrists' couches by the millions, in a state of hopelessness, or what is often called depression. Drugs like Prozac are earning their manufacturers billions, as people try to medicate their despair with drugs. Entertainment offerings seem to grow exponentially – as people want to escape their despair in movies, TV programmes, music, computer games, the Internet and so on.

Among the wealthy, spending is at an all-time high, as people shop to feel better – get more things that others can admire. Others turn from the hopelessness of their jobs to extreme sports, reality TV, increasingly realistically violent or perverse TV. Others press on in the hope that more money will provide the power to drive away despair.

As our culture distances itself more and more from God, it is discovering the lessons of Ecclesiastes – life wasn't meant to work without God. When you leave God out of the equation, everything keeps adding up to zero, weightless, vanity. And if everything you do in life keeps adding up to nothing, the end result is hopelessness and despair.

Now if life without God ends up in hopelessness, what should life *with* God add up to? A life of hope. The book of 1 Peter was written to remind believers that we have every reason to hope, and our attitudes should reflect that.

Do you have hope?

What is biblical hope? And why should I have it? Biblical hope is not wishing. When we wish for something, we want it to happen, but we do not know if it will. That is the way we use the word hope today: 'I hope it won't rain' or 'I hope he gets back before it's dark.' But biblical hope, the kind that God wants His children to have – is not this blind wishing for better things.

Biblical hope is the joyful emotion arising from confident and certain positive expectations. There is absolute certainty that things will work out in our favour, and it causes hope. It's joy in advance. It is delighting over what has been promised, knowing how certain the promise is.

It is happiness in the present based upon the inevitable fulfilment of God's promises, and it is a satisfaction and contentment in the future based on a sense of absolute security and wonderful prospects. A number of texts from Scripture demonstrate that hope is this joyful certainty about the future; joy in what has not yet materialised:

*But Christ as a Son over His own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the **rejoicing** of the hope firm unto the end.*

Hebrews 3:6

*And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the **full assurance** of hope unto the end...*

Hebrews 6:11

*That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a **strong consolation**, who have fled for **refuge** to lay hold upon the hope set before us...*

Hebrews 6:18

*Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without **wavering** (for He is faithful that promised)*

Hebrews 10:23

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?

1 Thessalonians 2:19

Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer...

Romans 12:12

For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?

Romans 8:24

What is a believer's hope?

Let's ask this question differently. What is an unbeliever's hope? What does the unbeliever look to for security, certainty, health, happiness? A mixture of things: money, other people, his own plans, his own health, his own intelligence. And when they fail – he loses hope. But a believer's hope is **God Himself, and what He has promised**. The channel by which we receive God Himself and His promises is what we call 'grace.'

A believer's strong confidence, assurance, joyful expectation is that God will do for a believer all that He said He would:

In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began...

Titus 1:2

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Titus 2:13

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.

Ephesians 1:18

*Now the **God of hope** fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.*

Romans 15:13

To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory...

Colossians 1:27

Why should you be interested in hope?

Well, that's almost a non-question, because whether you realise it or not, you do have hope. You are right now placing your confidence, your expectation, in something or someone. But the key question is, why should I have biblical hope – hope in God?

1. Biblical hope glorifies God

...Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory...

1 Peter 1:8

God's people are the only ones who have every right to be fully joyful about the future. They have every right to be gladly confident. That assurance of good things to come speaks of God's sovereignty over the world and the future, of His faithfulness to keep His promises, of His goodness and mercy in making such promises, in His power and trustworthiness to perform what He has promised. Biblical hope magnifies a big God. It displays to all that we are in a permanent relationship with the Almighty, and He is love.

The fluctuating Rand, interest rates, the rising costs of living, the state of crime, the state of education, the state of unemployment, the state of the roads, the state of infrastructure, the amount of corruption, poor service, fluctuating politics, fluctuating religious views, the rise of Islam, the changing weather patterns, the increase in new diseases and ailments, the eroding environment – are not things to cause a believer to be shaken in hope.

God is sovereign over these things, and when a believer stands in God's grace, his or her hope is to multiply. Like heat hardens clay, so trials and uncertainty are to solidify and strengthen the believer's joy and confidence in the future. Hope says, 'My God is sovereign – He rules over the future, He rules over the unsaved, He rules over the economy, my health, world politics, He rules everything.' As **Psalms 103:19** puts it, *"The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all."*

Hope says, 'My God is powerful. Other people can fear things going wrong, but God rules over absolutely everything.' Hope says, 'My God is faithful. He made promises, and He will keep every one of them. He does not go back on His Word.' Hope says, 'My God is good. He uses His power and His sovereignty to work for His children, not against them. Therefore, I believe things are working together for good.'

2. Biblical hope provides strength.

But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.

1 Peter 4:13-14

Biblical hope provides a sense of fulfilment and purpose, reason and order in the midst of a situation that seems pointless, aimless, out of control and unfair. Man without God feels frustrated, gets discouraged, loses heart, and wants to give up because everything seems pointless. It seems out of control, and he can't change it. It seems unfair, and he can't make it right. So he gets discouraged and eventually weakens in his desire to keep trying, he gives up on his marriage, he gives up on his work, he gives up on his ambitions.

The believer, on the other hand, can continually look at circumstances and say, 'Grace has brought me thus far and grace will lead me home.' The believer says, 'Life lived my own way does not work. But if I apply God's Word to my situation, it will work.' That provides strength.

3. Biblical hope purifies the believer.

Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

1 Peter 1:13-16

As our confidence is fixed on the very character of God, it causes us to abandon lesser, weaker hopes. Misplaced hope often tends to sin.

Peter wrote to believers who were either undergoing, or about to undergo, persecution. It is likely that Peter wrote this epistle about the time that Nero was beginning his persecution of Christians. In A.D. 64, a fire broke out in the Colosseum, and strong winds spread it to the rest of the city. By the time the fire had been extinguished, seven of the 14 sections of Rome had been destroyed.

Even though Nero worked hard to extinguish the fire, and provided shelter for the homeless in his own gardens, there was always a suspicion that he had started the fire. Many believed that Nero didn't like the look of Rome and wanted to rebuild much of it according to his designs. As the suspicions grew, Nero had a handy scapegoat – the Christians. The number of Christians was growing, and it was now clear that Christianity was a separate religion from Judaism, which was licensed and tolerated by Rome.

Nero blamed the fire on the Christians, and the persecution of Christians by Rome began in earnest. Some were wrapped in skins and then wild dogs were set upon them. Others were made into living torches to provide light for the city of Rome, others fed to wild beasts in the circus. Property was confiscated, privileges were taken away, and Christians faced imprisonment and death. And as fears start to spread, despair is a temptation.

Modern believers face different things, but with as much potential to erode or destroy our hope. Peter wrote this epistle to remind believers that the grace of God should always cause a believer to have hope, and to strengthen that hope. Now here is the key. It is one thing to say, 'God is supposed to be my hope'. It is another bringing that abstract idea into your life. How do I do that? The answer is the theme that runs parallel to Peter's emphasis on hope – and that is grace.

The two key verses are 1:3 and 5:12:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...

1 Peter 1:3

By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand.

1 Peter 5:12

His theme is that God's grace, past, present and future must cause great hope and peace in a believer. Grace is everything God has done, is doing, and shall do, for you. It includes both your salvation and your sanctification. It is forgiveness, but it is also empowerment. Grace is the channel by which God flows favourably toward you. Without grace, there is no experience of God that would benefit you and thereby give you hope.

Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace...

2 Thessalonians 2:16

In this epistle, Peter shows us how the joy in advance is sustained and strengthened. The book can be understood in three sections which give us three ways we must relate to God's grace.

1. You must understand grace

In most of chapter 1 and parts of chapter 2, Peter reminds us what God has done in saving us. He causes us to reflect on what God has *already* done in saving us, and what that means for who we are now in Him, and what we will be.

Hope is based on what God has determined to do for His people. Hope grows to the degree that we are acquainted with and confident in God's desire and ability to bless His people. The more we meditate on what God has promised us and done for us and made us in salvation, the more secure we are. Not complacent or smug, but secure *in Christ*.

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

Romans 15:4

2. You must submit to grace

Grace is not just God saving us in the past, it is God saving us in the present from our sin. From the middle of chapter 1 through to about the middle of chapter 3, Peter says, in light of what God has promised, and in light of how He can enable you – do the following. Submit to God's commands, submit to human authority. Grace *enables* submission. As we submit – the result is hope. Life works, because we are under God. We are in our place.

3. You must endure with grace

A key theme in 1 Peter is suffering. From about the middle of chapter 3, right through almost to the end, Peter majors on the theme of suffering. Peter knows that his readers will be undergoing persecution, just as though Holy Spirit knows that we will each face varying degrees of suffering. And by God's enablement we can endure. By looking forward to what

He has promised us, we endure. By realising what He is forming in us, we endure. All this amounts to endurance by grace. The end result is we are strengthened, purified, made more confident in God, and the result of *that* is hope.

See why many believers lack hope? Because of their relationship with grace. Many believers do not **know or understand grace**. They do not really understand what God has done for them. As a result, they do not look forward to Him doing more of the same in the future. They do not grow more acquainted with the loving heart of God.

Many do not **submit to grace**. They want the privilege of the joy, but not the responsibility of obedience. As a result, they live life outside of God's umbrella of submission, and life malfunctions. And as things do not seem to be working out, they lose hope.

Thirdly, many believers do not **endure with grace**. They do not see why God allows trials, so they go through them with complaining, pessimism and anger. As a result, God's grace does not sustain them and give them strength the way it could, if they would yield to Him and what He is doing. And as they do not submit to God's hand, and as the trials continue in length or in frequency, they increasingly lose hope.

Believer, God's grace is His downward channel of love to you. But if you are to live in the fullness of that channel, you must cooperate with it fully. Know it. Submit to it. Endure with it. And may you then be marked by joy unspeakable and full of glory.