

Romans (5:1-5)

Hope or Mope

Part 16 – October 31, 2004

BENEFITS OF BELIEVING

We have two cats: Tiger and Light-Bulb. Tiger enjoys us as masters. She enjoys peace with us, and access to our living room. Light-Bulb doesn't trust us. We can barely coax him into the house. And when he does come in, he panics at any sudden movement. He just doesn't seem to understand that we've poured out our love to him.

Paul has spent four chapters talking about what it means to be a true believer and how we are justified by faith. Now, he turns his attention to the natural consequences of faith in Christ.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. - Romans 5:1-5 NIV

In these verses, Paul lays out five benefits of believing:

1. We have peace with God.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ... - Romans 5:1 NIV

Q: Have you ever heard the phrase: "Making peace with God."

We don't make peace with God ... He's made peace with us. Mankind chose to wage war with an infinite power. That's not so bright. Our only hope was that the infinite power would provide a way of reconciliation. And He did, at the cross.

Now, we can lay down our rebellion and accept His "peace plan" on His terms ... or keep on fighting a lost battle. And we're not only offered peace *with* God, but the peace *of* God. A Funny thing happens when you're at peace with God: you want to be at peace with others; and you want to be at peace with yourself.

2. We have access to God.

... through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. - Romans 5:2a NIV

The word Paul uses refers to entering the presence of a king.

The Romans were well aware that you didn't just walk into the palace and get unarranged *face time* with Caesar.

- (They knew) To have access is to have power and authority.

And this would've been a radical idea to the Jews. Their worship demanded a respectful distance between the worshiper and God.

- Gentiles were restricted to the temple's *Outer Court*.
- Females were restricted to the temple's *Court of Women*.
- Even male Jews were restricted from the *Holy of Holies*.

This was the holiest room; only the high priest was permitted to enter - and then only once a year (Day of Atonement) - and then only through the blood of an innocent sacrifice.

- The O.T. sacrificial system was a reminder of separation.

In the Holy of Holies, there was a massive curtain to divide a holy God from sinful man. In a dramatic display of divine symbolism, this veil was supernaturally split as Jesus died.

It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. - Luke 23:44-45 NIV

The curtain was "opened" to represent our access to God. We no longer have to go through a priest or offer a sacrifice. Jesus gets us *face time* with God.

- (The Jews knew) To have access is to have acceptance and approval.

Not the access of a subject granted an audience in appreciation for their efforts, but that of a child, innocently bypassing all formality with permission to approach their father, the King. (As verse 2 says) "It is grace in which we now stand." We can approach the "throne of grace" with confidence because Jesus has become our high priest. (*Heb. 4:14-16*)

And, because we have *peace* with God and *access* to God ...

3. We have hope in God's glory.

And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. - Romans 5:2b NIV

Q: Do you remember what we decided faith was?

A: Faith is uncertainty plus trust.

Remember: it's like the child, apprehensive about jumping into a swimming pool, but choosing to trust in his father's arms.

Q: But what *empowers* me to trust when I'm uncertain?

Q: What makes me secure when I'm not so sure-footed?

A: Hope. Biblical hope doesn't mean wishful thinking. Hope is *confidence* in God's power and purpose. That's why a pessimistic believer is an insult to God. They're a *distrusting* child whose attitude says, "I don't believe He's in control ... and I don't believe He'll work it out."

Believers should be the most hopeful people in the world! We have peace! We have access! We have hope in His glory!

Q: Do you know what God's glory consists of?

A: It's *all* that He is (character, beauty, holiness, loving nature, etc.) and it also includes all of His plans for us.

One of things we regularly celebrate (*rejoice* in) is our confidence (*hope*) in God's power and purpose for us (*glory*). This is the next benefit of belief:

4. We have a purpose from God

A huge part of his purpose for us is to make us like His Son: to think and to act and love the way Jesus does.

Q: But, how can He make this happen? How can He possibly produce Christ-like characteristics in our day-to-day lives?

A: Resistance training! Just like exercising a muscle.

Need to learn patience? You just need to be put in a situation where you must *resist* the urge for impatience.

Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings ... - Romans 5:3a NIV

Notice: we rejoice "in" our sufferings, not "because" of them! We're not masochists, or gluttons for punishment. We rejoice for the results suffering can produce. To thank God for evil is an insult to His nature.

We don't rejoice *because* we get to suffer! We rejoice *through* it because everything from traffic jams to major grief works for our benefit for Christ-like character building.

... because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. - Romans 5:3b-4 NIV

This is the process that melts and molds and matures us.

A. First, there's: "suffering" (i.e. tribulations)

This word means *pressure*. And the pressure of suffering forces us to observe and confront our un-Christ-like characteristics. Ever notice, under pressure you tend not to act like Jesus? Just as pressure is a necessary force to turn coal into diamonds ...

- Suffering sets the stage for Christ-likeness

B. And suffering produces: “**perseverance**” (or endurance)

Paul doesn’t mean this is universal. We must choose to refuse to unleash hatred, anger, bitterness, and resentment. We only learn endurance by enduring. And we endure by embracing the loving presence of Christ for our strength and sufficiency. Just as steel and glass are tempered in a furnace for strength ...

- Perseverance under fire makes our faith harder to break

C. That’s because it produces: “**Character**”

Some translations say: proven character. Until hardship comes, we can’t know how genuine our faith really is. Remember the parable of the seeds?

Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. – Mark 4:16-18 NIV

Whenever our faith is tested, and we persevere, we get this wonderful sense of authenticity ... “I’m *not* a hypocrite!” Just as the adequacy of a root is revealed in a drought ...

- Character depth is discovered in dry times

So, suffering gives us an opportunity to persevere. Perseverance strengthens our faith and proves our character ...

D. And this brings us more: “**Hope**”

And hope is confidence, and it grows as we experience the reality of our own authenticity through affliction.

- “I am truly His and He is truly mine.”

If I didn’t know suffering, I couldn’t know the sufficiency and presence and love of my hope. And this brings up our final benefit of belief:

5. We have the loving Spirit of God

And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. – Romans 5:5 NIV

- We have put our hope in something that will not disappoint.

God has a gracious, loving purpose behind every obstacle, every frustration, every pain, every grief, and every affliction. And in those situations we discover the value of peace, access, and hope that His presence brings.

- We can embrace it as a “Tiger” or decline it as a “Light-Bulb”.