



We believe in Hope

Romans 8 v 18 to 39

So is it, 'we believe' or 'we hope'.

We often use the word **hope** when we speak about a future event that isn't certain. For example, we say we hope it doesn't rain on Sunday when we are uncertain about what might happen. When we say 'we believe' there is much greater certainty about our statement. So, there could be a contradiction in the statement 'we believe in hope'.

Sometimes the Bible uses hope in the 'longing' way – for example in 1 Corinthians 9:10 where the ploughman is told to 'plough in hope'. But generally, the biblical use of the word is very different. It doesn't depend on how you feel or how things are going in that moment. It is built on the word of a promise keeping and faithful God who when he speaks about the future the events he speaks of are certainties. The prevailing Greek culture of the time regarded hope as a temporary illusion – it was not seen as a virtue. That's why Paul's statement described non-believers as people with no hope. (Ephesians 2:12)

Describe some of your hopes for the future?

Is it that life will get better?

Has the last two years squashed a lot of hope out of you?

Romans 8 will help us see what our true hope is based on and what it will be like. So much of Jesus' teaching was about hope. He tells his disciples not to be anxious about the future because the future is in the hands of a loving father. Paul's words in Philippians 4:7 are very direct.

'Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again: 'rejoice'

The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God'

Is it realistic to live this way in a modern world?

What Paul is describing is living close to God ('near'). Only then will we be able to rejoice in our daily lives and be full of hope. In Romans 8 he talks about the contrast between present sufferings and future glory. Paul started on his point about the hope of our salvation in Chapter 5 v 1 to 11 and he returns to it here with the solid basis for our hope as Christians. His starting point may be uncomfortable

'If indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory' (8:17)

Is this something you take on board or is it something you wish could be avoided?

How easy is it to look beyond the sufferings and frustrations of this world as you anticipate the glory of heaven?

In verses 19 to 21 Paul talks about the liberation of the whole of creation. The bondage clearly started at the Fall in the Garden of Eden. Clearly Paul writes about the creation being liberated as part of our eternal hope because we will be part of that new creation.

Talk about what that new creation will be like – what will be different to what we see today?

What do you think a creation without frustration will be like?

Paul then fits God's people into that new creation.

'Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we are saved'
(8:23)

Once God's spirit enters our lives, we have an awareness of what it means to please God. On this earth we often get 'pleasing God' wrong so being indwelt by the Holy Spirit makes us long for a time when frustration will be behind us. So, we wait for a time when our bodies will be delivered from sin and death that restrict us here. Then we will be adopted as God's children – but are we not that already? Yes, we are but not yet enjoying perfect holiness in resurrection bodies and glorified. THIS IS OUR GREAT HOPE

What are the things you are most looking forward to when you join your Lord and Saviour in heaven?
How often do you think about it?
Does it give you hope?
Does it help you to keep going?

Paul then tells us what hope is all about

'In this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not have, we wait for it patiently' (8:24 & 25)

Some people ask, how can I hope in something I cannot see – where's the evidence? You keep telling me heaven is wonderful but how do I know?

How do you deal with your doubts about whether this glorious eternal life is a reality?

Paul understands the question. He explains that God understands our problem so he has given us the Holy Spirit to help us 'in our weakness'. (v26) The Spirit helps us to pray when we cannot find the words. In addition, 'God works for the good of those who love him' (v28). So often this verse is misquoted as 'all things work together for good'. That is a fateful statement that says everything will be fine. It will only be fine because **God is at work** in your life. God is always present in our daily lives

As we cope with the trials of this life, how aware are we that God is working in our lives?
So, we are not alone – do we sometimes feel that way and how can we counter it?

Verse 28 onward is a real confidence booster for us all. We are in God's foreknowledge and, through the process, we will end up glorified in his presence. We see the bold statement that says – 'if God is for us who can be against us' (v31). And then 'who shall separate us from the love of Christ' (v35)

Are there dangers of over-confidence with these statements?

Why not finish your session with prayer after you have read verses 28 to 39.

- Thank God for securing our salvation through his son.
- Thank God for the real hope of eternity.
- Ask God to help you with the frustration of your present earthly life.
- Ask God to help you wait patiently for heaven and use the time you have left for his glory