

- I don't know about you, but the things I have been hearing on the news and reading on the computer screen about what is going on in the Middle East in regards to the persecution of Christians by the ISIS is just sickening. I don't know these people's Christian affiliation. I don't know where they stand in regards to their convictions. What I do know, however, is that those people are being put to death simply for professing Christ. That is a seriously discouraging and sad situation. So, if you will please, let's bow our heads for just a moment and I'd like us to join together in prayer for those people who are suffering at this time.....
- We hear of these people who are willing to give up their lives a bigger cause, and then we hear of the sad situation of Robin Williams who apparently felt as if there was nothing to live for, and we might wonder what the major difference is between the people under persecution and Mr. Williams. I'd like to suggest to you that the major difference between them is a little four letter word and that word is "hope." Mr. Williams, from what we have gathered, had determined that there was no hope left for him. He was an atheist who was battling with severe depression and bi-polar disorder, and from statements by his wife he had just been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. For an atheist to be consistent then they must admit that there really isn't anything in this life worth living for because once you're dead everything is over. It is quite possible that Mr. Williams understood that and decided that living with his conditions just wasn't worth it. On the other hand we have the Christians in the Middle East suffering for the name of Christ. For these people, there is hope. Very few people are willing to suffer for nothing. Mr. Williams seemingly wasn't willing to do that. It seems, He would rather just die and get it all over with. The question I have is..... Why are these people's viewpoints so different? Why is one person's outlook on life is so dreary and hopeless while the other person's is so bright? What is it that gives the one group hope while the other has nothing to live for?
- I believe the answer is found in **Romans 8**. Paul is writing this book to Christians who, in the not so distant future, will be at the epicenter of the Christian persecution. These people will be on Caesar's doorstep as he tries to stomp out the faith. Paul is trying to stress to these disciples that there is hope. Paul begins the book by stating that he is, **"not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."** Paul recognizes the great power that the Gospel possesses. He recognizes that the gospel can do things that nothing else can! The gospel can save the soul! The gospel can also provide hope when things don't look great. But when we look at the things in this world in view of the cross, then we will have hope that can sustain us through the most difficult times.
- Let's begin reading in **v.18**....
 - **(v.18)**Paul says that the temporary sufferings of this world are nothing compared to what is awaiting for that person who has hope in the Gospel of Christ. That hope makes these temporary sufferings worth it. Paul was willing to suffer for a little time in order to gain the reward that is eternal.
 - **(vv.19-22)**The creation of God suffers because of the sin of the world. Sin causes suffering, and the creation groans in its suffering.
 - **(vv.23-25)**Christians groan for that better time and place, where the sufferings of this world will be repaid in glory. As Christians, we have hope that can sustain us through the difficult sufferings of this life. We have been saved through hope and we persevere because of it!
- The Gospel provides us salvation from the sin of this world, but it also provides us with some things that will sustain our hope. Many people have taken this encouraging passage of Scripture and have twisted it (**II Peter 3:16**) to mean something that it just does not mean. This text does not support the false theology of Calvinism. This text supports the hope that Christians should have through the Gospel! Let's examine 3 provisions that the Gospels gives to those who desire to have their hope sustained.

3 Provisions of the Gospel

I. Encouragement (vv.26,27)

- A. As Christians, we are told that we are aided in our prayers before God.
 - 1. It's not that we don't know how to pray, we have been taught how to pray by our Lord.
 - 2. Instead, it is that sometimes, especially when we are in a difficult spot, we find it difficult to communicate our needs to God.
 - 3. Paul says that the Spirit intercedes for us in order to help our petitions be brought before God.
- B. We don't always see the whole picture of what is going on.
 - 1. The Spirit sees the whole picture. He is interceding for us. He knows our heart and He knows what we need! We might just see difficulties, but the Spirit sees the solutions and helps us.
 - 2. The Spirit knows God and communicates with Him on our behalf. (**I Cor. 2:10 "...the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God."**)
 - 3. The Spirit works for us on our behalf before God when we might not know exactly what to say or what we need in difficulties.
- C. This should be so encouraging to us!
 - 1. Those who have obeyed the Gospel and have suffered for Christ are not left alone!
 - 2. We have the Spirit that intercedes for us when we might be in a tough spot.
 - 3. We have hope when we might not know what is going on or what the solution might be.
 - 4. We have a God who loves us enough to provide us with encouragement during the most difficult times in order to sustain our hope.

II. Confidence (vv.28-30)

- A. As Christians, we can have confidence through the Gospel by understanding God's eternal plan for us.
- B. All things work together for good to those who love God and are called by His eternal purpose. (v.28)
 - 1. Some would abuse this passage to say that all things work for all people, but there are some qualifiers.
 - a) "those who love God" (James 1:12; 2:5)
 - (1) If we love God we will keep His commandments. (John 14:15; I John 5:3)
 - (2) We can have confidence through our obedience.
 - b) "those who are called according to His purpose." Those who are called by the Gospel.
 - (1) Those who are taught of God come to Him. (John 6:44,45)
 - (2) Called by the Gospel for salvation through sanctification. (II Thess. 2:13,14)
 - 2. God did not choose the person who would be saved, but God chose the type of person who would be saved.
 - 3. Those who have become "**obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed**" can have confidence in their salvation and have hope that regardless of how things work out on this earth that they will receive the glory of the next life.
- C. Sad consequences of false theology on this text.
 - 1. God does not redemptively love all men. This means God did not so love the world.....
 - 2. God is a respecter of persons because he chooses to save one sinner while allowing others to be condemned.
 - 3. God is unjust because He will judge men on the actions that He determined for them to do.
 - 4. Everything is set in stone and nothing can be changed. This means God is the source of all sin and evil.
 - 5. Not a single person can know for sure if they will be going to heaven. No confidence at all.
- D. Thankfully, we can have confidence in our salvation through the Gospel and know that God has a plan for those who obey His will.

III. Security (vv.31-39)

- A. God is for us and not against us!
 - 1. God is greater than any force that might come up against us! Nothing can overpower God for our souls.
 - 2. Jesus, in John 10:27-29, while talking about His sheep says that nothing can take His sheep out of His hands because the Father is greater than all.
 - 3. John later assures the Christians that God is indeed greater and stronger than anything of this world. (I Jn 4:4)
 - 4. God will always win when it comes to our souls!
- B. We will either stand while in Christ, or we will fall outside of Him.
 - 1. This security is only found while in a relationship with the Father, Son, and the Spirit.
 - 2. No condemnation in Christ (Rom. 8:1)
 - 3. We can only be saved through Jesus. (Rom. 5:6-10)
 - 4. Christ is our only connection to the Father. (I Timothy 2:5)
 - 5. Christ is our only means of atonement before God. (I John 2:1,2)
- C. No external force can separate the faithful Christian from God.
 - 1. We can have hope through this security because nothing outside of our power can destroy our relationship with God.
 - 2. No persecution, tribulation, or trial can force you to turn your back on God.
 - 3. As long as we hold on to our hope of salvation and heaven for eternity then we can overcome anything this world can throw at us and we can be sure that it is all worth it!

Why do some people persevere while others give up? It's all about hope! Its all about knowing that there is something bigger waiting for us on the other side if we will just press on and reach that finish line in Christ. I pray to God that we never have to deal with the struggles that some are dealing with right now. I pray to God that I nor any person in this country will be physically persecuted for proclaiming the name of Christ. If, however, that does happen, then I pray just as strongly that those Christians will stand in Jesus and know that they have a hope that is worth dying for. I pray that they will remember the encouraging words of **Romans 8** and be willing to stand up in the face of any sort of tribulation and always remember the words of **Romans 8:31**, "**If God is for us, who is against us?**" May our God help us always to put our trust in Him and hold on to that hope of an eternity in heaven.