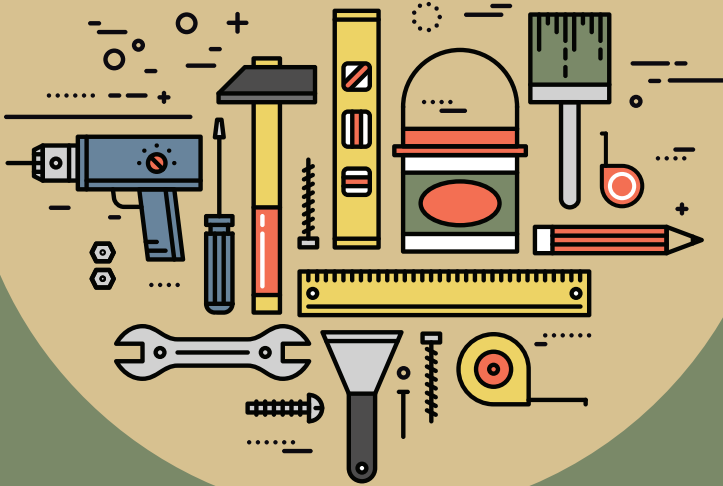


# CHRISTIAN ESSENTIALS

*9 key characteristics  
of every follower of Jesus*



**KEN D NOAKES**

Saved by grace. Grounded in the Word. Faithful in prayer. Bold in witness. Resilient in suffering. Committed in membership. Loving in relationships. Godly in giving. Fruitful in service.

Does this sound like you? Do you wish it did?

Come with preacher and pastor Ken Noakes as he explores what it means to actively follow Jesus and “let your light shine before others”. His unique mix of the imagined perspectives of the believers described in Acts combined with topical Bible studies and written teaching will encourage and grow every Christian in what God desires rather than what the world values.

Unlike anything else available. This is a great resource to help grow disciples, not as mere holders of knowledge but as ones who engage with their world, joyfully embracing the privilege of growing as disciples of Christ.

### **Archie Poulos**

Director, Centre for Ministry Development  
Moore Theological College, Sydney

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We long for disciples of Jesus to be people of truth, balance, zeal and love. In this very helpful and practical book, Ken Noakes takes us into 9 sections of Acts and provides teaching, application and discussion material on 9 central parts of the Christian life. Are you looking for something to put into the hands of individuals and especially groups? Here it is. This is a fresh gift for the church today and the disciples of tomorrow.

**Simon Manchester**

Senior Minister, St Thomas' Anglican Church, North  
Sydney, 1989-2019

*Christian Essentials* is both expected and unlike anything else available. The book covers what any good evangelical book on discipleship would cover, and does so from an evangelical perspective. But it does this in a unique way. It does not download information. It does not raise questions as riddles for the reader to solve. Rather, the author walks beside the reader in growing as a follower of Jesus. Each chapter begins by making us curious and showing us, through the narratives of Acts, why a particular aspect of discipleship matters. Then follows a Bible study that does not give answers but guides the reader through the text. Finally, Ken finishes each chapter with wise theological reflections to help sharpen and integrate the disciple's thinking—and all this by relating wise and sound thinking to the world we now inhabit.

This is a great resource to help grow disciples, not as mere holders of knowledge but as ones who engage with their world, capable of joyfully embracing the privilege of growing as disciples of Christ.

**Archie Poulos**

Head, Department of Ministry  
Director, Centre for Ministry Development  
Moore Theological College, Sydney

Born out of Ken's pastoral heart and his desire for people to live in ways that honour Jesus, this book explores 9 aspects of Christian discipleship that Ken considers to be essential. Each chapter contains an in-depth Bible study followed by encouragement and instruction for those who seek to live faithfully for Christ. It's a Scripture-soaked treatment that challenges the reader to compare the life that Jesus calls us to with what the world offers, and shows how following and serving Jesus is so much better.

**Wendy Lin**

Book reviewer and blogger, Trinity Church Adelaide

I had the great privilege of serving alongside Ken Noakes at Holy Trinity Adelaide for many years. The image that sticks in my mind from that period is of Ken sitting in a coffee shop with two others looking at the Bible together—one a young or not-yet Christian and the other someone he was teaching to disciple others. The faces changed but the pattern didn't. The material in this creative book is not theoretical. It is the distilled experience of someone who has been consistently discipling others for decades. This is a resource that can be used to grow disciples. It combines thoughtful biblical insights with a wealth of accumulated pastoral experience. Ken demonstrates an excellent understanding of the pressures that new and not-so-new believers face. He answers real questions with what the Bible has to say, combined with wise understanding of human nature. This is a great addition for a pastor's toolbox.

**Paul Harrington**

Senior Network Pastor, The Trinity Network of Churches,  
Adelaide

This book is far more than just “a toolbox for living the Christian life” as the author humbly claims. Having read it, I would without any hesitation describe it as a handbook or manual that every Christian should use and follow. This book covers the foundational building blocks of a disciple’s life, from the moment of a first personal encounter with Jesus through to the Christian maturity that the apostle Paul speaks of in Ephesians 4:13 and Colossians 1:28. It is certainly not a book that will be read once and shelved. It is designed to be used continuously by individuals and groups for self-evaluation, spiritual growth, and purposeful service in the kingdom. This book is a powerful tool for equipping Christians, who are called to be influencers in the world rather than being influenced by the world. This book is a timely gift to every Christ-follower and to the global church.

**Dr Sam Stephens**

President, India Gospel League

This book has the wonderful aim of helping us to be more godly Christians. The author is an experienced and admired pastor. He has thought deeply about how to communicate biblical teaching in an effective and readable way, and his work will be a blessing to those who study it.

**Dr Peter Jensen**

Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, 2001-2013

What does it look like to be a follower of Jesus in our complex world?

Written in an accessible and conversational style, Ken Noakes’s book brings a refreshing approach to our understanding of discipleship in a complicated and post-faith culture, underpinned by relevant Scripture and everyday examples.

This book offers a ‘toolbox’ for understanding, considering and putting true discipleship into action, both for mature Christians and those who are still unsure.

**Philip Bell OAM**

Chairman, The Anglican Schools Corporation

This book is an invitation for all of us—enquirer, new believer, and those who’ve been Christian for a while—to equip ourselves with the tools for being effective disciples of Jesus. More detailed and comprehensive than an introductory course or short ‘next steps’, the creative chapter arrangement allows for deep examination of the fundamentals of the Christian faith. By the end of the book, participants will indeed have a full and useful toolbox.

**Kara Hartley**

Archdeacon for Women’s Ministry, Anglican Church,  
Diocese of Sydney

Ken is a gifted Bible teacher with extensive ministry experience in diverse contexts, both in Australia and in cross-cultural settings overseas. His ability to explain profound truths with clarity, confident in the authority of Scripture, has been evident in these different ministry contexts and similarly shines through in each chapter of *Christian Essentials*. I have no doubt this book will be of tremendous benefit to those new to the Christian faith, as well as to mature believers seeking to grow in their understanding of key biblical foundations that shape the life of disciples of Jesus.

**John Lovell**

Executive Director, Church Missionary Society, NSW and  
ACT

Christians must always be clear about the essentials of the Christian faith, and must hold on to them. Building on years of experience in pastoral ministry, Ken Noakes combines clarity, creativity and biblical faithfulness in defining and describing these essentials. The book is ideal for both the new believer and the older Christian who wants more certainty about what they believe and how they should live.

**Mike Raiter**

Director, Centre for Biblical Preaching, Melbourne

This is a splendid book on basic Christian discipleship. For the person wondering, “What will it look like for me to get started as a Christian and to begin to grow in my faith?”, this book provides excellent answers. The Bible passages, short studies and imaginative reflection questions at the end of each chapter give valuable exercises to work on. The instructive material is thoroughly helpful. It is a useful resource for individuals and small groups.

**William Taylor**

Rector, St Helen’s Bishopsgate, London





# CHRISTIAN ESSENTIALS

*9 key characteristics  
of every follower of Jesus*

**KEN D NOAKES**

 **matthiasmedia**  
SYDNEY • YOUNGSTOWN

*Christian Essentials*

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*For Glad Ellen and Jan Michele:  
you have been like Lois and Eunice to me*

*and*

*Naomi Anne,  
my beloved*



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## INTRODUCTION

**T**he word had got around. The crowds were gathering fast, and they were coming from everywhere.

Under some pressure to deal with their leader's growing fame, Jesus' disciples scrambled up a mountainside and gathered around him, setting the scene for possibly the most famous speech in history: the 'Sermon on the Mount' (Matthew 5-7).

With the vast crowds eagerly listening in, Jesus told his disciples what it means to follow him: "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven" (Matt 5:16).

What does a disciple of Jesus look like? A light. This statement from Jesus, "Let your light shine", is in many ways a perfect summary verse for this book. Christians live in a fallen and dark world, yet we are not to be like the fallen or dark world. We are to be a light.

Grasp this truth for a moment. So much about our secular world stresses the need to fit in. To conform. To be tolerant. There is, however, a key difference between being in the world and being like the world, and it is a difference that every Christian must understand and carefully live out.

But *how* do we do that? How do we fulfil our God-given task of being a light in a dark world?

You can think of this book as a bit like a toolbox for living the Christian life. When it comes to working with my hands, I have to admit I am not particularly gifted. My father-in-law's shed is largely a mystery to me. I walk in and see rows and rows of tools, supplies and equipment, stacked from floor to ceiling. If you were to ask me what most of the tools are for, it is likely that I would not have the foggiest idea!

Yet whenever I have a job to do, I know that in this shed are all the tools (and more) that I need to do it. The job may not be complicated, but it is important, and without the right tools it would be impossible to attempt or complete. So I grab a bit of this and a bit of that, and before I know it I have a car full of stuff. In my mind I have everything that I need to efficiently do the job.

But nothing could be further from the truth. In reality, I will fluff around, making an absolute mess, wasting all sorts of time and achieving very little. Why? Because I get so overwhelmed by everything before me that I do nothing right or well. I use the wrong tools in the wrong way, and then start to wonder why I even attempted the job at hand. Not efficient, and certainly not effective in any way.

Just like that moment when I walk into my father-in-law's tool shed, living the Christian life can sometimes feel overwhelming. But it doesn't have to be. This book puts before you nine elements—or 'tools'—that are essential for any person of faith in Jesus. It is an attempt to sort through the many and varied possibilities that are often associated with what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Very often, the Christian person can become so burdened and distracted by



the many good and valuable things that they could choose to do that they lose sight of some of those essential elements of following Jesus.

In each of the next nine chapters we will look at one aspect of Christian discipleship that should be a 'Christian essential' for any disciple of Jesus. Each concept presents us with a distinction between what the world expects of a person and what the Lord expects of his disciples.

### **1. Saved by grace**

The world says: You earn your importance by what you do.  
But God says: You are saved in Jesus, by grace, not by what you do.

### **2. Grounded in the Word**

The world says: Listen to us. We'll offer you many different voices and opinions, and tell you what to believe.  
But God says: Listen to me. I give you my word, the Bible, to show you how to live and why it is good to trust in me.

### **3. Faithful in prayer**

The world says: Humanity knows best, and we can achieve whatever we set our minds to.  
But God says: You need me, so talk to me in prayer. I will listen to you, and I will give you what is best.

### **4. Bold in witness**

The world says: Watch yourself! Don't say anything we deem intolerant or confronting, or you'll be 'cancelled'.  
But God says: Make Jesus famous, so that others will know how important it is that Jesus died for them.

## **5. Resilient in suffering**

The world says: Don't worry, be happy; that should be your goal in life.

But God says: Persevere in the face of suffering and keep trusting me; your goals are not limited to this life.

## **6. Committed in membership**

The world says: Put yourself first, and put others next—if it's convenient.

But God says: Love me above all else, and love others before yourself.

## **7. Loving in relationships**

The world says: All you need is love—and we can define 'love' to be whatever we choose.

But God says: Love others in a way that is both pleasing and acceptable to me.

## **8. Godly in giving**

The world says: The more you get, the happier you will be.

But God says: Give generously! Freely give, for you have been given much.

## **9. Fruitful in service**

The world says: Take what you can get and look after yourself.

But God says: In love, find ways to do good works for others (even if it costs you).



This book is written for the person who wants to be essentially Christian. In each of our nine areas, the disciple is called to live out the gospel of Jesus Christ in a tangible way. And in doing so, the Christian is being a light in a dark place. Is that easy? Not always. But is it necessary? Absolutely! It is part of what it means to be an essential Christian.

If you are checking out the Christian faith, I hope these essentials will give you a window into what being a follower of Jesus looks like.

If you are new to the Christian faith, I hope these essentials will help to put in place the foundations so that you can intentionally set out well in your Christian walk.

If you have been following Jesus for some time, I hope these essentials will offer an opportunity to take stock of your Christian walk, and that they might even prompt some reassessment (if needed) to make sure you keep growing as a Christian.

And if you are doubting what it means to be a Christian—if you're wondering whether it's worth the effort—then I hope these essentials will be helpful prompts to reconsider what it means to live as a disciple of Jesus and why each element is important in the life of a believer.

Each chapter has three parts:

- **A voice from Acts**

It was Jesus who taught his first disciples what was truly essential to live the Christian life. In the Acts of the Apostles, we see those disciples putting the essentials into practice. So each chapter of this book introduces its topic with a first-person retelling in the (imagined) voice of one of those first-century disciples.

- **A Bible study**

This will take you straight to the source on each topic. The Bible study is designed to get you into the text of God’s word so that you will be thinking through what God says about the topic. The study can easily be done on your own, one-to-one with someone else, or in a small group.

- **An exploration of the ‘essential’ topic**

This final part of each chapter aims to address the topic in a clear and systematic way, showing you what each of the essentials should look like in the life of a believer and offering tips and suggestions for how you might put each one into practice.



Come with me as we step into the shed and pull out only the tools that we must use, because Christians have a job to do—to shine the light of Jesus into a dark world—and we must do it effectively. I hope and pray that you will enjoy diving into the Bible and, under God, allowing it to shape you as an essential Christian.

# 1. SAVED BY GRACE

The world says:  
You earn your importance by what you do.

But God says:  
You are saved in Jesus, by grace, not by what you do.

## **A voice from Acts: “What must I do to be saved?”**

*Inspired by Acts 16:16-40*

It had already been a strange day, and it only got stranger ...

I’m used to prisoners being abrupt or violent—that’s all in a day’s work. I am a jailer, after all. Lock them up, keep watch, feed them if necessary, get to the end of your shift—that’s what keeps the bosses happy. Not much to it, really. Provided the prisoners are kept behind bars, the Roman authorities are happy with me. I help them maintain order by keeping the criminals off the street.

That is, if they’re kept behind bars.

On this day, two new prisoners had been dragged in. ‘Christians’, they were called—I’d heard about them, how they were notorious for causing disruptions in the synagogues and marketplaces. The magistrate had ordered these two men, Paul and Silas, to be incarcerated—and it must have been for a serious crime, because we were told to put them in the inner high-security cell. We were told to shackle their feet, too, so there was no way they could do a runner.

These two prisoners were strange. Everyone could see it; even the other prisoners. We could hear their voices floating out from the cell, but not the usual cries of fury or anguish. They were singing. Hymns! (Who does that?) And then they seemed quite content to do a lot of praying. I remember thinking, “I don’t know who they think is going to help them now!” But when we looked in on them, sitting there shackled to the wall, they were ... different. Calm. Peaceful. Joyful. “Each to their own”, I said, and shrugged.

And then it happened. Around midnight, the walls began to shake. There was a deafening sound as the earthquake buckled the floors and sent cracks shooting through the walls. The wind blew out the torches ... and the cell doors were dislodged from their hinges. All of them.

This was bad news. I have one key performance indicator—keep the prisoners locked up! And if I can’t do that one job, then I pay for it with my life. Harsh, I know—but that’s the deal.

And now an earthquake had opened the cells.

The next bit is a bit hazy. So much happened, so quickly.

When I realized that the prison was open, I knew I had a horrible choice to make. To the Romans, saying “An earthquake set the prisoners free” would sound pretty lame.

I tried to slow my breathing. What to do? Run away? Was that the answer? But what about my wife, my kids? I had to focus. Think. Act.

I grabbed my sword. My arms shook. I raised the sword to my chest. “I’ll have to fall on my sword—better that than face the Romans or put my family at risk”, I thought. “I’ve got no choice. Why did this have to happen to me?”

Then came that voice—a voice I’ll never forget—out of the rubble, through the thick dust, calling urgently in the darkness: “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”

I called for lights. “Of course!” I thought. I was so relieved. I had forgotten about the shackles! I had them locked by the feet. They couldn’t leave! But as I rushed into their cell and shakily held the torch up in front of them I saw the strangest thing of all. Not only had the earthquake knocked the doors from their hinges, it had somehow loosened everybody’s chains. How could an earthquake do that?

The prisoners were all free; but they were still there!  
Why?

I looked at Paul and Silas with my mouth open. If I was a prisoner and my shackles suddenly dropped off and the cell doors swung open, I would take it as an invitation to hot-foot it out of there—but not these men. My body started shaking even more violently. If indeed all the prisoners were still there, my life was saved. I fell to my knees in front of them.

I thought about those men—their notoriety, their hymns, their prayers. And it was at that point it dawned on me: I needed something more than just having my physical life saved. I needed the salvation they had! It was personal. It was powerful. It was beyond anything that I could do for myself. I got to my feet and brought them out of the cell.





## **Read Ephesians 2:1-10**

**Suggestion:** Be creative—find some paper and draw a picture that depicts this passage.

1. Who is this passage written to? Who does this passage critique?
2. What are the characteristics of one who is disobedient? What are the consequences of disobedience?
3. Opposite to being dead in transgressions and sins, God has “made us alive with Christ” (v 5). Why? By what means did God do this?
4. Describe ‘grace’ as explained in this passage.



- Is it possible to earn our salvation by doing good things? What does this passage suggest about this idea?
  
- Now that you've read this passage, revisit the reflection point at the beginning of the Bible study: What do you think it looks like to be 'a success' as a Christian?

### **Suggestions for prayer**

- Give thanks to God for his gift—salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.
- Ask God to help you value what he has done over what the world says you should do.

## **God's gracious work**

According to Acts 16, the Philippian jailer and his whole family listened to the word of the Lord as spoken by the apostle Paul, accepted it, and were baptized as a sign that they had been saved (Acts 16:32-40).

Christians are people who believe in the Lord Jesus. They are saved not by what *they* have done but by what *he* has done. Jesus' greatest gift is his salvation—which is why Christians can clearly and confidently say that they are 'saved by grace'.

This is a fundamental starting point.

Let me explain.

Being a ‘person of faith in Jesus’ is not a status that is earned or established by some wonderful deed. Christians are not saved by the good things that they do, or by the sufferings that they endure, or by the things that they go without, as if heavenly credit points are accumulated in some way.

*Salvation by grace* is a truth that is one of the most liked but most badly applied truths of the Bible—and a truth that people often find difficult to accept.

It is **liked** because it speaks of God’s gracious work to save.

If you took a person who was, at best, an enemy and gave them everything as if they were your best friend, then you would have to say that was gracious—an unwarranted, and therefore extraordinarily gracious, gift. That is what God has done in saving a Christian.

It is **badly applied** because of the way many take this grace for granted.

It is making a faulty assumption to assert that because God is loving he will save everyone. And further, it is a fallacy to think that because God has saved, people no longer need to obey God.

It can also be **hard to accept** God’s gift of grace. But why is this the case?

The concept of our need to accept God’s gift of grace is one of the many points where the Bible is totally out of step with our society!

Romans 5 helps us:

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup> through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

<sup>3</sup> Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we

know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup> perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup> And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

<sup>6</sup> You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

<sup>9</sup> Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! <sup>10</sup> For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! <sup>11</sup> Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. (Rom 5:1-11)

## **A confronting truth**

The first reason that *salvation by grace* is out of step with the world is because the Bible says that we can do nothing to earn favour with God. We are saved by faith, *not our works*.

Being "justified through faith" (v 1) is a fancy way of saying that a person's relationship with God has been put right. How does that happen? The answer is there for all to read: "through faith ... through our Lord Jesus Christ".

The "therefore" at the beginning of the verse tells us that the writer is making the argument based on something already written in the letter. The apostle Paul wrote this letter to the Christians in Rome, many of whom would have had Jewish origins, meaning they were descendants of Israel and would have grown up knowing the history in the

Old Testament of how God had saved them.

A quick history lesson: the Father of Israel, a guy named Abraham, is the one who heard the original promises from God that he would save his people—in fact, that is the topic of Romans 4 (the chapter immediately before the passage above). Paul explains how God had credited Abraham as righteous: “What does Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness’” (Rom 4:3; cf. Gen 15:6). What is significant here is that at the time Abraham was credited as righteous, he had not *done* anything that would give him credit. He had no law to follow (that came later with Moses). He had no birthmark; no distinct sign that marked him as special (circumcision—which was done to mark out a person of Israel—came later). And yet, Abraham was declared righteous.

The point: God declared Abraham to be right with him on the basis of faith, not on the basis of any effort on Abraham’s part.

God justified the Christians in Rome, and justifies Christians today, through their faith in Jesus, not because of any human effort.

That is a very different picture from the way our society thinks and operates. Imagine what it would be like to receive something good without having to earn it. To be graded with top marks at school without having to do any homework or sit any exams. To be awarded top marks at university without submitting an essay or handing in an assignment. To be promoted and remunerated at work without having to sit through a performance review or meet any KPIs!

God’s gift of salvation is not gained by our efforts; it is received through faith in Christ.

## It is about hope

The second reason that *salvation by grace* is totally out of step with the world has to do with hope.

There is a connection drawn between grace and hope in verse 2 of the Romans passage above, which says that “we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we *boast in the hope* of the glory of God.” (Some translations use the word ‘rejoice’ instead of ‘boast’. Either way, what it means is that the Christian can really celebrate this hope.)

Christians have access *by faith into this grace in which we now stand*. Can you see that this is a present reality for those in faith? They “now stand”.

Our world tends to think of hope as sort of like wishful thinking, like winning the lotto (“I hope I win the jackpot”), but that is not the Bible’s view of hope at all. *Hope* is a sure thing because of God’s grace in Jesus.

Consider for a moment what that means for the person of faith—they can rejoice in the *certain* “hope of the glory of God”. Every time a person gets baptized (like the Philippian jailer in Acts 16), and every time a person declares that they are a follower of Jesus, they are declaring that they accept what Jesus has done for them and also what that means for their glorious future. They rejoice in hope.

Does that mean that a Christian should expect everything in life to be roses? Not at all! Christian hope is not simply present when things are good; hope also has relevance when things are not so good. Read on in our passage. Verses 3-4 say that “we also *glory in our sufferings*, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope”.

Is that not strange to our ears? Glory in suffering! (In fact, the Greek word for ‘glory’ here is actually the same word as ‘boast’ in the previous verse! If we can boast or rejoice in hope, we can also boast or rejoice in suffering.) Who wants to rejoice in their sufferings?

It is strange, because the hope on offer in our world is lost when suffering comes. If all we live for is what can be offered in the here and now, then at some point that will be found to be wanting. Suffering, for any reason at all, is one such point.

With Jesus, suffering cannot take away Christian hope, because even if suffering leads drastically to the point of death, there is more. There is peace forever with God.

It is not uncommon to hear reports of Christians suffering for their faith. There are many countries around the world in which those most targeted are those who hold to a Christian faith. To be attacked, to be beaten, to be exiled or even to be killed is hardly something to rejoice in. Yet this experience does not mean hope is void—in fact, those who do suffer will often say that it is at those times when hope is most important. Chapter 5, ‘Resilient in suffering’, will consider this topic in more detail.

If Christian hope is simply ‘wishful thinking’ then Christians should be pitied more than anyone. Conversely, if *worldly* hope is to be taken seriously, then it must find an answer for suffering.

## **What we don’t like to admit**

The third reason that *salvation by grace* is out of step with the world is because it tells us something about ourselves that, deep down, we know is true but do not like to admit.



Verse 6 in the Romans passage identifies me as someone who is “ungodly”. Verse 8 calls me a “sinner”. It’s not a very popular notion!

I quite like thinking of myself as a good person, and I am sure that, given the opportunity, you also would like to be seen as a good person. Generally, we are good, give or take the occasional traffic infringement or swearword! Yes, we are good people! But I am not sure anyone would want to put their hand up and say they were perfect. And that is the point.

So if we are not perfect, then we are sinners. This passage is reminding us that deep down we are ungodly and sinners.

Paint me with the brush of sin and you paint a portrait of an unrighteous man. I wish I could say otherwise, but I am a sin masterpiece!

So how do ‘good’ people, if not by their own efforts, come to have peace with the one who is perfect? How do the unrighteous become righteous? The answer is that Jesus took our place: “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (v 8).

Jesus did not need to die *for* a righteous man; he had to die *as* a righteous man—in order that we ‘good’ people might be made completely righteous in God’s sight.

This is the greatest trade in history. On the cross, Jesus (the perfectly righteous Son of God) took my place (the place of a tainted and unrighteous sinner), and died so that I would be set free. It was his effort, not mine. His life, for mine. Jesus paid what he didn’t owe, for what I owed and couldn’t pay.

Why was that so necessary?

Simply, as verses 9-11 above show us, this is everyone. Without Jesus we are God’s enemies. Being an enemy of

anyone is hardly a pleasant notion. Being an enemy of the God of the universe should be terrifying! And without someone to step between us and God, we are in the firing line of his wrath. There is absolutely nothing comforting about that picture.

It is into that reality that God's grace comes: "For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" (v 10).

## **Faith, works and grace**

What does it mean to be saved through faith by God's grace?

It means that God, through Jesus, and only through Jesus, has made the effort to save us. It is his gift and it is freely given. That's grace.

When someone works at a job, they receive payment for what they have done. They have earned their pay. We would never call that pay cheque a gift. By works, we get what we deserve. That is exactly why 'faith' is the opposite to 'works'—by *works* we get what we deserve, but in *faith* we get what we *don't* deserve.

A Christian is saved through faith by grace.

## **Faith, obedience and grace**

While *faith* can be contrasted with *works*, there is another dimension to consider. *Faith* can also be contrasted with *disobedience*. And that is why when someone becomes a person of faith, the right response is to obey Jesus. After all, why

would you trust Jesus to remove your sin and guilt before God if you were only going to hold on to sin and continue to disobey God day after day?

When Jesus started his public ministry as recorded in Mark 1, his first words were these: “The time has come ... The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” (v 15).

Jesus calls people to repent (turn to him) and to believe (place their trust in him). *Repentance* involves seeing sin for the deceitful and deadly thing that it really is, and turning away from it. *Belief* in Jesus involves seeing Jesus for the gracious and powerful Saviour that he really is, and turning to him.

Faith places these two acts together in a person’s salvation—repentance and belief are two sides of the same ‘faith coin’, if you like.

Have you ever noticed that when you turn from something you turn in two ways?

Suppose you are walking towards the front door of your house when you suddenly remember that you have left your bag on the bench. When you turn to go back to the bench you also turn away from the front door. Every turning involves a turning *from* something to something.

That is what a saving faith looks like. It involves *turning from* the horror of sin (without which you will stay out of step and not at peace with God, who will hold you to account) and it involves *turning to* trust and hope in Jesus (who brings you in step with God and to peace with him).

Now let me try to explain why repenting and believing in Christ is not a ‘work’.

Repenting and believing in Jesus, if done solely as a

human action, would do nothing if Jesus had not already paid the price. But when you repent and believe in Jesus, it is as if you are coming to him with an empty hand and saying, “I offer myself not by merit, as if I have anything to offer, but in humility, relying totally on what you have done”. By faith, we recognize that it is because of Jesus that salvation forever is even on offer, and it is by God’s grace and only by his grace that we are saved.

## **What does a Christian look like?**

So for someone who is indeed *saved by grace*, what should that change about the way you live your life?

A Christian is someone who has moved from being out of step with God to now being someone who is in step with God through Jesus. Or to put that another way, a Christian is someone who has moved from being in step with the world to now being someone who is out of step with the world. So:

- Don’t think that being good, or working hard for God, can give you more credit. The best line of credit has already been offered in Jesus alone.
- Don’t take the gift of salvation for granted. Instead, live a life that is worthy of the gift that has so generously been given. And that will look like a sinner who rejoices in the hope of the glory of God and rejoices in whatever suffering they might experience for being in Jesus Christ.
- Be more concerned about the security you have in Christ than you are concerned about the security you have in the world. There will always be a temptation to rest in what the world offers, but it will only be a temporary rest.

- Be obedient to Jesus. There will be a temptation to use the excuse “Because I am saved by grace, I don’t have to do anything that Christ asks of me” (of course, we wouldn’t say it like that—we would be much more nuanced or subtle). You may be tempted to think to yourself, “I don’t have to be involved in service, because I know I have already been saved by grace”, but this is a self-deception and a misunderstanding of grace. As Christians we should be concerned about being saved people who take obedience to our Saviour very seriously. There will be more about being fruitful in service in chapter 9.

### **What’s best next?**

- What aspects of your thinking and your behaviour should be changed as a result of reflecting on this ‘essential’ Christian quality?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What step can you take this week to make that change?

*Pray about it.*