

THE ABOUNDING JOY OF NEW TESTAMENT HOPE - Part six

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THE OBJECTS OF OUR HOPE - RIGHTEOUSNESS

Galatians 5:1-11 - “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. [2] Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. [3] I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. [4] You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. [5] For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. [6] For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. [7] You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? [8] This persuasion is not from him who calls you. [9] A little leaven leavens the whole lump. [10] I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view than mine, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is. [11] But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed.”

Here’s where we’ve been so far in this study of Biblical hope. We’ve been studying the **power and importance of hope**, how it empowers both **faith** and **holiness** in the Christian walk. Then we turned our attention to the **sources of hope**, being the **vastness of God’s grace**, the **assembling together with the body of Christ** and the **encouragement of the Scriptures**. And finally, we’ve been looking at the **objects of hope**, the things to which we look with both **confidence** and **longing**.

First we looked at what the New Testament calls the **blessed hope** - the **“appearing”** of the great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ (**Titus 2:13**). Then we studied the **redemption of the body** - that glorious transformation that takes place when the dead in Christ are raised again. Today I want to look at something quite different - **the hope of righteousness still to come**. There are six thoughts I see bubbling up out of this text. We’ll zero in on three today and three more next week.

The phrase I want to look at is tucked away in the **fifth verse** of the passage I read just a moment ago: **Galatians 5:5** - “**For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.**” Paul says that you and I are all involved in this process of **“waiting for the hope of righteousness.”** This is an unavoidable part of Christian experience. And Paul says it’s important that we all understand exactly how we’re to maintain this hope in our hearts.

But before we look at that phrase, let’s look at the surrounding verses to see what prompted Paul to talk about this hope, because the **situation** is what caused Paul to talk about this hope of righteousness:

1) THERE WERE PEOPLE IN GALATIA WHO WERE HINDERING CHRISTIANS FROM OBEYING THE TRUTH

Galatians 5:7 - “You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?”

You can see how disturbed Paul was with these trouble makers in the church. These people were trying to pull the church away from their Lord. Paul says they were doing it by **adding to what was necessary for salvation**: **Galatians 5:4-8** - “You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. [5] For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. [6] For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. [7] You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? [8] This persuasion is not from him who calls you.”

Now that is a serious situation. People can teach things right in the church that don’t come from God. They can add to and twist the message of Christ.

Paul makes the exact nature of their distorted message even clearer in **Galatians 6:12-13** - “It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. [13] For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.”

Notice the words **“good showing”** and **“boast”**. These people wanted to leave room for **human accomplishment in the process of salvation**. People like to make a good showing. People like to boast. They want something to be proud of. Religion should boost self-esteem, not just **Christ-esteem**.

In fact, the text says that when human achievement is removed from my standing with God, **people will persecute**

the bearer of that kind of gospel. These people, right in the church, were compromising the gospel simply so they **“would not be persecuted for the cross of Christ”**(6:12).

These people wanted to use circumcision as an **accomplishment of their own works** rather than a **sign of being a recipient of God’s grace**, which is what circumcision always was in the Old Testament. Originally it was an outward sign that these people had been **freely called in Abraham** and **freely delivered by God’s grace out of Egypt**. It never was meant to be a tool of human accomplishment or merit.

Now that’s the situation Paul is addressing when, right in the middle of his argument, he gives these words - these beautiful words: **Galatians 5:5** - **“For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.”** In contrast to those who wanted to mislead them, in contrast to those who wanted to boast in their accomplishments of merit, he speaks of a kind of righteousness that is still **future - a “hope of righteousness.”** There is a **coming** righteousness we are presently anticipating and relying on.

There is a whole way of life in that one verse. There is a **waiting** - a solid **expecting** - a **patient trusting**. Then Paul adds another important detail. He speaks of this waiting being **“through the Spirit.”** It’s a kind of **supernaturally inspired expecting**. It’s based on the promise of God’s Word. And Paul says this is all received **“by faith.”** So it isn’t something that is either **earned** or **worked up** merely in the human emotions.

Now there’s a reason we took so much time working through the mechanics of this Galatian text. The details tell us a great deal about the Biblical hope of righteousness. There is a **way of life** Paul sets up as being the exact **opposite** of these trouble makers in the Galatian church. That’s why this **fifth verse** is so important in the context of the whole passage.

Paul means to **contrast** two totally different approaches to knowing and pleasing God. And the very essence of what makes a Christian different is in this fifth verse.

Let me make one more background point before we look at the words of verse five specifically. What we’re seeing in this process this morning is sometimes there are Biblical principles - very **practical** and **important** principles - that only yield their fruit to those who are patient enough to hold on for them. We can all learn this principle together if we’re patient enough and careful enough.

2) **THE CHRISTIAN RELATES TO GOD AS AN HEIR RATHER THAN A SLAVE**

Galatians 4:4-7 - **“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, [5] to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. [6] And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” [7] So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”**

Notice those words, **“you are no longer a slave, but a son...”**(7). Those words describe the only two possible ways of relating to God. If you want God’s favor, there are only **two roads** open to you:

First, you can relate to Him as a slave. A slave’s value to his master is dependant on only one thing. His **work**. He is only worth his keep to his master on the basis of what he produces for him.

Second, you can relate to Him as a son. A son rests in the standing he has **by virtue of his birth**. The son is the heir of the inheritance of the father, not because of the son’s grades in school, or the son’s annual income, or the son’s good looks. The son is an heir to all that the father has **just because he is the son of the father**.

In any sane, normal home, children don’t live life in fear that they will no longer be counted as children. They may want to **please** their parents. But they don’t have to strive to **be** their parent’s children. There may be some exception, but in any healthy, normal home, children rest in the love of the parents.

Our God is a good heavenly Father. And He is a faithful heavenly Father. He gives good gifts to His children. And His faithfulness isn’t **earned by the efforts of His children**.

No wonder Paul opens our text in the fifth chapter of Galatians with those beautiful words - **Galatians 5:1** - **“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”** What beautiful words! Christ has **set us free** so we might **stay** free! Not free to do whatever we want. Not free to live in sin. The words must be taken in their glorious context. We are free to **live for God as a child of His love rather than toiling as a slave out of fear**.

So here's how this happens. The Father's love for me as His child is the **reason** I long to please Him in all I do. It's result is holiness, but not the holiness of dead works. Or, as Paul has already described it - **Galatians 5:6** - "**For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.**"

With these background concepts in mind, let's look quickly at the words of our topic, the **hope of righteousness** - **Galatians 5:5** - "**For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.**"

3) **THERE IS A KIND OF RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT IS STILL IN THE FUTURE**

Paul says there is this "**hope of righteousness.**" And I know what he means. I know what it is to **hope for righteousness**. There are so many times when **I feel the frustration of not being what I long to be for my Lord**. If He hadn't so lavishly loved me, and I wasn't so eternally thankful to Him those moments of discipleship failure wouldn't trouble me at all. But I **love** Him and so they **do**.

And here's an important point. There are **two bad responses** to that inward disconnect between what I long to **be** and what I **am**. And I must avoid them both with steady, consistent resolve. I must resist **complacency** ("Nobody seems to actually be able to **do** all this spiritual stuff, but I'm as good as everybody else, so who cares?"). And I must resist the **despair** ("I'm never going to make it. This may work for **some** people, but it will never work for **me**").

I don't know if you remember the last message in this series. But we were looking at the kind of groaning and frustration we all feel as we wait for the redemption of these physical bodies - **Romans 8:23** - "**And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.**" We groan because we feel the fallenness and weakness of these physical bodies. We groan under those limitations while we wait for resurrection and transformation.

Now most of us have come to understand the kind of limitations these physical bodies have. And we've learned to wait in hope for that full glorified state. We all know the effects of pain and suffering and age. Physical bodies are such **limiting** things. But **Galatians 5:5** says exactly about our **moral condition** what **Romans 8:23** says about our **physical condition**. We're not **apathetic**, and we're not **lazy**, but we do **wait for a deeper righteousness**. We wait with longing and sometimes groaning for a final **fulfillment of righteousness**.

We don't wait with **despair**. Paul says, in both the physical and the spiritual dimensions of our lives, we take courage in the certainty of our **hope**. We "**wait for the hope of righteousness.**"

Evidently, Paul thought about this coming righteousness a great deal: **2 Timothy 4:7-8** - "**I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. [8] Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.**"

We Christians have used some of these phrases so often we probably don't attach any specific meaning to them anymore. What exactly **is** a "**crown of righteousness?**" I don't think this crown is an **actual material crown** that I will wear on my head. And I think this is true to the words of the text. This text doesn't talk about a crown of **diamonds** or **rubies** or **sapphires**. Paul says it's a crown of **righteousness**.

There is a coming **quality** of righteousness that will mark my life. It will dominate my outlook. It will **govern** absolutely everything about me. In short, it will **crown** my life. There is a coming righteousness that will **rule every part of my being with equal and total consistency**. I will no longer be **partially** righteous. I won't even be just **substantially** righteous. My life will be **crowned** with righteousness. Righteousness will no longer be my **hope**. It will crown my entire normal existence.

We need to remind ourselves of this every day we live. There is no strength in **self-condemnation**. There is no peace in **fear**. We need to relate to Father God as an **heir** rather than a **slave** - **Romans 8:15** - "**For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'**"

Learn this lesson in your daily walk with Jesus. There is a coming righteousness. All of those longings for pleasing God will be completed. Don't be lazy or wicked. But do wait in hope.