

THE ABOUNDING JOY OF NEW TESTAMENT HOPE - Part seven

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THE OBJECTS OF OUR HOPE - RIGHTEOUSNESS (Part 2)

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.”

We’re continuing our study of the wonderful hope of the full manifestation of the perfected righteousness of Christ in our lives. This is not the *imputed righteousness* credited to us in *justification*, but the *perfectly performed righteousness* like that of Jesus Himself in our physical existence. We don’t possess that yet, though we long for it as the Holy Spirit transforms our affections in this present age. And we feel the “*groaning*” of frustration that Paul describes in detail in **Romans 8:23** - the awareness of all that we aren’t yet but long to become in Christ. In the words of our text, we “*....eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness*”(5).

We considered three points in last week’s teaching. *First, this hope of completed righteousness in Christ is not the same as relying on the works of the law for our standing in Christ. Second, in Christ we have been brought into a relationship with God as an heir rather than a slave. And third, we wait in confident hope for this righteousness because it still lies in the future, not the present.* I have three more thoughts so we’ll begin today with point number four:

4) THE HOPE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS LEADS TO THE PURSUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

It would be a terrible mistake to conclude that Paul was teaching any kind of *indifference* to the pursuit of righteousness. On the contrary, because he had the certain hope of fulfilled righteousness before him through Christ, he aimed his whole life to preparing his life for righteousness now. He had tasted the righteousness of Christ and longed for more of it to be manifested now.

Philippians 3:12-16 - “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. [13] Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, [14] I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. [15] Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. [16] Only let us hold true to what we have attained.”

What an incredible wealth of insight lies in these verses! These are words to be *weighed*, not just *read*. He *admits* to the incompleteness of his present experience of Christ. That’s what he’s saying in **verse 12** - “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect....” “I’m not there yet. I’m fully aware of my spiritual ineptness.” All that Paul *isn’t* presses in on him with constant pressure. He found present *unrighteousness* impossible to live with.

But there’s more here. Paul is also keenly aware that he has been promised so much more in Christ Jesus. He can see what awaits him just up the road. He has a firm hope - **Philippians 3:14** - “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” This is no dim dream for Paul. He can see this prize in the distance. It’s a *certain* hope that he has.

So what is the *effect* of this *future* hope on Paul’s *present* agenda? He tells us in **Philippians 3:13** - “Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead....”

This is amazing. The certainty of this *hope of righteousness* makes Paul *strain* for it right now. This hope of future righteousness *crowds everything else into the shadows of Paul’s attention*. That’s what Paul means when he

says ***“forgetting what lies behind....”***

Here’s a simple illustration. Picture a small child awaiting Christmas. He sees the tree and the lights and the presents. He **knows** Christmas is coming. He’s **certain** of it. His mother tells him he can’t **open** the presents yet. They aren’t in his possession yet. But **knowing** Christmas is closing in doesn’t make the child **indifferent** about it. It makes him **passionate** and **excited** all the more about it. It’s because he knows it’s coming that he **can’t really get focused on anything else**. This certain future hope has captured his imagination.

I know that’s just a poor illustration. But it captures something of Paul’s present interest in the Kingdom of God when he looks at the promised future righteousness of Christ that will soon be his and then says ***“I am straining forward to what lies ahead!”*** He’s putting himself there right now. He’s pulling himself up to that future moment right now. He’s already relishing it. ***New tastes are constantly being formed and deepened.*** The future hope of righteousness is already making past things look **dim** in Paul’s mind.

So I think you can see what this object of hope has done for Paul’s present pursuit of holiness. It didn’t make him **indifferent** or **lazy**. But it changed his **approach** to holiness. The way of Christ - with all its discipline and self-denial - with all of its cost and persecution - yes, **that** way of Christ - had been transformed. It wasn’t a **list of rules and regulations**. True, it was still **costly** and, many times, **challenging**. Yet Paul didn’t view it as a **chore** but as a **race**. And, especially when you can see the **prize** at the finish line, there’s something wonderful and exhilarating about winning a race!

5) THE HOPE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS MUST BE SUSTAINED BY LIVING ENGAGEMENT WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Galatians 5:5 - ***“For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.”***

Immediately I’m made aware of the **nature** of this waiting for the hope of righteousness. It’s not a **passive** waiting, like sitting in a doctor’s waiting room. It’s an **active** waiting. It’s waiting that **seeks deep influence of the Holy Spirit**. And there are two key phrases demanding attention - ***“through the Spirit”*** and ***“by faith.”***

“Through the Spirit” describes **God’s** side of this process. ***“By faith”*** describes **my response** to the Spirit’s work. And I want to close by putting up two practical points of application from those two phrases in **verse 5**:

A) LEARN TO RECOGNIZE THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN YOUR LIFE AS HE CREATES A PASSION AND A LONGING AND A HOPE FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Many Christians are far too easily brought under **condemnation**. We aren’t too easily brought under **conviction**. But we are easily brought under **condemnation**.

The difference is this. Conviction always comes in an atmosphere of **positive hope and opportunity to change and grow**. Condemnation comes with the weight of **despair and spiritual inertia**.

It is never the goal of the Spirit of God to make you simply **despair over sin**. He wants you to see that pain in your soul over your failure as His work to **deliver and lead you out of that sin**.

Don’t yield to that downward spiritual gravitational pull of mere condemnation. Don’t yield to **inertia**. Don’t just mope over all that you aren’t and wish you were. When your soul stings from the presence of sin, immediately turn your attention to the fact that **nobody normally hates sin**. This must be the work of the Holy Spirit, confirming your sonship or daughtership, and working to establish God’s kingdom of righteousness more deeply and firmly in your being.

In other words, even as you renounce sin, **set your sights on the hope of righteousness** - **Philippians 1:6** - ***“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”***

B) RECEIVE THE SPIRIT’S CONVICTING WORK IN THE ATTITUDE OF FAITH.

Look again carefully at **Galatians 5:5** - ***“For through the Spirit [that’s the phrase we just looked at], by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.”***

The Spirit’s convicting and renewing must not only be understood as a **doctrine**, but **embraced**. We must

see the **hope of righteousness prepared for us - actually there** still out in front of us. Despair will never help me **yield** to the work of the Holy Spirit. I must bring **faith** to the table.

And here's what responding **with faith** to the hope of righteousness looks like. Remember, the Holy Spirit comes to work in deeper and fuller ways in lives where people have already demonstrated a welcome to His work in smaller areas consistently.

Let me try to give a practical example of how this might work in experience. Let's take a basic promise of spiritual help from the Word of God:

1 Corinthians 10:13-14 - **"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.[14] Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry."**

This really isn't a passage about getting through times of pain and suffering. It's actually a passage about **temptation and sin**.

Paul says the Spirit is faithful to work for me right in the middle of my time of temptation. Evidently, from these verses, the temptation was to some form of idolatry (14). But let's make the same situation apply right in the home. Let's say the sin is watching inappropriate entertainment on my TV. There are certain programs that have no place in a Christian's mind or home.

Yet, I'm drawn to those things. I like to see them. So there I am in my living room watching something sinful. Suddenly, without any preparation or forethought on my part, instantly, the Holy Spirit speaks to me and says, "Don, this is wrong. I know nobody else knows, but this is hurting you. I want you to turn that off right now."

So there it is. A tempting situation. And the Spirit of God making a way of escape - even though I wasn't even looking for a way of escape at the time. He was faithful.

Now, that's one of the two parts Paul was talking about in **Galatians 5:5** - **"For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness**. That's what's happening right there in my family room. That's the work of the **Holy Spirit** prompting my life in the direction of the hope of righteousness.

Now comes the question, do I receive that work **"by faith?"**

Well, there are a million different responses I can make. We all know them. I can say to myself, **"That's just my overactive conscience bringing up all the hang-ups from my prudish upbringing"**, or, **"Everybody else, even my church friends, watches this stuff. It can't be all that bad"**, or, **"This is just a spirit of bondage and legalism trying to destroy my freedom in Jesus. I'm not under the law, so I can do what I like."**

Now, let me tell you something about all of those responses. **Not one of them is receiving the Spirit's work in faith**. They all explain my inward battle as being anything **but** the Holy Spirit. And nothing good is going to happen in my life through any of them.

The best way to grow in **present** righteousness and the hope of **future righteousness** would be to respond like this: when the Spirit of God deals with my heart about that TV program I ought to immediately say in my own heart, **"How good of the Lord to work so faithfully, right here in my home. Nobody else was around to help me. It would have been very easy to have this sin attach itself, like some barnacle on my mind. Yet the Spirit of God, wanting to bring freedom and purity - preparing my life now for the hope of righteousness that's before me - is both cleaning and freeing my life for His deeper presence. Thank you Lord, for such great love and attention!"**

And then get up and turn off the TV and pause to give the Lord thanks, renewing your mind in His Presence. Now that's a proper response to the certain hope of righteousness.

Remember, there is a blessed hope of righteousness. Your spirit will be made as new as your body. But don't forget to wait faithfully on the Holy Spirit and run this race with patience. Not all the battles are won in

a moment. You are God's child. And there is a wonderful, certain, hope of righteousness to draw you ahead.

And, as if we might occasionally need reassurance, the Bible gives this wonderful picture of our **hope of righteousness**:

Hebrews 12:22-24, 28-29 - "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, [23] and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, [24] and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel....12:28-29....Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, [29] for our God is a consuming fire."

Think of those you have loved who have died in the Lord and gone on before us. However fondly you remember them - and they are rarely as completely saintly as we eulogize them at their funerals - they were never, in your fondest memories, as perfectly Christlike as they are right now. And you will be like that too one day. Made absolutely **perfect**.