

O, THAT WE MIGHT BE A PEOPLE FILLED WITH THE DARING POWER OF BIBLICAL HOPE

Part five - Teachings #1249 & 1251 - Sundays, February 22nd and March 1st, 2009, 10:00 a.m.
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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**.

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.

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. It was an outward sign that these people had been **freely called** and **freely delivered** by God's grace. 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 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**. And he 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 dig 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**.

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**.

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. 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**. 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. And that leads me to the next point:

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.**

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. And that can be hard 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 he **can’t really get focussed 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. 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 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**. And the difference is this. Conviction always comes in an atmosphere of **positive hope and opportunity to change and grow**. Condemnation comes with the goal 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 my sonship and

working to establish God's kingdom of righteousness more deeply and firmly in my 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 ***recognized***, but ***embraced***. We must see the ***hope of righteousness*** 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 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."

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**. 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 and word 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 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.

Dear one, 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.”