

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

Part nine - Teachings #1267 & 1269 - Sundays, April 26th & May 3rd, 2009, 10:00 a.m.

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HOW FAITH AND SIN ARE EACH GENERATED BY WHERE OUR HOPE IS PLACED

We've been studying the fruit of Biblical hope, how it produces *joy, love boldness* and *endurance*. Then we had a bit of a break from this series for our missions emphasis and Palm Sunday and Easter. But we need to come back to deal with an important question. Why don't *all* Christians reap this fruitful harvest? If Biblical hope produces joy and love and boldness and endurance - and the Scriptures clearly *promise* that it does - what are we to make of Christians who become tired and disillusioned in their faith?

Let's face it. It's no secret that many people try to live the Christian life but don't succeed. Somehow it just doesn't seem to work for some people. It's no secret that there are many people who profess to "*believe in Jesus Christ*" but still seem chained to their sins. And the church has to figure out what's gone wrong. And it has to figure out *how this can be fixed*.

Is genuine godliness possible in this world? What is the fuel for godliness? Is it available to everyone? Is godliness the same as sheer willpower? If not, how can I tap the source of power for me?

We're going to spend quite a few weeks probing the relationship between *hope, faith* and the *life of joyful holiness*. Today we're going to look specifically at the relationship between *false hope* and *continuous sin*. And we're going to look at the way *Biblical hope* extends and intensifies *faith*, almost to the point where you can't distinguish between the two.

That's where we're going to start today. There is a living, intricate relationship between *hope* and *justifying faith* and *sanctifying faith*. And it's because many Christians never *think* about this issue that they are confused at some seemingly contradictory emphases in the Scriptures.

a) There are some statements that make the whole Christian relationship look totally free, simple, and unearned - **Matthew 11:28-30** - "**Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. [29] Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. [30] For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.**"

Or consider those well-known words in **Ephesians 2:8-9** - "**For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.**"

There you have it. It all seems so free and uncomplicated. In fact, "*easy*" is the very word Jesus used to describe it.

b) But then there are other statements that put the *demands* of living for Jesus right up front and center - **Hebrews 12:14** - "**Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.**" Or, **Luke 9:62** - "**Jesus said to him, 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'**"

And we feel like saying, "Well, which is it. Is this Christian life an "*easy*" fit, or is it like "*striving*" and "*ploughing*"? Is it *no* work? Or is it a *great deal* of work? And how can both these statements be true?

And here's the key point this morning. There is no contradiction between any of those verses if you understand the *nature of faith as it gets expressed in real life*. The same faith that reaches out and embraces Jesus in salvation *continues* to reach out and embrace His will in the daily decisions of life.

Faith both *receives* Jesus and *pursues* Jesus as Lord. Faith always pursues holiness because once faith *tastes* the beauty of freely bestowed grace it becomes more *satisfied* with God than anything else. Because of the reception of grace God's commands cease to be a *burden* and are seen as a road to

freedom and **joy**. In fact, it's on the basis of grace received that we are called to holiness in the first place - **Romans 12:1** - "**I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.**"

Notice how the power of grace received turns **obedience** (which can carry connotations of mere labor) into **worship**. Grace so transforms obedience that it is based in **love** and results in **joy**. Hence, it's our spiritual **worship**. Perhaps we could say that your favorite worship song, sung from the depth of your heart, won't bring as much joy as obeying Jesus does. And we need to **hope** in Christ that way when tempted to sin.

This is also why the apparent contradiction between Paul and James is a myth. Paul talks about being "**justified by faith**" and James talks about the **manifestation of faith**. James says the way you can tell if you've ever exercised genuine faith in salvation is you continue to exercise faith in each daily decision of righteousness and obedience:

James 2:14-17 - "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? [15] If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, [16] and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? [17] So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."

I'm going to take this entire message to look at these issues and some of the questions that get raised. It's important to know what a Christian is and isn't. It's important to understand when conversion is authentic and when it's all in the mind.

In recent years the church has emphasized the use of faith in getting what we want from God in prayer. And that's not without biblical support. Jesus spoke several times about the importance of exercising faith to make our prayers effective. But it may surprise you to know that this is not the **main** emphasis of what faith is for in the Scriptures.

For centuries the main purpose of faith was **power for holy living**. Faith kept Christians pure when all around them people were impure. Faith was the victory that would "**overcome the world**." Faith wasn't just linked to getting healed when I was sick. It was linked to overcoming the pull of pride and self-centeredness, to purify the mind of covetousness, to rinse the heart of lust, to free the soul from the power of anger and bitterness, to still the mind when worry and impatience would rob my peace with God, to give strength in the face of suffering and death. Faith was seen as the **fuel for holiness**.

And make no mistake about it, faith **is** the only fuel for a holy life - "**Without faith it is impossible to please God**." There is no pleasing God without harnessing the power of faith. Serving God isn't just a matter of concentrating my **will-power**. The Scriptures are clear, **faith** is the victory that overcomes the world.

I want to take some time this morning to give an overview of how this all works. I'll go over it in broad strokes today. In particular, we're going to ask the question: **If faith is the victory that overcomes the world, where do I get this faith?** Do I just **pray** for it? That seems to present a problem because the faith I'm **requesting** is the faith I **need** to make that request work. We end up with a chicken and egg issue. And this is where **hope** comes into the picture. I want to show in a fairly detailed way, the relationship between **hope** and the birth of **faith**.

1) **NO ONE SINS OUT OF DUTY OR OBLIGATION**

I know this seems obvious, but James wants to remove all doubt about the origin of sin in our experience - **James 1:14-15** - "**....But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed**

***by his own desire.* [15] Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death."**

So no one gets up in the morning and says, "You know, I really haven't committed adultery in a long time. I don't feel like it, but I guess it just has to be done, so I'll just go out and get it over with."

That's ridiculous. James says people sin because they get enticed into sin by their own desires. They sin because they *want* to sin. We may *hate* sin *after* we commit it, but, at least at its entry point, we sin because we would *rather* sin than *not* sin. Sin gains its mastery over us through our own *desires*. So remember our very first obvious point because it's going to set the stage for understanding the power of *hope* to create *faith* which will *overcome* the world. No one sins out of a *sense of duty*.

2) **SIN SUCCEEDS BY HOLDING OUT SOME PROMISE FOR YOUR FUTURE**

It can be *any* promise, depending on where you are in your present circumstances. Sin never offers us *nothing*. Remember, no one sins out of sheer duty. There is always a promise attached to sin. It may be the promise of fulfillment, or pleasure, or success, or security, or revenge, or power, or prosperity, or beauty, or even just the thrill of momentary excitement. But there's *always* a promise attached to sinful temptation. It was even so when Satan tempted our Lord: **Matthew 4:9** - "And he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.'"

You might say this is the *standard* form of sin. It never varies. The *reward* varies. But the *pattern* always remains the same. Sin's power is directly tied to my belief in the promise it carries.

And now we come to the most important point of all in considering the power of *hope* to create a faithful response to God and the victory of faith over the world:

3) **SIN IS WHAT YOU DO WHEN YOUR HEART IS NOT FULLY RESTING ON THE HOPE OF GOD'S PROMISE FOR YOUR FUTURE**

Look carefully at this. The power of *sin* is inversely related to the *power of hope* in God's promise. Sin is what you do when you don't believe that God's promise of future blessing and strength and grace is vastly superior to what you can obtain doing things your own way.

So *coveting* is turning away from God to find *satisfaction in things*. *Lust* is turning away from God to find *satisfaction in illicit sex*. *Bitterness* is turning away from God to find *satisfaction in revenge*.

Study the *root* behind any of those sinful actions and here's what you'll find they all have in common. The root behind them all is ultimately *unbelief*. The root is the failure to truly believe - to *rest my hope* - on the promise that God's future grace and provision will be infinitely better and more joy producing than any satisfaction I can find apart from Jesus Christ and his lordship over my life.

In other words, the power of *any* of those sins I mentioned comes from believing the lie of the promise attached to them. Before I sin in action I sin in the *gullibility of unbelief*. I trusted the power of sin to be more satisfying than the certain *hope* God promises to those who follow Him.

4) **THE PROMISE OF SIN WILL HOLD SWAY OVER MY LIFE UNTIL I BELIEVE THAT MY WHOLE BEING WILL BE MORE SATISFIED IN GOD THAN ANYTHING ELSE**

Will-power will help me *pursue* righteousness only *after* my heart is set on it. But only faith fueled by *hope in God's promised future* will help me *prefer* righteousness in the face of any specific moment of temptation. And only when the promise of grace and blessing from God becomes

more attractive than the promise of sin will the power of sin be broken in my life.

Once we get this process in our minds its repetition in the Scriptures is outstanding - **Psalm 63:3-4** - "Because ***your steadfast love is better than life***, my lips will praise you. [4] So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands."

This is the hub of holy living. ***Until I hope in God's promised future provision and blessing more than the promise of sin, I will be a slave of sin.*** These verses are not just David trying to pump up a worship service. He's ***talking to himself***. There are dozens of allurements out there. There are twenty situations every day that tempt his heart and mind to sin. And they always do it with the promise of reward. Remember, ***no one sins out of sheer sense of duty.***

David is reminding himself that there is nothing worth more than the loving kindness of God. There is nothing to be desired more than God. God's grace on his life is so wonderful, and God's future provision so rewarding, so enriching, that the promises of sin are just fool's gold.

5) **FAITH IS A HOPE-FILLED SATISFACTION WITH GOD FOR YOUR FUTURE GOOD AND JOY**

I want to be very clear on this point. If we leave ***hope*** out of the picture, ***faith*** can become nothing more than ***believing certain facts about Jesus Christ***. We come to just accept that He is the Son of God - that He died on the cross - that He rose again - that He is coming again. You can give assent to all those facts and still be enslaved to sin. Deliverance isn't just tied to ***doctrine***. It's tied to a living ***hope*** in the future goodness and satisfying grace of God.

Now we're coming around to a Biblical definition of faith. And we're only getting there because we're seeing faith in its connection to ***hope***. Faith is not just a concept in your mind. It's not just a set of doctrines. Faith is hoping and cherishing Jesus above all. Faith is always ***future*** oriented, even when it rests down on the great accomplishments of Christ in the ***past***. By that I mean faith isn't just about having your sins forgiven in the past. Faith essentially has to do with your life ***from this moment on***. It has to do with your ***future*** - **Hebrews 11:1** - "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

Jesus too tied the power of faith with a confident ***hope*** for the promise of God for our future satisfaction - **John 4:10-14** - "Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." [11] The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? [12] Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." [13] Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, [14] but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

John 6:32-35 - "Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. [33] For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." [34] They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." [35] Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."

Two truths emerge from these passages:

a) ***The images of eating and drinking were favorite pictures in the use of Jesus to describe saving faith.***

And both of those images make it clear that faith is more than mental agreement with some statements of truth. Just like eating is more than believing in food.

b) **Second, Jesus specifically equates faith with being satisfied with Him for all future needs and blessing. John 6:35b - "Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.'"**

Other water and other bread will soon leave the partaker empty again. But to truly encounter Jesus is to be so satisfied with Him that nothing else compares with the good to be found in Him. Or as David said it, "***Thy loving kindness is better than life!***"

6) **AGE** **HOW PAUL APPLIED THE PRINCIPLE TO HIS OWN LIFE OF HOLINESS IN THIS PRESENT**

Here's the text. Try to pretend you haven't heard these words ten thousand times:

Galatians 2:20 - "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Paul plainly says that the power by which he lives life is ***faith*** - "***....and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God....***"(20). That's his source of strength. But then he does something very important. He focuses our attention, not just on the past and his forgiven sins, but on the power he has obtained for ***present*** holiness - "***.....And the life I now live I live by faith....***"

True, Paul is rejoicing over the cleansing of his past sins - "***....the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me....***" But he uses that faith ***right now and for his future***. So he doesn't just mean, "I'm really, really, really glad Jesus died for my sins and I really, really, really believe that He did!"

No, there's a future orientation to Paul's understanding of God's grace. Faith is tied to ***hope*** - **Romans 8:32** - "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"

Yes, faith does have roots in the past - "***He did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all....***" But Paul's faith isn't ***chained*** to the past. His faith is tied to a glorious ***hope***. Hope is faith ***aimed*** at the future - "***....how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?***" It's the logic of redemption when faith is tied to hope. If God has already done the great work on the cross by giving up His Only Son, ***there is nothing good that He will not do for me in the future!***

Let me close by saying it this way. We will fail miserably when we look at God's commands and see ***only*** commands. We will always find the commands ***restrictive*** and the enticing promises attached to sinful temptation ***attractive*** until we refuse to read God's commands ***apart*** from the understanding of ***hope***. Learn that God's commands are always the expression of a God who longs for our ultimate satisfaction. Satan only sells shares in bankrupt companies.