

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Hope Most Sure

Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.... (Colossians 1:26–27)

Many years ago, decades, two preachers in my region engaged in a senseless fuss over hope versus knowing that you are saved. One evening the "know-so-er" phoned and asked, "Well, Joe, are you a 'hope-so-er' or a 'know-so-er'?" I must confess that the question irritated me, perhaps because of the silliness of it or perhaps because of the man's arrogant attitude. You see, this whole disagreement missed the Biblical perspective on both sides of the question. Consider the following passages.

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. (1 John 2:3)

And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. (1 John 3:3, KJV)

Isn't it amazing? An inspired apostle saw no tension between "knowing that you know" and "hope." From the Biblical perspective, Biblical hope increases sound knowledge, and Biblical knowledge increases godly hope.

Many years ago I was asked to preach a funeral for a lady whose children had moved her to this area from some five hundred miles away. The mother had been a lifelong Primitive Baptist, but the children had joined other churches with other beliefs. Because I had never met the lady or her family, I requested some time to get acquainted with them before the funeral service. I found a delightful Christian family that demonstrated true hospitality when I visited with them. During the visit one of the younger generation asked me a fascinating question, "Mother always talked about her 'little hope,' and I could never make any sense out of that term. What did she mean by it?" By this time I had learned this woman's beliefs, so I responded with a question, "If Mother had talked about her assurance of God and of her relationship with God, instead of using the term 'hope,' would you have understood what she meant?" The woman smiled and nodded. Of course, she would have understood. I can appreciate a person's care to

avoid appearing boastful or over-confident, but I am not at all sure "little hope" accurately captures the conviction of "...Christ in you, the hope of glory."

Peter frames the Old Testament perspective of the coming Messiah, God Incarnate.

Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into. (1 Peter 1:10–12)

Old Testament prophets clearly understood that God was showing them incredible things that He would unfold in future ages, but they could not fully grasp the details or even the full significance of those future events.

We in the Gospel Age, subsequent to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, God in human flesh, have an incredible blessing that we take for granted. For centuries, Old Testament prophets saw glimpses of God's unfolding redemptive purpose, but they could not see the details. They could hardly even imagine an age of time in which God would take on human flesh and be born of a virgin. (Isaiah 7:14) The idea that God, "...whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (marginal reading, "from the days of eternity"), would be the birth site for God's Son to enter into His visit to earth exceeded their grasp. Yet God graciously revealed sufficient details of that glorious future event that they "...inquired and searched diligently..." to know more about it.

This is the mystery, hidden from ages past, of which Paul writes in our study passage. Now, Paul tells us, this mystery is revealed. Prophecy

became historical fact. God's intent as revealed to these Old Testament saints, now appears as God's glorious accomplishment, success, mission accomplished. Paul chose a unique word for "mystery" in this passage. Notice this definition of the idea.

Counsel, or secret plan, which God shares only with his people. In most biblical passages it relates to the wise counsel of God in his guidance of history to its destiny. The most specific and significant application of the concept of mystery is to the plan of God regarding the death of Christ. It does not refer to a secret that God is unwilling to tell or to something so obscure that it could not be understood even if told.¹

We see no "secret will of God" in this definition, but the mirror opposite, something that "...**God shares only with his people....**" Some New Testament dictionaries define the word as something previously mysterious and unknown, but now revealed by God, comfortably stated in the above definition.

Think about the personal truths that we hold and take for granted. That same Jesus, God who came in literal human flesh, died an ignominious death for our sins. He spent three days in a borrowed tomb, rose from the dead--as literally as He was God living in human flesh--appeared to His disciples for forty days, ascended in His literal but now glorified human body back to heaven, and through the Holy Spirit now lives within each of His beloved children. Oh, and "His beloved children" embraces people from "...*every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation....*" (Revelation 5:9) Forget the old and never-accurate belief that God loved only Jews. Do not overlook John's perspective in this verse. He was not viewing a few humans who lived during his lifetime. He was looking into heaven and viewing all of God's redeemed people who had received God's gracious and loving gift from the very beginning. If you had lived in Old Testament times, could you have wrapped your mind around all of these glorious truths?

Paul wraps up these truths, and so much more, into a profoundly simple--and simply profound--phrase, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." That which gives us reason to celebrate in our deepest valleys, rejoice in our greatest sorrows, and praise God in our sharpest pain here appears in crystal clarity. It is not "God doing His part and we doing ours." It is not Jesus plus all

¹ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 1512 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1988).

our good works and faith. It is first to last and all-inclusive, Christ in you, the hope of glory! "Christ in you, the hope of glory" enabled John to write that glorious Revelation from a cold, desolate, foggy, depressing prison island. It enabled saints across the centuries to praise God even as persecutors' fires burned their bodies. Never doubt. That same "Christ in you, the hope of glory" will not forsake you in your times of trial.

Another passage adds perspective to the truth that Paul teaches us here.

And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.
(Hebrews 11:39-40)

Every example of model faith that appears in Hebrews 11 comes from the Old Testament, most of them from quite early in Old Testament history. These are the same people of whom Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:10-12. God gave them the "good report" of faith, the framework of Peter's words, but they died without seeing those prophecies fulfilled. They fully trusted God that He would bring them to pass just as described and promised. However, any prophecy must see fulfillment, or it is a false prophecy. That "better thing" that God provided for us is in fact our witness of His prophecies fulfilled precisely as He revealed them to those Old Testament saints. Without the fulfillment that we witness, their anticipation would be incomplete and futile.

Blessed hope with her anchor of safety,
It points upward with index of love,
Saying, "Children of sorrow and sadness,
There's a home with the blessed above.

Blessed hope, sure and steadfast,
Anchor of the soul,
Guiding thru the veil,
To the heav'nly goal."
A. D. Filmore

This hope doesn't belong to others, my friends, it belongs to you. Your joy, comfort, and security in it will grow stronger in your conviction as you feed it with strong faith in its Author, knowledge from His Word, and faithful obedience to its Master. That is the New Testament gospel.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor