

From the Bits and Pieces series (#514) by Elder Ralph Harris
HOPE THAT IS SEEN IS NOT HOPE

"For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" (Romans 8:24)

The apostle says, "*We hope for that we see not.*" We hope one day to be with the Lord in a perfect world, but we are not yet there; we have not yet entered into the full realization of it. If we had we would have no further basis for hope. We have solid grounds, if the Lord has graciously dealt with us, for fondly anticipating the resurrection and our consequent glorification and complete conformity to the image of Christ. And there are times when a confident expectation of these things glows brightly within our hearts; yet, we are still bound to earth, and are "prisoners of hope" (Zech. 9:12). Like Paul, we are living "in *hope* of eternal life" (Titus 1:2), not in its full fruition.

Among worldly religions *hope* is often looked upon with some scorn or even ridicule, and it is frequently argued that we must have something *more* than hope. They say that if we do not *know* beyond any doubt that we are saved, then we are *not* saved. This error has caused some of God's children great distress of mind, for they have been convinced that they must know beyond question, and yet they have realized that they could not attain to such a perfect knowledge: a great dilemma indeed for a serious minded person!

The truth of the matter is, the children of God will never have *perfect* knowledge of their salvation this side of glory. They will perhaps many times have *very strong assurance* of it, but they cannot attain to *perfect* knowledge while they dwell in bodies of sinful flesh.

Confusion has arisen in the minds of some because of their inability to reconcile those scriptures that speak with great certainty of the salvation of God's people with other scriptures that speak of that matter in terms of *hope*. But any difficulties that may arise in our minds concerning this seeming conflict may be easily removed merely by considering the fact that the *knowledge* to which we have reference is neither *continual* nor *permanently conclusive*. Such scriptures as First John 3:14 do not teach us that *perfect knowledge* is necessary. And, as I said in a booklet that I wrote many years ago on the subject of hope, when I speak of *perfect knowledge* I refer to a *continual and unremitting state in which one is altogether positive that he is one of the elect and is absolutely incapable of being wrong about the matter.*" And who among men can truthfully claim to have attained to such a lofty state and position? I do not feel that such a state is meant by those scriptures that speak in

positive terms concerning our spiritual standing, but rather to those *strong seasons of assurance* which, as our experience bears out, are not always with us.

"At such times of assurance I would certainly consider it not only *proper*, but if our joy is sufficiently enlarged, it is perhaps even *requisite* that positive language be used, such as, 'I *know* that *my* redeemer liveth,' 'We *know* that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren,' etc. But there are other times in our experience when we would not be truthful to ourselves nor to others if we used such positive language. When we are cast down in soul, and perhaps have been disobedient, the Lord is experientially withdrawn and we would perhaps more appropriately adopt such language as is found in Psalm 77:7-9, 'Will the Lord cast off forever? And will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever?'

"Therefore...this is an experiential matter with the children of God. If we were always on the mountain we would be strangers to the language of those who dwell in the valleys, and if we were always in the valley we would likewise be unfamiliar with the dialect of those who occupy the high country. But having 'walked in the valley' as well as having 'skipped upon the hills,' we are familiar with both terrains and conversant with both tongues." —Elder Ralph Harris