

Gospel Gleanings, “...especially the parchments”

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Saved by Hope: Keep your Heart Focused on the Real but Unseen

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? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. (Romans 8:24–25, KJV 1900)

Paul ends this extensive teaching on the Second Coming and our bodily resurrection, “...the redemption of our body,” fittingly with these verses on hope. Our modern pedestrian idea of “Hope” is something akin to wishful thinking, an escape from reality into a wishful fantasy world where we imagine what we’d like with no expectation whatever of realizing it. The casual Bible student who has little or no exposure to the historical meaning of hope will take this fantasy idea of hope to the Bible and wholly miss Scripture’s rich teaching on the subject. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines “Hope” as “Expectation of something desired.” The idea of wishful thinking is thus absent. Unless you have a solid expectation of the object, you have no hope. Yes, you have a desire, but a desire with no expectation is not true hope. When we read of “Hope” in Scripture, the truth of its teaching always urges us to focus on the expectation and on the thing joyfully expected.

Paul removes this “Wishful dream” idea in our study passage. When he writes “For we are saved by hope,” he associates hope with his teaching on the Second Coming and our resurrection that he just taught. We might interpret “We are saved by hope” in various ways, but the context will clarify and direct us to the right way. While it is true and beyond doubt that “...Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27) is the cause and source of our final salvation, the salvation that relates to the Second Coming and our bodily resurrection, Paul’s emphasis on the unseen quality of our present hope deals with our present mindset that joyfully anticipates and expects that final glory. The truth of the Second Coming and our resurrection, when rightly believed and kept in our minds, is life changing.

By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:2)

Neither in 1 Corinthians 15:2 nor in Romans 8:24 did Paul intend to teach that our final deliverance from sin and death are uncertain and contingent on how strongly and rightly we believe and hope. Both verses remind us of the present “Saving” effect our belief and hope have on how we live and face the trials of our present life. We may give up on anything good and godly and allow ourselves to

become consumed with the present groaning for deliverance, but this path will eventually surrender to the groaning and forget the reason for it. Do not miss Paul’s analogy of “travail” in this context. The groaning of the creature is in some way similar to the groans of a woman in the midst of child birth. If she for a moment forgets the reason for her groaning, the pain overwhelms her. However, if she steadfastly remembers with each new contraction that a child, her child, is on its way into the world, and she must push all the harder to see that new life, she will look past the pain to the new life that is coming. Despite the long duration of many of life’s pains and trials, often so intense that they produce audible groans, Paul directs us to never forget the fact that our present pain is temporary, that something beyond our ability to reach by ourselves, and something far exceeding the impact of our present pain awaits us in glory when we shall realize the deliverance of the “sons of God.” Keeping that truth fresh and alive in our minds today saves us from overwhelming despair at the present pain.

Paul’s use of hope in this context properly bridges our thoughts into truths that he will give us through the remainder of the chapter. As our pains drive us to our knees in prayer, the Spirit intercedes in our seasons of weakness with groans that we cannot know. We might focus on the stuttered weakness of our words in prayer, but the saving of hope reminds us of the Spirit’s interceding groans. While we groan under our present trials, the Holy Spirit joins our groans, but He never forgets our final and certain deliverance. We may find relief and deliverance—another word for “saved”—when we remind ourselves in our “Groaning moments” of the Holy Spirit’s groans for us before the Father.

Folks who fail to grasp Scripture’s broad teaching on the topic of “Salvation” will likely become confused by lessons such as this one. Their confusion grows when they must deal with such passages as First Timothy 4:16. Does Jesus save, or does the preacher save both himself and his hearers? Confusion regarding this Bible topic will lead to one of two extreme and errant beliefs. 1) God micromanages everything that occurs, even to the point of complicity in our sins for a mystical

greater good.¹ 2) Or it will lead to belief in one or another forms of salvation by works, either blatant salvation by works as in the teachings of Arminius, or “Side door” salvation by works, as with so many contemporary teachers who use the terms of salvation by grace, but they inevitably teach a view of grace that falls short unless accompanied and implemented by human contribution, as in MacArthur’s “Lordship salvation.”

The Biblical principles of salvation divide into multiple aspects or types of salvation or deliverance. When we encounter the word in any of its various forms in Scripture, good study and right division require us to ask questions of the context in which the word appears. “Saved from what?” “Saved to what?” “Saved by what?” “Saved now?” “Saved in the past?” Or “Saved in the future?” In fact Scripture uses the word “saved” in many different ways. We may wisely break Scripture’s use of the word into two major categories; 1) temporal deliverances that relate to our discipleship, our service to God and to His people in the here and now, or 2) eternal deliverance from the eternal consequences of our sins. Occasionally fatalists who teach that God orchestrates every person in every act will heatedly oppose this division of Scripture’s use of the word. Since they believe that God manipulates our good works as sovereignly and as irresistibly as He produces the new birth, in principle, they reject or wrest every passage in the Bible where the word “save” is used as a directive or commandment to an individual. A favorite logical fallacy used by those who lean in this direction creates a “Straw man” and ridicules it instead of honestly dealing with the Scriptures that use the word in this way. The straw man says that all of God’s works, including the new birth and the final resurrection take place in time, so all Bible salvation is in this way of thinking “temporal.” Obviously, this is not the way that Scripture uses the word in the passages that command believers to save themselves and others by walking in faith, obeying God, and teaching others to do likewise.

In these passages, Scripture often uses the word as a directive, a command to action by the believer in time when the consequences of the action are temporal. Our obedience to the gospel, our teaching others the truth of the gospel, being baptized, and all the godly works of faith commanded in Scripture deal with our discipleship

¹ As an example of this errant belief, I recently stumbled across a website of a man who holds to this belief. In one of his lessons, the man stated that, at times, God prevents sin, as when he prevented Abimelech from committing adultery with Sarah, but at other times “God purposes sin” and thus the sin, in this case adultery, occurs. The obvious implication; if you or I commit adultery, it is because God “Purposed” it. Paul answers this thinking in clear terms. We should stand with Paul. (Romans 3:8)

here in time. We do not believe that Scripture teaches that we earn our place in heaven by what we do. Thus, despite being emphatically commanded, not gently suggested, the ultimate consequences of our action or our failure in these exhortations of Scripture, are temporal, not eternal. They result in the Lord’s severe chastening, not in our eternal separation from Him and from His love, Paul’s final point in Romans 8. (Romans 8:38-39) Thus our use of the word that Scripture uses in the way that Scripture uses it in these passages; “save” in one of its various forms, and the Biblical focus of temporal, as contrasted with eternal salvation or deliverance.

Likewise, when Scripture teaches us about God’s exclusive work that redeems us from the legal—and the eternal—debt of our sins, extracting us from the condemnation of sin and death and translating us into the kingdom and family of God’s dear Son, it always attributes all of the action, the truly “Saving” action, to God alone. Why? Because it is dealing with the eternal consequences of our sins, consequences that God alone can eradicate by His merciful grace. The Biblical principle that distinguishes the use of “Saving” to God alone or that uses the word as a directive to faith and action by us always relates to the consequences involved, not to the irrelevant and superficial question of when the action occurs. The logical fallacy of the straw man is quite obvious in this argument. Ignore the real issue and try to divert the other person’s mind to the irrelevant question of when something occurred instead of dealing with the consequences involved, which is Scripture’s discerning use of the word in two very different—opposite—ways, one involving God alone doing for us what we utterly lacked both the ability and the desire to do, and the other involving God directing and aiding us in believing Him and His truth and acting in faith and with His assistance in our discipleship.

When Paul teaches that we are saved by hope, he is not in any way contradicting his faithful teaching that God alone can and does save us from the eternally damning consequences of our sins. He has just completed a detailed and edifying lesson on the reality of our future resurrection, the adoption/redemption of our body into the family and presence of God at the Second Coming. If we keep that truth in mind, despite the present trials and vanities that we face in life, that truth will strengthen our faith, give us hope in what we might otherwise view as a hopeless situation, and thus save us from the despair of hopelessness that would overwhelm us.

Scripture teaches the truth of a literal bodily resurrection at the Second Coming, but we have not yet experienced that resurrection. Nor have we seen resurrected people walking around in our world. The scoffers who reject the truth of the Second Coming mockingly remind believers that cemeteries are growing daily, that thousands of years have gone by, and still we see no indication

of an imminent resurrection. “Where is the promise of his coming?” (2 Peter 3:4) Believers who fail to dedicate their lives to a growing, fruitful faith are liable to fall prey to this depressing error and forget God’s saving grace. (2 Peter 1:9) False teachers may overthrow the faith of weak believers by false ideas regarding the Second Coming and resurrection, but they cannot overthrow God’s merciful grace that refuses to let go of even one of His beloved children of grace. (2 Timothy 2:16-19) Paul’s teaching drives to the heartbeat of the gospel’s good news. Shall we believe it and experience the joyful deliverance of hope right now, or shall we believe the scoffers and the false teachers and become overwhelmed and lost in the depressing false teachings that abound in this sinful world? The more we keep God’s glorious “Resurrection truth” fresh and alive in our minds the more we shall experience the reality of being “...saved by hope” as we trek through a hostile world, looking for that better country.

But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. We do not see the resurrection in our present field of vision. If we surrender to the scoffers who mock the doctrine of a literal resurrection of the body and the literal Second Coming of Christ, we lose any expectation of that day and the events that Scripture assigns to that day. Instead of being saved by hope, this abandonment of our faith leads us directly into the dark and depressing world of hopelessness. Folks who fall into this trap of the great deceiver often manifest an angry void of patience. In fact, they often live in a state of constant anger. They are not happy people. If they have abandoned such a central truth of Scripture, how can they have any other attitude?

Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. (1 Peter 1:8)

If we fall to the lowest common denominator of “Seeing is believing,” and choose to believe only what we can see or touch with our natural eyes and hands, we not only deny the Second Coming and our bodily resurrection, but we also deny the very Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, if, despite not seeing Him, we love Him, believe in Him and believe Him, we “...rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” You see, what we believe directly shapes our frame of mind. When you see a believer who lives in nearly constant anger and irritated agitation at his brothers and sisters in Christ, you may not know the details, but you may rest assured that you are dealing with a brother or sister who live with a deeply flawed faith and a wrested belief system. These traits are not the fruit of a sound and firmly believed Bible truth.

Over some sixty years, I have observed more than a few strong believers, including preachers,

who slipped from their productive and active life into the shrinking world of their older years, dominated by the spirit of bitterness and anger. At first, I was puzzled by the observation. It seems that growing into this final era of one’s life causes some people to grow more gracious, kindly thoughtful of others, and mellow at the trials of life, while others grow increasingly bitter and angry. Knowing some of these people fairly well, I have observed a consistent pattern behind these opposite attitudes and behaviors. True to Scripture’s teachings, those who keep their hearts and lives focused on serving God by serving His people—all the while looking with joyful anticipation to their hope in Christ—manifested traits of grace and calm peace at life’s never-ending trials. These dear saints exemplify before our eyes the joyful and Biblical reality of being “...saved by hope.” Those who turned inward and became more focused on self and on the self-obsessed idea of creating and leaving their legacy became the angry bitter folk.

As I ponder this passage, the questions loom in my mind. Which class of people will I imitate? What kind of believe will I become? Which class will become your steady companions? God has not decreed you to one or the other. He has pointed us to self-denying faith and a life that immerses its work in serving others, not in lording our will over them. He has richly described the blessings of obedience in Scripture, and He has frighteningly reminded us of the price we shall pay for choosing our own way and interests above His. Which path shall we choose? That choice shall shape our attitude in the closing chapter of our life. If we seek the path of joyful peace, of experiencing what it means to be “...saved by hope,” we must choose the way of service, not the way of self.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor