

Romans 15:13 (P. Compain) 72037

Bible Treasury: Volume N10, God of Hope, The (15:13)

The very title here attached to the name of God proclaims Him as the source of all hope, and hope is one of the chief sustainers of life. It is that at least for the children of God. They know God in His love, they enjoy His care, His peace, yet they cannot do without hope as given by Him. When brought, through pure grace, to receive salvation in and by grace, they began to see this world in a new light. They perceive and experience that this world is a mass of ruins, the fruit and result of man's sin and disobedience. They do not charge God with the ruin. How could they? A true God, living, perfect, holy, even apart from goodness, cannot be the author of the misery and suffering we are so well acquainted with. The depravity of man's imagination can alone conceive such a thought. A believer acknowledges that, as a member of the human race, he is for his part responsible for the present state of things; and far, very far from complaining of God's ways, sees God's merciful intervention in the wondrous gift of His Son, sent to be the propitiation for our sins. "Herein is love," says the apostle, and how rightly!

But by His propitiation at the cost of Himself, of His life and blood, the Son did not restore things as they were in the short day of man's innocency. He saves for the better paradise of heaven, the paradise of God, where nothing can be spoiled or deteriorated; and He left the ruin and the suffering in our present world in order that man might be reminded of his hopeless fall, he brought to feel it, generation after generation, and, by the very feeling of it, be led to turn to the Savior.

The believer feels in his body, no less than the unbeliever; the sufferings of the present time, and far more in his spirit. Yet he rejoices; yea, exalts. How can this be? "And not only so, but we rejoice [or, boast] in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." The Christian hope has received from the love of God a pledge that cannot fail, even the Holy Spirit; "and if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies because of His Spirit that dwelleth in you." Thus the Christian hope is divinely warranted.

But there is a dangerous hope—dangerous because it has not the least foundation in Scripture—against which it is charity to guard many a soul. Such would own that they are not saved, even say that nobody can know in this life whether or not he will be saved, but that they hoped to be saved somehow. In these modern times Satan has invented a cheat by which not a few are caught. It is what they call conditional salvation. This rests upon the fallacy that Christ, between His death and resurrection, descended into hell to preach unto the spirits in prison, which were disobedient when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah.

The supporters of this fatal dream will have it that the gospel preached by Christ in hades to the antediluvians has continued to lie preached there ever since, and that thus God, in mercy, gives those who have not believed in this present life, a chance of believing in the next, and so of being saved. That is their hope, and they do their best to swamp others into the same. Now their interpretation of 1 Peter 3:19, 20, and the consequences they draw from it, are equally false. First, the apostle never says that Christ went into the prison where those who were disobedient in the days of Noah are now consigned. He says that, by the Spirit He preached to them, not in person, but by the instrumentality of Noah, while the ark was a preparing. They are now in prison because they would not heed the message of Christ to them through Noah—a preacher of righteousness. Even supposing for a moment that they were preached to by Christ in their prison, how would that prove that the millions and millions of post-diluvians who died in unbelief have the gospel preached to them in hades? A hope founded on such a delusion should more rightly be called despair, as Luke 16 shows.

In Scripture, hope is bound up with faith and love (1 Cor. 13:13), thereby showing, inasmuch as faith precedes hope, that there can be no hope without faith, and faith in the gospel as now preached on earth. Earth has been the scene of man's fall; earth has witnessed the entrance of sin into the world and of death by sin. The earth has also witnessed that mighty work of the cross in virtue of which God has exalted His Christ to be a Prince and a Savior. And by these two things, of which earth has been the witness—sin on the one hand and redemption on the other—all the questions concerning eternity have been settled in the life that is present—settled for blessing or for woe; for blessing to those who have received God's testimony concerning His Son; for woe to those who have rejected it.

By receiving this testimony a man becomes a Christian, and by being a Christian he is entitled to blessing in this life and in the next. Among his blessings down here is hope "good hope," because God-given, and given jointly with everlasting comfort. It is also a "blessed hope," directing the eye of faith to the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. In that glorious appearing every believer has an immediate interest. We shall be with Him then, His companions. How does this prospect move our hearts and tell upon our daily life and conversation? "With the Lord!"—it is not glory and bliss without Him. If it could be, it would never satisfy us. Nor would it satisfy Him, who redeemed us to Himself at the cost of His own life. Nothing short of seeing of the travail of His soul could satisfy Him, and He will see of that travail when He has us with Him in His glory. "The glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them."

It is a "living hope," as Peter writes, founded upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ, therefore stable and immovable as is all that rests upon that foundation, and it is "unto an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." It was given to Moses to have a full survey of Canaan from the top of Pisgah. He contemplated from thence the goodly land, the land flowing with milk and honey. It must have been to him a delightful sight by reason of His deep love to God's people. He was sure God would make it good to Israel, and He could anticipate their joy and share it. Yet that inheritance was corruptible and soon became corrupted, defiled, and it has faded away—how sadly! We have a better sight than Moses. The door of our hope opens heavenward, as did the window in the ark. From thence we can survey our inheritance, "reserved in heaven for us," and we "kept for it by the power of God." No failure can come in here, no power can be anything like a match for

the power of God, who has both it and us in His keeping.

It was in view of His resurrection that our blessed Lord said by the prophetic Spirit, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage," and it is that heritage that He intends to share with us, His redeemed. But before He entered on it a mighty conflict was to take place with all the powers of earth and hell, and there could be no one with Him there. Had we been witnesses of it, what could we, poor helpless things, have done more than did His disciples? We could not so much as have crossed the brook Besor! But it was in the face of our helplessness that our great David came forth, after having vanquished all the enemies, with the wondrous decree, "As his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that carrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike. And it was so from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel unto this day" (1 Sam. 30.).

There is yet one feature attached to our God-given hope, and, one can say—the brightest. It will be unspeakably blessed to be with Christ, His companions and His joint-heirs in the day of His power; but is there anything equal to being like Him who is the very effulgence of God's glory? Yet God has predestinated us to be conformed to the image of His Son, and of course His purpose stands good forever. Faith may and does reckon upon it with full assurance. How will this part of our hope be fulfilled? By the adoption, the redemption of our body, as we read in this eighth chapter of Romans. The adoption, the redemption of our souls we have already. We cry, "Abba, Father." We are now children of God as much as we shall ever be. But there is yet in us what we have inherited from the first Adam—a mortal body, a body of humiliation, of corruption, and we know, that flesh and blood, as our body is at present constituted, cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. How then shall we be delivered from this mortal, corruptible body? By an act of power of the Redeemer of our souls, "For... we also look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself."

But it is not by power only that we shall be conformed to Christ. The apostle John declares, "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when [or, if] He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." So that being like Him is consequent upon seeing Him as He is. Wondrous sight! The disciples saw Him after His resurrection, saw Him when He ascended up, but they did not see Him glorified on high, and were not like Him. They and we await the resurrection of those that are Christ's at His coming. Then shall we all be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Rapturous sight! Now, even where faith is most in activity, (as surely it was in Paul), "we only see in a mirror, darkly"; but then face to face, "as He is." The consequence will be, that we shall reflect His beauty and His glory, so that He will be glorified in His saints and marveled at or admired in all them that believed. Observe, it is said "in them." Were it said "by them" it would not necessarily be that they were "like Him."

May the comfort of that purifying, sanctifying hope fill the souls of all those who love His appearing and long to see Him in His radiancy! "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that ye may abound in hope in the power of the Holy Ghost."

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