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OUR HOPE

Pledge

As members of this church, we pledge:

To ^a renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, being ^b controlled not by wine but by the Holy Spirit; ^c to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, as we await our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

^a Titus 2:11; Rom. 13:11-14; 1 Thess. 4:3-8; 2 Tim. 2:22; 1 Peter 4:7; ^b Eph. 5:18; ^c Titus 2:11-14

Scripture

Waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ

Lesson

Why We Hang Buckets on Maple Trees

Just before spring, all over New Hampshire and other New England states, something strange shows up on the trees.

Well, they don't exactly just "show up." People put them there: buckets, hanging on taps, designed to catch the sap that will flow from the trees. And once all that sap gets boiled down, the precious product is that delicious, golden syrup. *Yum!*

Suppose we could interview someone as he is headed out to hang the buckets on the taps. You both crunch through layers of ice and snow, breathing in the frigid March air.

"Sir, why are you hanging the bucket on this maple tree, and not the pine tree?"

"Because I *believe* the maple tree will produce sap I can turn into syrup."

"That's *faith*, then, right?"

"Sure is," he replies.

"And because you have faith that this tree will produce syrup"—for a moment you both stop in front of a massive maple tree—"you *hope* it will."

"I'd be a fool not to. I could almost taste that syrup now!"

"And because you *hope* it will, you hang the bucket here."

"Exactly." With that, the man slips the handle of the bucket over the hook on the tap.

Hope: The Intersection of Faith and Future

Hope, from a Biblical perspective, operates at the intersection of faith and the future. While our faith is rooted in *past* events—the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and thus has a "backward" orientation—those past events awaken our expectation for *future* events: the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of our bodies, and an eternity in the presence of God himself.

The Source and Power for Hope

One of the most important passages on Biblical hope comes from Romans 15. Here Paul writes, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope" (Romans 15:13). This teaches us that the source of hope is God himself, and that the agent of hope is the Holy Spirit.

The reason why the Holy Spirit is the agent of hope is evident from one of his primary activities: to remind believers who they are because of Jesus. Earlier in Romans Paul had taught that "the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of

God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (Romans 8:16-17).

Therefore, this is how hope operates. *First*, God sends his Spirit into our hearts. *Second*, his Spirit reminds us that we really are God’s children. *Third*, knowing that we are God’s children prompts us to expect that we will inherit everything God has promised to his children. *Fourth*, this confidence gives us the perspective we need to persevere through trials.

The Essence of a Hope-Filled Life

To live *in hope* is to live with the eager expectation that all the promises of God that have begun to be fulfilled in Christ will one day be fulfilled. This hope is an essential part of the Christian’s “worldview” or mindset, protecting our head like a helmet: “Let us be sober,” Paul writes, “having put on . . . for a helmet the hope of salvation” (1 Thessalonians 5:8).

Hope in Action

Hope is more than an attitude; it also informs our *actions*. This is because the object of our hope also affects, for example:

Because our ultimate hope is bound up in the future, our hearts need not be bound up with this present passing age. We are free “to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age” (Titus 2:12).

Putting the Pledge to Work

1. How is the biblical concept of hope different from what we usually think of as *hope*?
2. What is the connection between biblical hope and the freedom to live self-controlled and godly lives in this present age?
3. What might be some indications that we do not have Biblical hope?
4. What would it look like if we really had the kind of hope described in Romans 15:13?