

## “The Hope of the Gospel”

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In his epistle to the followers of Yeshua in Colossae, Paul wrote:

He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard.... (Col 1:22–23)

The salvation that has been procured for us through the death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession of our Messiah Yeshua is the greatest gift of God’s grace which we possess. Since we who have believed are “in Messiah,” we are accepted before the Holy One of Israel as righteous in His eyes and therefore we have no fear that we will be rejected. We stand before Him as “holy and blameless and beyond reproach!” “As He is, so also are we in this world” (1Jn 4:17).

But the message of the Gospel, revealed to us in the pages of the Bible, is under attack today. We’re not surprised when we hear the anti-religion, anti-Bible rhetoric from avowed non-believers, or even when the neo-orthodox, liberal Church panders its universalistic “gospel,” proclaiming that all religions share some measure of truth, and that therefore all (even atheists) will be given God’s mercy in the end. What is alarming, however, is to see how this religious downgrade and the universalistic zeitgeist has seeped into the evangelical edifice through the doctrinal cracks in its walls. The “faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 3) is being massaged through Orwellian “double-think” into a caricature which neither the prophets nor the Apostles would have recognized. The biblical teaching of a final, divine judgment which will separate believers from non-believers, is being cast aside as inconsistent with God’s love. The “eternal fire” (Matt 25:41; Jude 7) of God’s wrath is being erased from the Scriptures by the claim that those who “fall under the curse” of God “forfeit the resurrection and the world to come.” So the “punishment” of the wicked is summed up in their ceasing to exist. Even messianic teachers are telling us that the biblical doctrine of final punishment of the wicked is more of a divine scare tactic than a reality—a way of sobering people toward righteousness. So when the Bible speaks of “eternal fire,” it really is using the same ploy that some unwise parents use, when they tell their young children “there are snakes under the bed” in order to keep them from getting out of bed at night.

But it is not only the dismissal of final judgment that is being eroded from the Gospel message. Even the core of the Good News, that eternal salvation is the gift of God’s grace by personally exercising faith in His Son, Yeshua, is being marginalized. We’re being told that in some measure, we can pay for our own sins through the suffering we endure in this life, or even that our physical death is payment for our sins. We hear and read some who are telling us that Soren Kierkegaard was right when he wrote that we could never honestly know—that is, be assured—that we now possess eternal salvation from the wrath to come. That in one sense, we really cannot commune with God because we don’t speak the same language,<sup>1</sup> and we can never be assured that we have genuine faith because faith is itself absurd.<sup>2</sup> We’re being told that “good people,” people who live moral and ethical lives, will enjoy the blessings of the world to come even though they have never accepted Yeshua as God’s Son and their Savior, the One Who died to pay the penalty for their sins.

One has honestly to wonder how such teaching could be given within our circles in light of the clear record of Scripture. How could a person have saving faith in Yeshua without knowing and confessing that Yeshua is the ob-

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<sup>1</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling and Sickness Unto Death*, Walter Lowrie, trans. (Princeton Univ Press, 1954), pp. 45–6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

ject of their faith? Do not the Scriptures teach that all who are born from above receive the indwelling presence of the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit), Who makes known to the spirit of the believer His presence, the very presence of the Messiah Himself? Paul writes in Rom 8,

However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Messiah, he does not belong to Him. (v. 9)

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (v. 14)

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God... (v. 16)

Consider John's words in 1Jn 5:10–12:

The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

When John speaks of having “the testimony in himself,” this cannot be dismissed. All who are chosen by God unto eternal salvation; all who have been given saving faith, the gift of God's grace (Eph 2:8–10), also receive the indwelling Spirit Who testifies of His presence (cp. 1Jn 4:13). The Spirit is Himself the *arrabôn*, the “guarantee” (Eph 1:13–14) that the work He has begun in us, He will finish with a view to the return of our Messiah and our ultimate redemption (Phil 1:6).

Yeshua Himself made it clear that in the day of final judgment, many will claim the right to be received by Him and escape the wrath of God on the basis of their religious deeds (Matt 7:21–23). Those who are received are identified by Yeshua as “doing the will of My Father Who is in heaven” (v. 21). But note carefully His words to those who are rejected:

And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’

In light of v. 21, we might have expected Yeshua's words simply to be: “Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.” Why did He add the all-important phrase “I never knew you?” Because the heart to do the will of the Father—the power to walk in the ways of righteousness and to put to death the deeds of the flesh—is the gift of a changed heart, the work of the indwelling Spirit, and the fruit of Yeshua's own intercession for those who are His (Jn 17:9). In this case, the word “know” in the phrase “I never knew you” has covenant in mind, the sovereign work of God by which He draws us to Himself and forms a covenant relationship with us.<sup>3</sup> The life of righteousness which characterizes those of true saving faith is not the means of being accepted by the Father. Rather, the life of righteousness lived out by faith is the fruit which results from the divine initiative to bring to life the soul that was dead in sin, to infuse that soul with a heart that yearns for a close, covenant relationship with God, and lives to please Him by sanctifying His Name in the world. Simply put, we “know” Him because He first “knew” us. And it is His “knowing us” that empowers us to “do the will of the Father.”

Further, saving faith, itself a gift of God, is not something mustered by one's intellect or the fruit picked from the tree of one's culture. Surely God has graciously revealed Himself in the created universe (Ps 19:1–; Rom 1:18–20), but unless and until the heart of sinful man is awakened to this revelation so that it can be received for

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<sup>3</sup> Notice how the word “know” (Hebrew *yada'*, *yada'*) is used in Gen 18:19 of God “knowing” Abraham, or in Amos 3:2, of God having “known” Israel. Cp. 1Cor 8:3; Gal 4:9; 2Tim 2:9.

what it truly is, mankind inevitably rejects this revelation, worshiping and serving “the creation rather than the Creator, Who is blessed forever” (Rom 1:21–25). It is in the mystery of God’s all-encompassing providence that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Messiah” (Rom 10:17).

Therefore, the motivation for living righteously, for obeying God’s Torah, is not one of fear that if we don’t obey, we will be condemned. The motivation for obedience is that of love for the One Who has redeemed us and changed us: “We love Him because He first loved us” (1Jn 4:19). Obedience is thus the sure proof of genuine faith, for true faith in God and His Son Yeshua is always marked by a growing willingness and ability to walk in righteousness. Indeed, we have been “created in Messiah Yeshua for good works (mitzvot), which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Eph 2:10).

The “hope of the Gospel” is the assurance that what God has said is true, that the Good News is this: He has drawn us to Himself, forgiven our sins through the saving work of His Son, Yeshua, gifted us with faith to lay hold of that redemption, and promised that He would conform us to be like His Son. What is more, He has given us the gift of His indwelling Ruach, Who is at work in us to convict, prod, encourage, and comfort us in the path of holiness. So do not be disheartened or believe “another gospel” which some may be presenting. As Paul admonishes the Colossians (and us), “continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard.”