

Perseverance and Hope

Our Hope Must Be In God

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In Hebrews 3:6 we are admonished that "we are His house [meaning here the *Father's* house over which Christ has been given authority] if we hold onto our courage and the hope of which we boast." We all know that Israel didn't while they were out in the wilderness, and an entire generation, except for Joshua and Caleb, fell by the wayside, never making it to the Promised Land. For whatever reasons, the "rest" wavered, and they died.

The church has had a similar experience. For as long as I can remember, some leave the fellowship between Feast of Tabernacles. There are many reasons, but two, I think, are at the very top for losing the guidance and motivation to go on. First and foremost is that they lose their courage to go on facing the problems and trials of this very difficult and narrow way. Second, and directly linked, is that they carelessly place their hope in the wrong area.

I believe that life is going to become increasingly difficult. This sermon is devoted to helping us see clearly where our *hope* must be.

Matthew 24:12-13 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

This sobering warning is given to help arm us with the firm resolve necessary for the pressure-packed turbulent time we find ourselves living through. Frustration is building all over the world, aided and abetted by constant political, economic, and religious uncertainty. Uncertainty in this kind of pressure-packed environment can be a dangerous mental condition. History shows that when the frustration level reaches a critical point it often explodes into revolution within a nation, or with warfare *without?* against another nation. Eventually, people will do whatever it takes to stop or destroy what they feel is irritating them. There are only four courses to which a person might turn to thinking they can relieve this frustration.

1. The Fear Reaction. We will run from any effort to solve the frustration
2. We will roll ourselves into a sort of mental fetal position, apathetically hoping the problem will just go away.
3. We will fight to destroy it, hoping that its destruction will be the solution.
4. We will patiently face the problem in hope, knowing that what we are doing *is* the solution to the problem for us.

I think that we will all agree that there is not very much going on in this world that inspires hope for successful solutions. Everywhere we look, and virtually everything that we hear and

see in news programs is depressing. They inspire dread and foreboding. Enduring through the end time has become a reality, and you know it. It is as though black rolling clouds, pierced by lightning flashes, have formed on the horizon, and they speak of danger. But we are standing out on a boundless prairie with barely a tree in sight, alone, (a safe home to seek out). It seems as though there is no place to run, and the storm is inexorably advancing toward us.

Now where do *you* look for something that will lift your spirits? something that fills you with anticipation of good, and something that is a motive to go on? All of us do this because we don't want to feel the pressures of foreboding. Not only that, we don't want to fail. This is natural, and it is good, but not everybody succeeds in accomplishing it. Where we might look could be very telling about what is at the center of our life? what is the focus of our sense of well-being. What will we turn to, to lift the pressures of the times and to help us not only to stand, but set us on the right course and provide the resolve to go on?

I had an experience with this leading up to the Feast of Tabernacles. It happens virtually every year. I was getting depressed with the weight of producing so many sermons in such a short period of time without removing any of the ordinary day-to-day responsibilities that are always present regardless of the Holy Day season. And so I complained to Evelyn, and we decided to go see the movie *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*.

Though this movie is not perfect, it is one of the better "feel good" movies around these days. We could relate to very many of the humorous situations perhaps because of the very large family-size atmosphere that was depicted in the movie. But reflecting on it later, it became very apparent to me, that in one sense, going to see that movie as a solution was not a solution. Its lifting effect was pleasant, but it provided only a brief release. The movie's appeal could never produce a sustained motivation toward achieving a realistic goal for me.

I'm not alone in this. Virtually everybody does it. Some people turn to food. Others turn to sports. Others turn to work, and others turn to shopping, almost continuously, in hope of finding a bit of motivation to keep on moving through life. Turning to these things can be done so often that an addiction of sorts is created, and it becomes habitual to the point that their lives seem to become centered on it. An imbalance then is created that is destructive to other areas of life that should be far more important. So one's physical or mental health can actually be impaired, a marriage weakened or destroyed, or a financial disaster created, all in the hope of finding relief from the pressure to move on with life.

I don't know whether you have thought of this lately? thanked God for it over and over and over? but He has rescued us from this potentially vicious and destructive cycle *if* we are willing to take advantage of what He has so graciously made available. He has placed a certain and true hope within our grasp.

Turn to I Corinthians 13:13. Just from hearing that scripture, you ought to know what this verse says.

I Corinthians 13:13 And now abides [or lives] faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Paul penned these immortal words that one commentator called " *the eternal trinity*." It consists of faith, and hope, and love. These three factors we *continuously* need. That's what that word "abide" means. The need for them *never* ends. We need them all through life, without end. Every day we need them. We live by faith, and the other two are directly connected to faith. They are, in fact, the three building blocks of a successful abundant life. They are inextricably bound, tied to our relationship with God, and these are the qualities that make us *run*. That is, they make us work correctly.

Think of it this way. We are God's invention. He built it. He made us, and as our manufacturer He designed us to function and produce. Now automobiles run on gasoline. I think that you can understand this. They do what they do because of the way they were designed and built, and they *move* on gasoline. Movement. That's what I'm talking about. We run on faith, hope, and love. It is these qualities that support us, and we receive strength from them to function as He intends. Every human being who is living, or who has ever lived, functions on these qualities, but only the faith, hope, and love that comes from God will *work* in the right balanced life to produce success.

II Peter 1:2-11 Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as his divine power [from which comes faith, hope, and love] has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that has called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, And to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, And to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. [These things make up a successful life.] For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacks these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things, you shall never fall. For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Now completely disconnected from the commentator that named faith, hope, and love the *eternal trinity*, are others who say that the basic subjects of the General Epistles (consisting of James, Peter, John, and Jude) are that James' theme is faith, Peter's is hope, and John's is love. I am not saying that possessing these three qualities makes the trials of life go away. The pressures of the trials are a part of life. Pressure forces decision. Pressures test us, and God, as He did with Abraham, wants to see what our reactions are going to be.

James 1:2-3 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into different temptations: Knowing this, that the testing of your faith produces patience.

We are counseled here by James, who was Jesus' brother. Hardly anybody knew Jesus as James did. He grew up with Him. He was able to watch Him over the course of His entire life, and so he knew the mind of Christ exceedingly well. He says that we're to consider trials as a reason for great joy. The reason for this is that trials are capable of producing good results. However, it must be understood that trials do not *automatically* produce good results. They can very easily make one *bitter* rather than *better*. Whether one comes out better for the experience depends upon how faith, hope, and love are used. How the trial is used is the issue, and whether faith, hope, and love produce a higher level of spiritual maturity. The thing that determines whether they make us better rather than bitter is how they are used.

James is describing a person surrounded by trials of many kinds, and we are in that period when iniquity abounds, and we are admonished by Jesus that it's going to take *endurance* during this time. So here we are, surrounded by many kinds of trials, and they are going to increase. James is here concerned whether they will produce perseverance.

Did you notice I changed the word "patience" to "perseverance"? The *King James* says "patience." That *may* be acceptable as a translation; however, it is not really correct. "Perseverance" or "endurance" is a more correct translation, and most modern translations translate that word "patience" into "perseverance." This is because the word that demonstrates patience in the Greek is passive, and that means one is merely waiting something out. But the Greek word used here indicates *activity* rather than passivity. The person is not sitting there waiting for something to happen, but at the same time he is patient in what he is going through.

The commentator, William Barclay, describes this Greek word as "having the quality to stand, facing the storm, struggling against difficulty and opposition." This word is a quality that is making progress against, rather than merely waiting a difficulty out. James is focused on the testing of our belief and trust. My focus though is *hope* that is derived from faith as being a motivator to sustain the struggle against the difficulties of life.

Peter didn't mention "hope" in his paragraph that we read, and James did not do it either. But James did mention "endurance," and Peter also mentioned it as well. Now right here the same Greek word is translated, as in the *King James Version*, "patience," but virtually every modern translation uses "perseverance," which is *active* endurance. There is no active endurance unless one is actually attempting to accomplish something, and has the hope of good to come from what he is enduring.

We're going to go again to the book of Peter.

I Peter 1:3-7 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away,

reserved in heaven for you. Who are kept [or guarded, or protected] by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein you greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, you are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

That is what we all want. What I am getting at here is that our lives are not merely a matter of waiting things out. God expects us to make a stand, endure the problem, and make progress against it, overcoming it. There is a difference, and only those who have the kind of hope that I am talking about here—the hope that comes from God—are actually going to make progress against the trial, and *grow*. Those who are patiently waiting things out are going to disappoint God, because that hope will produce nothing. It's just like *living faith* will produce works. It's the same thing with hope. The right kind of hope *will* drive one, motivate one, to overcome—rather than just sitting and waiting—instead working to accomplish and persevering at the same time.

Peter does mention hope here at the very beginning of his first epistle by saying that we have been given *a living hope*. That's what it says. Living hope couples with living faith. The context shows that this living hope is not in any way fleeting in its nature, like my going to the movies was. In fact it is guaranteed (says Peter) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The reference to Christ's resurrection is made, because even though He submitted to God willingly, and He did it perfectly, He still suffered and died. And so people will surely come to the conclusion, saying, "What good did it do Him to obey God in that manner?" Well, the answer is that *He was resurrected* in order to give us assurance that in like manner *our* living hope in God is not in vain.

We're going to go now to Hebrews 12:2 to show what Jesus experienced, because it is the model and the pattern for you and me, and we are counseled by the author to look at Jesus our example:

Hebrews 12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith;
who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising
the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

This touches on an aspect of Jesus' life important to understand in respect to us—that our hope, like His, cannot be fleeting. It must be an enduring hope, because we are not involved in a one-hundred-yard dash. Nor is the doctrine of "Once saved, always saved" valid. The realization of our hope is depicted in this verse as being *future*, and God expects growth from the point of receiving His Spirit, and so He provides us with sufficient time following our calling for that to be produced. Our race is more like a marathon. Israel's marathon lasted for forty years. This should not be looked upon with discouragement, but with thanksgiving, because God has mercifully given us enough time to grow. This is very important.

Go back now in thought to I Peter 1. This hope is not only guaranteed, but Peter dogmatically states that this hope *is* our inheritance; that it is imperishable; that it is absolutely morally untainted; that it is not subject to the ravages of time; that it has been preserved as of old and is *still* held reserved for us whom God has called and watched over.

Why does Peter go to such lengths to describe this hope? Because he has learned, like so many other thinkers and researchers on this subject, that most people's hopes are not founded on very much. In addition to that, there are many kinds and degrees of hope. It was the Greek philosopher Euripides who wrote: "If you have a thousand men, you have a thousand hopes, and some will realize their hope, but most will fail."

Somewhat in the way of contrast, the American, Samuel Johnson, said: "Hope is necessary in every situation." He agrees with Paul. That's why faith, hope, and love are abiding. Now why would Samuel Johnson make such a statement? Because if anything positive is going to be accomplished, if any good is going to be produced from one's life, one must be motivated to make whatever efforts are necessary to accomplish it. Hope, founded upon living faith, is, or can be, a very powerful motivator.

In regard to hope, most of us operate from a perspective of *hoping* that things will work out, but willing to accept something less if it's not too bad. This premise is not all bad, brethren, because some circumstances in life force us to accept this way because there are factors in life that are completely and totally out of our control.

In addition, our achievements in many areas are not permanent. They are not *the* end, but only a level that is reached to that point in time. So in some areas we are rightly conditioned to accept less, to be content, but only if at the same time we are continually working to achieve a higher level in the future. We cannot accept life statically for very long.

If our life is being driven or motivated by living faith, combined with a living hope, and with God's love, it *will be dynamic*, and so we can be content at a certain level. But a son of God, if he is being motivated by these three, is going to be striving always to be achieving a higher level of perfection?one that is more reflective of what God is. So you see, in regard to *the* major overall goal of life, this "*being content*" is not acceptable.

Paul reinforces what Peter said there regarding this hope that we have, and he expresses it in I Corinthians 15: 1-8 when he writes about the resurrection of the dead.

I Corinthians 15:1-8 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also you have received, and *wherein you stand*; by which also you are saved if you keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless you have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After

that he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

Paul's clear purpose, as he opens this chapter, is that the hope that God has placed before us is not based upon men's guesses or maybes, but that it is clearly established upon the testimony of many eyewitnesses then yet living when he wrote this in the fifties AD. Paul added that he did not make up the gospel on his own, but rather it was what he received from Christ, and that what he received was exactly the same as what he had also been later told by the apostles when he met with them. Paul is presenting the resurrection of Christ as a historical fact.

We also have available to us the witness of the apostles' lives following the resurrection. Now you don't just get people to do the things the apostles did without them believing with all their heart what they saw with their own eyes. Thus, in these first eight verses Paul reinforces what Peter says, that there is plenty of *strong* evidence of the proof of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is not a figment of these men's imagination. It really did occur, and God did not give two witnesses, He gave *hundreds* of witnesses to the fact of the resurrection of the dead.

We have seen that Peter establishes very clearly that our hope at this point is resurrection into the Kingdom of God. However, we must take this hope one step further if we're going to have a chance of making it yet a *stronger* motivating force. The resurrection is, in one sense, merely a promised event given at a point in time. The resurrection does not occur merely because we believe it, or even because it has been promised. It occurs because of *Who it is* who promised it. It occurs *because* there is a powerful Being of utmost integrity, who cannot lie, who *makes* it occur. *This is where our hope must be*. It is not really in *what* He has promised, but rather *Who it is* who has promised it. Is your faith in God? So must our *hope* be in God. Is that clear?

We're going to go to II Timothy 1: 8-9. This is addressed to you and me. We are being appealed to, "to be a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God."

II Timothy 1:8-9 Be not you therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be you partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God. Who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.

Where did the hope come from? It came from God. He is the source of it, and He is the author of it.

Titus 3:5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit.

You put these two scriptures that we just read together, and our hope for salvation and

completion as a son of God in Christ's image, prepared for the resurrection, all comes back or down to one thing, and that is *God*. Was it not God who saved Israel from their slavery? Was it not God who provided for them the whole way, and then gave them their inheritance regardless of any promise? Would there had been any hope for them without Him in the picture, first giving the promise, and then carrying through with what He said He would do?

Could they have saved themselves? Could they have provided for themselves? Could they have taken over the Promised Land? In what did their hope have to be? Their hope had to be in *Him*, that He would follow through. It wasn't the promise that saved them. It was the God who made the promise.

Romans 15:13 Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Brethren, could we call ourselves out of spiritual Egypt? Can we forgive ourselves through our works? Can we give ourselves the Holy Spirit? Can we give ourselves the gifts needed to achieve God's purpose? Do we begin to see that it is *He* who should be our hope? Everything, including hope, flows from this real literal personal Being with whom we must develop a relationship so that we truly know Him.

Jesus uttered a great profundity when He stated that "eternal life is to *know* God." What He said is profound, because this God? Jesus' God? *S* God, and He can carry through with His promises. Promises aren't worth a thing, aren't worth the paper they are written on, except for the holiness and the power and the integrity of the one who gives the promises. Can He be trusted? If He can, we can have hope. Our hope is in *HIM*. If we put our trust in the promises, our hope is literally being put in the wrong place. They are just added benefits.

There is one group out there that really pounds this into people's heads that you need to be with them, because if you are, then you can have hope of escaping. Wrong, brethren. Their faith is in the fact that their group is claiming that they are going to escape. How do they know that? It is God who is going to make the judgment, and He is going to be examining people to see whether they trust Him, and whether their hope is in Him. If their hope is in Him, then the promise goes right along with it. If we are putting our hope just in a promise, that's not going to cut it. We are essentially serving ourselves if we do that. We're *regetting*. That's a wrong attitude. We're "*getting* escape." We're saying, "*Well, after all, God has promised.*"

Let's carry this further. Here is something that requires a great deal of thinking. We won't really expound on it, but I will put it into your mind, and later on it will come out in other sermons.

Colossians 1:23-29 If you continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister: Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church: Whereof I

am made a minister according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God; Even the *mystery* which has been hid from ages and from generations, but *now* is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ *in* you, the hope of glory. Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Whereunto I also labor, striving according to his working, which works in me mightily.

Paul was writing to Gentile converts, and the specific "*mystery*" that he is talking about here is *Christ in you*. It was no secret in the Old Testament that the Gentiles would be saved, but that Christ, by means of the Holy Spirit, *would dwell* in all converts was unknown. Otherwise, Paul would be telling a lie when he said that it is a *mystery* now revealed to the church. It was not known in Old Testament times, and this directly connects to you and me, because it is Christ living His life in us again that prepares us for the Kingdom of God. It *IS* our hope! God *in* us is our hope.

God *in* us is our hope because it is this that gives us the certainty for the future. This certainty carries beyond the grave, even as it did with Christ. He *rose* from the grave because God was in Him, and it is why we can have joyful and confident expectation of salvation. It is because that Christ's life?His character, values, virtues, thoughts, attitudes, and deeds can become evident in a Christian.

I Thessalonians 1:2-3 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of *faith*, and labor of *love*, and *patience of hope* in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.

First I want you to notice that the "eternal trinity" is mentioned here. Faith, hope, and love all appear in verse three. Secondly, I want you to notice that the word "endurance" (translated in the King James as "patience") should either be translated as "endurance" or "perseverance" once again. Thirdly, the grammatical structure of the sentence Paul wrote in the Greek makes Jesus the *object* of our faith, hope, and love, not the promises. The *Person* is the object of our faith, hope, and love.

In other words, our faith, our trust, is in Jesus. Our love is because of Him, and toward Him, and we persevere in hope toward Him. So all of these spiritual qualities exist in us, and are profitable for us because of a Personage. That's an important distinction. Our relationship is with a *BEING*, not a book, not words on the page, but with a Person. We can have enduring hope not only because of what He has done in the past when He died for our sins as our Savior, but because of what He is doing in the present as our High Priest, and what He *will* do in the future, because of His promises and His character.

I Timothy 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment

of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope.

Jesus Christ is our hope. I don't know how it can be made any plainer than that. Jesus Christ *is* our hope. He is directly called "our hope" because He is at the foundation of our earnest yearning, our confident expectation, and our patient endurance for salvation. He is both the Source and the Object of these qualities.

Let's chase this out a bit further. We're finding that this is all over the Book. Yes, we can have hope in the Kingdom of God. We can have hope in the resurrection. But far more important is that we have hope in the Being *whomade* the promises.

Ephesians 4:4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in *one hope* of your calling.

What do we label this "one hope" as being? Is it the resurrection of the dead? Is it the hope of eternal life? Is it the establishment of the Kingdom of God? Turn to Ephesians 2. Paul is again speaking to the Gentiles, as he was back there in Colossians.

Ephesians 2:11-12 Wherefore remember that you being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.

What is "the hope"? It's "Christ *in* you." It's hope in the Person. It is not until God comes into the picture that He becomes part of us. Jesus told His disciples just before He died that "the Father and I will come and dwell *in* you." It is not until that occurs that the promises become of any effect, and these promises are ones that only He can fulfill because only He is trustworthy and has the power to do it. So promises, and therefore the hope that we place in them, are only as good as the character and the power to perform them by the one who makes them.

We hear of all these things pertaining to salvation, and understand because God has entered our lives. What we must understand is that the gospel all by itself does not save. God is the agent who saves the person who is *in* Christ *through* the gospel, and therefore the foundation of our hope must be in Him? a person with whom we have a deep and abiding relationship, and is one that continues.

God indeed intends that the hope of resurrection, eternal life in the Kingdom of God, and all that they imply, contained within the gospel, permeate every aspect of our lives, and therefore the resurrection of Christ has far reaching and lasting implications to those who believe. Every aspect of this hope is reality. They aren't our ideas, or other men's ideas as Paul showed regarding reasonable goals. God fully intends that this reality? His reality? impact upon us by providing guidance and motivation toward right goals in life. This hope is one of the major factors that makes us go.

Hebrews 4:13 Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

We deal with a Person, and we must always remember that behind this whole operation is a mighty Being?our Almighty Father and Creator. It is with Him that we *must* interact. Jesus has already been resurrected. We must wait until our time comes, according to God's timetable. It is He who made the promises, and it is *He* who must be pleased. That's what the author of Hebrews is imploring these people with. It is the Word of God with whom we deal. There remains yet much to be done before we are ready.

I will turn just briefly to Philippians 3 because I want you to see how Paul reflected this in his writing to the people in Philippi, of how he expressed himself regarding what I meant by "There remains yet much to be done."

Philippians 3:8 Yea doubtless, and I count all thing but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.

Notice how he is talking about a person, a Being. He suffered the loss of all things because of a Being.

Philippians 3:9 And be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

This can be accomplished only because this Being is living *in* us, living His life in us once again.

Philippians 3:10-14 That I may *know* him, [This is what he wanted, what had yet to be accomplished. *Knowing Him is eternal life.*] and the power of his resurrection, [Paul hadn't been resurrected yet.] and the fellowship of his sufferings, [If Christ went through sufferings, and He is in us, we're going to suffer.] ...being made comformable unto his death; [Going through maybe a death; maybe not, but being prepared for death so that we're conformed to Him.] If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect [or complete, or mature]: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus [that is, to be in the image of Christ]. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of

the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Yet much more must be done before we are prepared, and our faith has to be in the One who preceded us in this until we are conformed to a way that satisfies Him. What Paul is doing here (in this long sentence) is stating his objectives in life, and those objectives, brethren, must also be our objectives, because it is through pursuing them and achieving them that the holiness process is completed, and the image of Christ is formed. Paul wanted the righteousness of God. He wanted to know God personally. He wanted to experience the power of overcoming and to share Christ's sufferings, and to be prepared to die, as was Christ, and attain the resurrection of the dead. In short, he wanted his life to be as much of a parallel of Christ's life as he possibly could.

You know that neither Paul nor Jesus had an easy life. Jesus described this way as "difficult and narrow." Should we expect anything different? I think the reason that some fall away is that this way is not as they expected, and they get discouraged.

Hebrews 6:16-20 For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. [To them that settles the matter.] Wherein God, [in like manner] willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise [you and me] the immutability [the unchangeableness] of his counsel [His teaching], confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation [a strong encouragement] who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which *hope* we have as an *anchor* of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entered into that within the veil: Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

Do you see what he is saying there? *HOPE is our anchor!* It is seen here by the author as something we hold onto, because there is more need for it to come. In other words, as Paul expressed in Philippians 3, we haven't arrived yet at the conclusion of the matter. The perfection of holiness is not yet completed. There is much that remains to be done, and hope is one of those major factors that maintain us steady to the course. Without hope one of our major anchors is gone, and the possibility of us drifting from off the course is increased immeasurably.

In the sense that the word "hope" is used here in Hebrews 6: 17, it is not referring specifically to the hope of resurrection, eternal life, inheritance in the Kingdom of God, but rather to *Jesus Himself*. It says "*even Jesus.*" He *is* our *hope*. It is His character that is at the foundation of the things that we hope for. And because it is impossible for Him to lie, we can have strong encouragement regarding this way of life. Anybody can make promises, but it is because *He* is the Person who has made the promises to the heirs of promise that we can be steadfast, and have stability and security in life.

The word-picture that is here is drawn from a ship being tossed to and fro in the midst of a storm, but it has an anchor-rope that disappears below the waves, and an anchor that is firmly locked upon an unseen but immovable rock that holds it in place so that the ship will not be dashed against the rocks and break up and perish. In this picture *we* are the ship. *Hope* is the rope and the anchor. The *Rock* is Christ.

This world is crashing seemingly in slow motion, but crashing it is. I remember seeing one of the earliest versions of widescreen movies called Cinerama. Probably most of you have never seen a Cinerama movie. There was only one theatre in Pittsburgh that was equipped to show it because it required three projectors, a large curved screen, and the installation of it was very expensive. The first movie was merely a demonstration of Cinerama's capabilities, and it came very close to presenting the image on the screen in three-dimensional qualities without using any glasses.

One demonstration that they showed in that movie was a slow motion filming of the sound waves from a passing jet shattering a window pane. It was almost surreal to see the thread of cracks appear in the glass, and then slowly separate, tumble, crashing into each other, and then falling to the floor in a heap. That is what is happening to the nations and their governments, their religions, and economic and educational systems that make up their cultures. Their weaknesses are appearing. They are internally divided, crashing into one another both internally and externally. They are not producing what they promised the government. Instead they are producing fear and pain, and are doomed to come crashing into uselessness.

That should not happen to our world. "Perfecting" means completing, finishing something already begun. It means "bringing to maturity," and the term can be correctly used either way depending upon the context in which it appears. Paul had an exceedingly abrupt turn-around in his calling in his life?one that seemed one of unending and stressful hardships.

I want to close with Psalm 116: 8-9. I don't know who the author of this Psalm is, but he says:

Psalm 116:8-9 For you have delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living.

This is one of the most personal of all the Psalms of thanksgiving. It's not about Israel. It's about one person's relationship with God. The psalmist is in the midst of an unspecified trial, and is reflecting on his relationship with God, past, present, and future. These verses are actually a conclusion to this thought so far. There are three things that he based his experiences with God on, and these should apply to you and me.

Number one is that there is a sure anticipation of good despite his current problems. Now why? It's because he could look into the past and begin to reckon the future, because when God is brought into the equation it provides assurance as nothing else can. It is God's past that guarantees the future. Now besides our own experiences with God, God has recorded His experiences with others so that we might understand. Remember it says in Romans 15: 4, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through

patience and comfort of the scriptures *might have hope*." He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. With God, as it has been, so it will be. Do you believe that? If you do, you can have hope.

The second thing that is contained here is that because there is expectation of good, there can also be *resolve* to face the problem. Choosing to set one's resolve in the present on the basis of God's past is the second instruction that is contained herein. I think this is really interesting that verse 9 says: "I *will walk* before the Lord." Notice the confidence here. He is *resolved*.

Now elsewhere there are somewhat similar statements, but the preposition is changed. We read of walking *with* God, walking *after* God, as well as walking *before* God. There is very helpful instruction if we meditate on all three of these, because walking *with* God indicates companionship, communion, and fellowship?sharing life together. Walking *after* God implies guidance, direction, and following His example in imitation. Walking *before* God speaks of us always being in His sight, knowing that we are *always* in His presence. When you put all three together, they indicate *His* ever-abiding presence in every situation in life.

The first time that "walk before Me" appears in the Bible is when God said to our spiritual father, Abraham, "Walk before Me and be you perfect." Isn't that what we're all striving for? What is interesting here is that this was not only a command, it is also a promise, because the very sense of that passage in Hebrew is "Walk before Me, and you *will* be perfect." God is assuring Abraham that if he fulfils this command, God will see to it that he would be perfect. God is assuring him that He will create His image in Abraham.

The third thing is that because of these two there is a far-reaching hope. I think the psalmist was looking beyond his own life and the present trouble. He was looking all the way into the Kingdom of God, and so verse 9 is a confident expression of his assurance that he was looking forward to being *with* God.

Ephesians 2 says that God has made us alive by His spirit. Before then, though physically alive, we were in reality spiritually dead, and that is the way with the whole world. It is in the grip of death because of sin, but Jesus Christ is going to present us *alive* into the Father's glory with exceeding joy. We will follow the Lamb wherever He goes. That's the promise. Now with the anticipation of deliverance, because of God's constancy, and a calm and set resolve to do our part, we can have a confident expectation of walking before God in the land of the living.

We need to endure and to go through these pressure-packed times, and it will not get any better in terms of the world around us. We can be sure of a steady decline of its condition, but we must be diligent, to be steadfastly enduring, and doing our part regardless. We cannot allow promises like escaping to a place of safety, or even promises as wonderful as being resurrected to eternal life in the Kingdom of God to deflect us from where our firm hope needs to be. *Our hope* is to be in the Person?holy in character and power?who is the One who makes the promises worthwhile, and with whom we are walking in a humble, submissive, and dependent loving relationship.