

## HOPE---A PRECIOUS GIFT

From the bits and Pieces (#191) series by Elder Ralph Harris

Primitive Baptists have often been criticized, and even ridiculed and insulted, for speaking of their eternal salvation in terms of *hope*. I have actually heard people of other orders say, "If I didn't have anything but a *hope* I would be ashamed of myself." But even the apostle Paul lived "in *hope* of eternal life" (Titus 1:2), and spoke of the saints rejoicing "in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:2 & 12:12). It appears plain to me that when people speak disparagingly or slightly of hope they thus distance themselves from the inspired apostle and say in effect that they are strangers to his experience.

The apostle also tells us that "whatsoever things were written aforetime (*of old*) were written for our learning....that we....might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). What I read in the Old Testament, as well as the New, constitutes the basis for a great part of my hope in Christ. And in fact, Christ *is* my hope (See I Tim. 1:1 & Col. 1:27), and I pity those who disparage *hope*, for in so doing they disparage my Lord.

Paul makes *many* references to hope and in one instance speaks of it as a "good hope through grace" (II Thess. 2:16) and he says that God the father "gave" us that good hope. Of course if *God* gave it, it has to be good (James 1:17).

Because there are some references to our "knowing" certain things, such as that we "have passed from death unto life," that we are "of the truth," that we "have eternal life," etc., (I John 3:14, 3:19 & 5:13), some have thought they must have something more than a hope of eternal life, otherwise they will never "be saved." But Paul also taught that "hope that is *seen* is not hope" (Rom. 8:24). If we were able to *know* that we have eternal life *now* in the same perfect way that we will know we have it in *heaven*, then hope would already be done away and would have no place in Christian experience.

The "*knowing*" of the above scriptures, and others like them, is not a *perfect* knowledge. *Perfect* knowledge is a *continual and unremitting state in which one is positive beyond any possibility of doubt that he is right about a thing and is absolutely incapable of being wrong about the matter*. This kind of knowledge with regard to our eternal salvation is reserved for the *hereafter*. Now we only "know in part" (I Cor. 13:9), and often our "knowing" has reference to "full assurance" (Col. 2:2 & Heb. 6:11) and to "strong consolation" (Heb. 6:18), and many times in our experience we do not have either of these.

Even John the Baptist sometimes had his doubts (Matt. 11:3). We are human just like he was and we will sometimes have at least a degree of doubt too, but if the Lord has

given us a "good hope through grace" it will never entirely leave us (See Heb. 6:11 & I Peter 1:13). Hope is a very precious and wonderful thing, and regardless of what others may say about it, "Hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5). I would never dare to make light of hope, and I fear for those who do. ---Elder Ralph Harris