

The Ability of Belief

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[0 : 00] I hope you will keep your place there in Romans because we will be returning there briefly, but I want you first of all to go to the little epistle of Paul to Titus.

Titus chapter 1. Then I'll have some propositions by way of questions to share with you before we actually engage the message. Titus chapter 1.

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledging of the truth, which is after godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie promised before the world began, but hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me, according to the commandment of God our Savior.

I simply want to pick out a couple of phrases that are mentioned in this brief introduction. Draw your attention to them, ask a couple of questions, and we'll move over to Titus chapter 3.

The apostle refers to the hope of eternal life. And I've pointed out to you a number of times over the years what the biblical meaning of the word hope is.

[1 : 31] It is never hope with a question mark, as we tend to use the term in our vernacular. When we say we hope this will happen, or we hope that will happen, or doesn't happen, it always contains an element of doubt.

We don't know whether or not it will, but such and such is our preference. The Bible never uses the word like that. When it uses the term hope, *elpis* in the Greek, it always speaks of an absolute certainty.

When we talk about our hope in Christ, that doesn't mean we've placed our hope, our trust, our confidence in Christ, and we sure wish that he would come through for us, but we really don't know whether he will or not until the time comes.

That's nonsense. And the Bible never uses the term that way. It is rendered absolute confidence.

When Paul talks about in hope of eternal life, he doesn't mean maybe so, maybe no.

He means there is no question about it. It isn't an iffy proposition. It is an exclamation mark, not a question.

[2 : 52] When he talks in Colossians about Christ being in you, the hope of glory, that means because Christ is in you, that is your absolute ironclad guarantee that there will be ultimate glory.

That's the way he uses it here in Titus. In hope of eternal life, that is, in the absolute confidence of eternal life, which God that cannot lie.

He is the ever-truthful God. This God whom we worship and serve would not know how to go about telling a lie if he wanted to do so. In fact, he couldn't even want to do so.

He is veracity personified. Whatever he tells us is that upon which you can build an ironclad case. So, in hope of eternal life.

And how is this appropriated? Well, right nearby, a couple of pages further back, we are told in no uncertain terms where this eternal life comes from and the basis on which we receive it.

[4 : 00] And I should just like to begin reading, if I may, with verse 4 of Titus chapter 3. But after that, the kindness and love of God, our Savior, appeared, our Savior toward men, appeared, not by...

I'm sorry, where am I here? I skipped a page. I skipped a page. Not by works of righteousness, which we have done.

Verse 5. But according to his mercy, he saved us. This is a past tense proposition. This isn't, you may be saved at some point in the future, provided you measure up.

It isn't anything like that. The salvation of which he is speaking in verse 5 is, not on the basis of works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us.

Past tense. And here is how he did it. By the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which he shed on us abundantly.

[5 : 08] Now, we do not understand exactly how God does that. But those of us who have been recipients of it know that he does. It is an internal process, whereby, upon our belief, upon our reliance of confidence and trust in Jesus Christ as our personal sin bearer, the Spirit of God comes into our life, into our human spirit, and he cleanses and regenerates that human spirit.

So that even though you look the same on the outside, inwardly, you are a completely different person. This is the miracle of divine regeneration.

It is something that only God can accomplish. No church can accomplish it. No baptistry can accomplish it. No confirmation process can accomplish it.

No religious organization, no lodge can accomplish it. It is a work of regeneration or renewing, remaking the individual on the inside, so that you become an entirely new person.

And we are given the basis for it here in verse 7, being justified by his grace. That means being declared righteous on the basis of the unmerited favor of God.

[6 : 50] Consequently, that we should be made heirs according to, and here's our phrase again, according to the hope of eternal life. One of the saddest responses that you can ever hear from someone that can only be exceeded by a negative answer is an answer to the question when you ask them, are you certain of heaven?

Do you know Christ as your Savior? The only worst answer could be no. The second worst answer is, I hope so.

There's not much comfort in that. Not much assurance in that. When you understand the biblical meaning of the word hope, you can say with complete confidence, my trust is in Christ, my hope is in him.

And that doesn't mean a maybe so. It means an absolute so. It is in him. And the basis for it is grace.

And, along with that, along with that internal regeneration, that making the person over anew, which is sometimes characterized as a new birth, or being born again, because that is an apt description of what takes place on the inside.

[8 : 20] If anyone be in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. Gone is the guilt, the despair, the uncertainty, and what has come to stay is the confidence, the assurance of cleansing, and pardon, and forgiveness, and it is all on the basis of what somebody else did.

Not what you did. It is on the basis of what Jesus Christ did. And your trust is in him. You admit you can't do it.

You never will be able to do it. You cannot clean yourself up so as to become acceptable to God. You just throw yourself on the mercy of God that he shed abroad upon humanity when he put Christ on that cross.

That makes you a whole new being. Nothing will ever be the same. Now, in the last couple of messages, we addressed the issue about unbelievers and their inability.

And we saw in Romans chapter 8, they that are in the flesh cannot please God. God. The flesh is forever tainted.

[9 : 47] God wants nothing to do with it, and God will accept nothing from it. They that are in the flesh cannot please God. They don't have the ability to do so.

And I chided you somewhat, as believers are sometimes needing to be chided, in that we can have unreasonable expectations of non-Christian people whereby we expect them to behave Christianly. We expect them to have our morals and our standards and our values. And they don't. And they can't. They are working with the only thing they've got, which is pitifully inadequate.

It's all they can do. They are just being what they are. This does not mean that they are not accountable. But it does mean that they are not able to be anything other than what they are.

They need a radical change in their behavior. But behavioral change is not brought about by reformation. It is brought about by regeneration.

[10 : 53] And that brings us back to the subject of the rebirth. So, behavior is governed by belief.

If you believe as you ought to believe, it will influence your behavior. And your behavior will be that which pleases God. This is called being in the spirit.

This means operating out of a spiritual perspective as opposed to a fleshly perspective. Here's the rub.

When one becomes a believer in Jesus Christ, he is not only radically regenerated, placed into union with Christ, has their destiny changed from hell to heaven, but they are also imbued with a new ability that they did not have before.

And we've talked about the inability of unbelief. They've been removed from that sphere. Now brought into a new sphere with a new ability, a new capacity, a new dynamic, because as a believer, you are in possession of divine operating assets, spiritual truths and values that unregenerate people don't know anything about.

[12 : 31] you have them. You possess them to the same extent that the most godly, mature believer possesses them.

You are not shortchanged in any wise. You have everything you need with which to live the Christian life. And no other believer, no matter how long they have been functioning and living as a believer, has more than you.

They have more experiences and they've had more opportunities to utilize it, but they have no more spiritual equipment with which to operate than you do. Even as a new Christian.

Because along with regeneration comes a divine empowerment and ability to be pleasing to God for the first time in your life.

It is having moved out of the sphere of the flesh into the sphere of the spirit and now we can live a life that is pleasing and acceptable to God.

[13 : 41] So, why don't we? why don't we?

Why is the church so impotent, so uninfluential while we have all of these divine operating assets, all of this potential power at our disposal, why isn't the world sitting up and taking notice more?

I suspect this is something that every pastor struggles with. My propositions are this. Follow these if you will and we'll go to our text.

Unbelievers are unable to please God as is clearly stated in Romans 8. They are in the flesh. They may do many things that please men but nothing that pleases God.

This is because they are in the flesh, dominated by the flesh, ruled over by their flesh. They are very capable of pleasing themselves and in the main, this is what they do.

[15 : 07] However, believers are able to please God so why don't we? Or why don't we please God more often than we do?

And how precisely can we know whether we are pleasing to God or not? Well, I think all of us would agree here at Grace Bible Church that we please God when we order our lives after the dictates of Scripture.

and of course this is not limited to something like the Ten Commandments although that's pretty obvious and good summation, pretty good starting place.

So, why don't all believers live lives that are pleasing to God on a consistent basis? and this is where we left off in our last discussion and the Apostle Paul already dealt with this in Romans chapter 6 and 7 and we have already considered the introductory remarks from chapter 8 so I want to take you back to the portion that Gary read for us this morning from Romans chapter 6 and see if we can open up a few ideas of thought.

Hopefully, a workable conclusion. Romans chapter 6 comes hard on the heels of the glorious truth of having been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

[16 : 44] This is pretty much the summation of chapter 5 and he's already worked through the concept of the unregenerate being alienated from God in chapter 3 he's dealing with the wonderful reality of Christ's death, burial and resurrection and how it is applied to us and the fact that the righteousness of God is revealed in the death of Christ in chapter 4 he goes back and brings forth the example of Abraham demonstrating that justification by faith was not new as Paul was preaching it this wasn't some new strange doctrine our father Abraham who lived 2,000 years ago believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness and that was justification by faith and we could go even back further to Noah who found grace in the eyes of the Lord and he was justified by faith so there's nothing new about it Paul isn't preaching some strange new doctrine and by the way it ought to be noted that justification by faith kind of fell into disuse for centuries until an

Augustinian monk resurrected it his name was Martin Luther and the teaching of justification by faith changed the whole of the world and it hasn't been the same since sometimes I think we need

another reformation because much of the world has lost sight of justification by faith even today and I have bookshelves lined with books that relate to this wonderful subject of justification by faith and I suspect that one of the reasons I think one of the reasons why more people are not taken by justification by faith are not struck by that captivated by it intrigued by it is because they haven't seen the results of it work all that well in the lives of those who claim to have it could that be could that be that too many of us who name the name of Christ are not behaving Christianly to the extent that we're all that noticed and why if that is the case why is it well I can only suggest one answer and I'm confident that I'm on safe ground in doing so and that is too many times believers behave like unbelievers because you see when you undergo this miraculous transformation of regeneration God does not overhaul your will I really want you to understand that that's the key to the whole thing each of us as a human being created in the image and likeness of God are endowed with a volition a will the power to choose and if you are an unbeliever you are locked in to the flesh you have no power other than to choose that which is wrong when it comes to pleasing

God this does not mean you cannot exercise your will and refrain from doing this deed as opposed to that deed of course you can't and it is on that basis that we hold people accountable it's on that basis that we charge people with murder because they don't have to kill somebody they choose to kill somebody they made a choice they could have chosen not to kill so they have that ability I am not saying that they cannot do anything right I'm saying they cannot do anything that pleases God once you become a believer the hold is broken will is not changed now this is remarkable because if it were not so if it were not so if

God commandeered the will what would that mean that would mean that we all behave Christianly all the time because there isn't anything else we can do we're locked into that the same way that unbelievers are locked in to the flesh but that's not the way it works at least to the extent of my ability to understand the human will which I would be the first to admit is definitely lacking I certainly don't have the handle on this subject that I would like but I know we are willful creatures and I know that even though we have received Christ as our Savior and have been made a new creation by him our volition remains intact we can still exercise our will to do those things that we ought not to do and when we do we displease

[22 : 43] God we injure ourselves or our testimony sometimes we disappoint somebody else or hurt somebody else through our behavior the key is given here in Romans 6 and Paul the apostle struggles with this and he points out in chapter 7 how this thing worked out in his own life as an apostle and I don't know about you but I tend to think that boy if there's anybody that if there's anybody that has this thing called life and the will and the flesh and all of it all together it's this guy Paul the apostle he and do you know what Paul is saying no I don't hey don't look to me as being the paragon of human virtue we've only got one of those and we put him on a cross so

Paul was flawed just like we are flawed and he talks about this and in Romans chapter six he says in verse six look at this because this is such an important theological concept it is just crucial knowing this that our old man is crucified with him that is with Christ this this this means being in union with Christ God counts you as having died on that cross with Jesus when he died you were there too and your old man your old nature was crucified with him put to death well if he was put to death then he doesn't exist anymore right then we no longer have the capacity with which to sin right something is wrong there because this breaks down we all know better than that that the body of sin might be destroyed and understanding that is critical as well

I have before me my 26 translation new testament that I use extensively and I want to give you some other renderings because the tendency is to think that if this body of sin this old man is crucified with him then he is dead and out of business and I don't have to be concerned about that anymore because that's what you use to sin with but if it's dead then you can't sin anymore or can you and there are some people bless their heart I don't agree with them I think they are suffering from delusion sin but they think they have arrived at a point in their Christian life where their old sinful nature is eradicated and they no longer have the capacity the ability to sin

I am not even close to that but this is one of the verses upon which they base that idea and some would even go so far as to say you can't even know or have any security as a Christian if you have not been sanctified and sanctification is called the second blessing the first blessing is salvation the second blessing is sanctification and you get that through earnest prayer and if you pray and agonize long enough and plead to God long enough then you will be zapped with the second

blessing and you enter the sphere of sinless perfection so that you never sin anymore and as I've said I think these people are well intentioned I think their heart and their motive may be in the right place but they are just sincerely disillusioned and delusioned the text and some of the alternate renderings to verse six is that the body of sin might be destroyed which is the most unfortunate translation as it occurs in the

King James Rhames version which is an official translation of the Roman Catholic Vulgate and it renders it in order that the sinful body might be made powerless that's much closer to the reality and the truth of it 20th century New Testament says in order that the body the stronghold of sin might be rendered powerless and the amplified says in order that our body which is the instrument of sin might be made ineffective and inactive for evil all of those convey the truth of the matter which is far removed from the old nature being dead and gone and no longer able to influence at all because we know it isn't people who love and know Jesus

[28 : 32] Christ in a very real way are capable of doing some pretty ugly things you know that Christians can be downright nasty well why is that it's because you still have that capacity you still have that ability the flesh is still with us the flesh occupies these bodies our bodies are not yet redeemed that's also the basis for our having physical death and Romans 8 makes that very clear how the whole creation groans and travails in pain until now waiting for the adoption to wit the redemption of our bodies and when our bodies are redeemed then our bodies are glorified and guess what happens then then the old sin nature is gone a glorified body no longer has the ability to sin in case you did not recognize it standing here before you is not a glorified body neither is yours so we still struggle with this thing called the flesh the reason we struggle with the flesh is because we still have a will and the will is still subject to temptation the will is capable of caving in the will is also capable of standing strong in other words

God saved you regenerated you left you as a new creature in Christ but he also left you so that you are still in charge think of that you are still in charge your will is still in place you still have the power of choice and when you are equipped with biblical information as to right and wrong you have the power of decision it is yours and you are accountable for the decision that you make let's read on here in Romans 6 that the body of sin might be I think the best way that this was illustrated at least that communicated with me is if you think in terms of the body of sin the flesh as being like like gravity pretty apt illustration because gravity is always with us unless you go out into outer space where it's weightless but we have to contend with gravity and it's pretty powerful and if you don't think it's powerful just try jumping off a building and define gravity and you will discover that you haven't broken the law of gravity at all it broke you but you didn't break it however if you can devise some kind of power that is superior to that of gravity so that you can overcome it it's almost as if gravity doesn't even exist and they call that the science of aerodynamics you get an airplane and you build that thing in such a way that it will slice through the air and you power it with engines jet engines or whatever kind of engines are required and it doesn't do away with the law of gravity at all it's still very much in play it's just that you now have the ability with this aircraft to overcome the law of gravity so that you can go where you want to go and you won't just fall out of the sky as the law of gravity demands you do because the thrust of those engines and those propellers if that's what you have are such that it renders the law of gravity almost as if it doesn't exist but while you're up there don't shut off those engines that's the way we are with the flesh and the old nature

God has given us the ability to function and operate in such a way that we overcome that sin nature that wants to displease God we have the power to do that and almost immediately there is some well-meaning Christian that says uh-uh boy I wish that were true of me but it isn't true of me because I'm weak I don't have that ability I know other Christians that do and boy I wish I could be like them but I can't do that oh yes you can just put you right back where you belong on the hook you can no matter how much you say you can't no matter how many obstacles you think are formidable and preventing you from doing that none of them will fly as far as

God is concerned because he has gifted every believer with the divine operating assets that are needed to be what God wants them to be what do you think that means I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me what do everyone everything that we need that pertains to life and godliness none of us is ill equipped we may not make very good use of what he has equipped us with but that isn't

God's fault God is saying hey Marv I've given you everything you need to operate in a Christian way and in a way that pleases me and if you choose not to use it that's your fault you're exercising your

own will and the flesh the flesh still wants to please itself whether it is dwelling in a Christian or in a non Christian the flesh wants to call the shots I want what I want that's our human nature that has not changed that has not changed and if it were changed then we would all just automatically be paragons of Christian virtue and some people think that's what we're supposed to be but they don't understand this stuff about the flesh they have unrealistic expectations as to what a Christian is lots of people in the world out there think if you're a

[36 : 21] Christian if you're a Christian that means wow you're a Christian oh wow that means you never say a wrong thing you never do a wrong thing you probably pray six hours a day you give half your money to charity blah blah blah they just have all kinds of unrealistic ideas as to what a Christian is and they don't know that the only thing that distinguishes them from you is the fact that you have undergone an internal regeneration process that only God can accomplish and while you have a whole new potential for living a life completely different from what you've ever lived before it is only potential it isn't automatic it isn't automatic it is potential it needs to be utilized needs to be implemented it needs to be drawn upon it's just like having a sum of money deposited in the bank to your account and all you have to do is write checks on it to withdraw there's just one problem you don't know it's there so you don't get the benefit from it part of what we are supposed to be all about as a church is to edify educate build up people inform them as to who they are and what they are in Christ and it's called growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ and part of it involves talking about the very things we're talking about now because even though you are a Christian and even though you are a new creature in Christ you still have areas of weakness don't you that really lay you low that cause you real concern that maybe makes you even wonder sometimes whether you really are a Christian because if I were really a Christian would I think those thoughts would I do those things would I covet those things I'm probably just kidding myself I'm probably not truly a Christian at all I've probably just had an emotional experience or whatever and hey I've been there I've lived that I've gone through that as a young believer and it's agonizing to not have any assurance and the reason the reasons that so many

Christians lack assurance of their salvation is because they know their behavior isn't what it ought to be so they ask themselves maybe the capacity for the behavior that I'm expecting isn't even there because I'm not truly a believer we need to understand this stuff about the flesh because it will immobilize you it will defeat you and yet this need not be the case because what God has provided through Jesus Christ allows you to supersede the law of gravity spiritually fly above all that I don't know about you but I want that more than anything else and that's what this text is all about in Romans 6 how that is realized this isn't pie in the sky by and by this is gut level reality for living the Christian life that is victorious and joyous and God honoring and if you engage in this kind of lifestyle based on these doctrinal truths you are traveling first class this is the only way to go and God has provided it for every one of us without exception and if we may I should like to explore this further next week because this is just part one but I trust you have been given some ammunition some things to think about and we will pick this up next week may we pray please thank you father that nothing about your gift to us leaves us lacking in potential and in ability even though we are often lacking in the will and the fortitude to do the right thing the flesh is still with us and we recognize that but how we rejoice that it need not gain the ascendancy you have provided us with the wherewithal to rise above that flesh and to live a life that is joyous and victorious in Christ thank you so much this is not mere theory but it's a reality and will be discovered by everyone who applies it we bless you for your provision in Christ's wonderful name amen