

Faith Waiting for the Hope of Righteousness

Text: Galatians 5:5-6

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Galatians 5:5-6 reads, “For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.” These verses bring us to the heart of the Christian religion: justification by faith alone, and the relationship of faith to hope and love.

The epistle to the Galatians deals with a particular apostasy. A number of churches in Galatia, in modern-day Turkey, were turning away from the gospel of grace. False teachers promoted salvation by works, insisting that circumcision and the keeping of the whole law were necessary. Paul opposes this with a striking affirmation: righteousness is by faith, not by works. This righteousness is received through faith, it produces hope, and it works by love. It is a life of waiting and working by faith.

Faith and Righteousness

Verse 5 speaks of “the hope of righteousness.” In Scripture, righteousness can be used in two key senses. First, there is *infused* righteousness: the righteousness of sanctification, whereby God’s Spirit works righteousness in our hearts. Infusion is closely related to *pouring*. Righteousness in this sense is put inside us by an inward transformation, and out of this, we work righteousness in our lives. Then second, there is *imputed* righteousness, which is the righteousness of justification. This righteousness is the perfect obedience of Christ in His life on earth, legally reckoned to our account.

The righteousness of justification is not within us but *outside* us: in Jesus Christ. God imputes it to believers, as a bank transfer places funds from one account into another. This is the righteousness Paul speaks of in our text – righteousness by faith, not by law, not by works.

This is reinforced by the immediate context. Verse 4 says, “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are *justified by* the law; ye are fallen from grace.” Then comes our verse: “For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.” This is a contrast between the false doctrine of justification by works and the true doctrine of justification by faith.

Such a righteousness is necessary to stand before God. The blazing holiness of God on the last day will consume all who are not perfectly righteous. The righteousness of man is as filthy rags (Isa. 64:6). The perfect obedience of Christ alone can cover our sin and satisfy divine justice. As Romans 5:18-19 teaches, “by the obedience of one shall many be made [or constituted] righteous.”

Faith, then, *sees* this righteousness. It sees it, because faith is spiritual sight. Faith recognises that there is no righteousness in ourselves. Faith sees the spotless righteousness of Christ and understands: this is what I need. This is the righteousness that answers God's law and wrath. Faith not only sees but *receives* this righteousness. It sees the promise of God that all who believe shall be justified. Faith trusts the God who made that promise and rests upon it. Faith lays hold of Christ and His obedience. Faith believes and receives the imputed righteousness of Christ.

This was the problem in Galatia. They began to lose the clear vision of faith. They were no longer certain of the central gospel truths. “Maybe I’m not as bad as Romans 3 says... Maybe my good works count for more than I thought... Maybe I need to add something of my own.” Trust in Christ is diluted, in the mind of one who thinks these things. Instead of looking outside of self to Christ, the heart turns *inward*. But once you *add* to Christ, you *lose* Christ. This is the argument of Lord’s Day 11 of the *Heidelberg Catechism*: “Do such believe in Jesus who seek their salvation elsewhere? They do not.” Either Jesus is a complete Saviour, or He is no Saviour at all.

The result of trusting in works is apostasy. Paul says, “Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8). The curse falls not only on the preachers of a false gospel, but on *those who believe it*. The gospel of grace is *exclusive*.

Faith and Hope

Not only does faith receive righteousness; it also produces hope. Paul says, “We through the Spirit wait for the *hope* of righteousness by faith.” Faith and hope differ in their direction and content. Faith believes everything God has revealed: past, present, and future. Hope, however, only concerns the future, and only future good. You don’t hope for things that happened yesterday. Faith believes the great apostasy will come before Christ’s return (II Thess. 2:3); but we don’t *hope* for apostasy. We hope for Christ’s return.

Faith believes it; hope *longs* for it. Hope is the *forward-looking* grace. Faith is the eye that sees; hope is the neck that stretches out in longing. Faith sees, and hope anticipates. Faith accepts the truth; hope rejoices in the coming good. Hope is *born of faith*.

Faith embraces the resurrection of the body, the renewal of all things, the new heavens and new earth. Hope *looks forward* to those things. Hope is more emotional, more desirous. Faith says: "This is true." Hope says: "I *long for* this to be revealed."

But our verse does not merely speak of hope generally. It speaks of "the hope of righteousness." We already have this righteousness by faith. But hope "waits" for the *public declaration* of it at the last day. Now we are justified privately. Our conscience knows it. The church hears the gospel and believes it. But on the last day, God Himself will *declare* it *before the world*. The believer will be vindicated before all his enemies, clothed in the righteousness of Christ. This is what we hope for. We hope for the manifestation of the sons of God.

The Galatians had lost this hope. They no longer waited. They became impatient. Why? Because justification by faith is not visible. You cannot "see" Christ's righteousness. You cannot touch it or hang it in your wardrobe. But circumcision you *can* see. Good works you can "tally."

So man turns from the invisible to the visible. He turns from what *God* has done to what *he himself* has done. He stops waiting. But the believer, Paul says, "through the Spirit waits." He waits for what cannot now be seen, because faith has convinced him of its reality.

This is the tragedy of every false gospel. It robs men of hope. It replaces confidence with doubt. "How do I know my righteousness is enough?" That question haunts the conscience. So the Middle Ages were filled with fear of judgment. Men feared the last day. They prayed to Mary. They paid for Masses. They relied on relics. Why? Because they had no hope.

Faith brings hope. Justification by faith brings the hope of righteousness. Without faith, there is no true hope. Only dread.

Faith and Love

Now we turn to the third of these Christian virtues. Paul says in verse 6: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love."

Faith works by love. Just as faith begets hope, faith begets love. Faith receives the love of God in Christ, and then love is kindled in the soul. Love adores the God whom faith sees. Love worships the Saviour whom faith embraces.

And love then strengthens faith: I love God, so I *trust Him more*. I want to *know Him more*. Love motivates the soul to deeper confidence. Faith and love, like faith and hope, are inseparably connected. Love fuels faith.

Faith is not alone. Though it alone justifies, it never exists alone. It brings forth love and hope. Love for God, and love for the neighbour. Love serves. Love obeys. Love gives.

The Roman Church interprets Galatians 5:6 as justification by faith and love. Faith justifies, they say, because it “works by” love. But this is a confusion. Paul is not saying that faith justifies *because of* love. He is saying that true justifying faith *produces* love. Faith alone justifies. But that justifying faith is not dead. It *works*.

Rome teaches an amalgam. Faith, love, works, the merits of saints, the righteousness of Mary, all stirred together into a righteousness that will satisfy God. But Paul says: “faith *alone*.” Yet not a bare, dead faith. A *living, working, loving* faith.

So the Galatians again are reproved. They lacked love. They lacked love for the truth, and love for one another. Paul warns: “If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another” (v. 15).

When love dies, truth is abandoned. II Thessalonians 2:10 says they “received not the love of the truth,” and so believed a lie. Love for God and for His Word is the only safeguard.

And so Paul lays before us the nature of true religion. Faith sees Christ. Hope waits for His appearing. Love serves Him and the brethren. Faith receives Christ’s righteousness. Hope longs for the last day. Love worships, gives, and obeys. “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6)

Our Father in Heaven, help us to understand the Scriptures because we are not only of the earth, earthy, but also fleshly and carnal, according to the old man. Give us clear sight of the truth that we need. Enlarge our hearts so that faith, hope, and love are active – never cold or indifferent – but alive by Thy Spirit, to the glory of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.