

FROM THE INHERITANCE OF OUR FATHERS

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HOPE



William S. Plumer

WILLIAM SWAN PLUMER

William Swan Plumer (1802–1880) was a Southern Presbyterian pastor and theologian well-known for his doctrinal and experiential writings. God used the preaching and counsel of a faithful pastor to convict the teenaged Plumer of his sins and bring him to submit to Jesus Christ as his only righteousness. Plumer grew spiritually through reading the Bible and solid Christian literature such as John Flavel's *Fountain of Life*.

He soon sensed a call into pastoral ministry, completing his education at Washington College, and then Princeton Seminary under Archibald Alexander and Samuel Miller (1826). He served as an evangelist and church planter (1827–1831), and as a pastor of Presbyterian churches in Petersburg, Virginia (1831–1834), Richmond, Virginia (1834–1847), and Baltimore, Maryland (1847–1854).

From 1854 to 1862 he served as a theological professor at Western Theological Seminary, Allegheny, Pennsylvania, while also serving as a pastor in the Allegheny church. His pacifism led to the loss of these positions in the Civil War, during which he served briefly in other pastoral posts in Pennsylvania. For the last fourteen years of his life (1867–1880) he was professor of theology at Columbia Theological Seminary, South Carolina.

Plumer was a plain-speaking and powerful preacher even into his senior years. He was also a prolific author, writing about thirty books and a hundred pamphlets, including devotional material, doctrinal treatises, and biblical commentaries. We might say that Plumer was America's J. C. Ryle, a simple yet profound proclaimer of God's sovereign grace in Christ, faithful to call sinners to Christ and to challenge Christians to practical holiness.

Hope

"We rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

—ROMANS 5:2

With some it is common to speak slightly of hope. Surely such do not draw their views from the Word of God, nor from the experience of His people. These well agree in giving it a high place among the Christian graces, and in declaring its excellence and usefulness. We are saved by hope. We are rescued from the influences of despair, we are aroused and animated in our whole course, and are finally made victorious by the power of hope. This is one of the great bands which holds together the church of God. As "there is one body and one Spirit...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and

Father of all," so also "ye are called in one hope of your calling" (Eph. 4:4).

Hope consists of desire and expectation. It is the opposite of fear, which is composed of aversion and expectation. Richard Baxter says, "Hope is nothing but a desirous expectation." It is also the opposite of despair, which though it desires, does not expect. When we regard anything as impossible, we cannot hope for it although we may greatly wish for it. As to the general nature of hope there is no dispute.

The hope of the Christian is a longing expectation of all good things both for this and the next world. It embraces all the mercy, truth, love, and faithfulness promised in Scripture. It lays hold of the perfections and government of God as the sure foundation of its expectations. It has special reference to the persons, offices, and exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Scripture the word not only means

the sentiment already described, but sometimes it is used for the thing hoped for. Thus Paul speaks to the Colossians of "the hope which is laid up for" them in heaven, where he plainly designates the good things hoped for. The hope of a Christian relates to the whole of what is promised in God's Word. There grace is promised. And on every child of God comes the blessing: "Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy" (Ps. 33:18). In like manner hope finds nourishment in all the divine perfections. It looks for them to be continually exercised for its good. Thus it expects bread and water, raiment and shelter, guidance and protection during life, with a blessed victory in death. It goes further. Each Christian can say as Paul, "I have hope towards God...that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust" (Acts 24:15). Yea, more, he

is always “looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). Yea, more, the souls of believers are sustained “in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Titus 1:2).

The living agent, who is at once the author and object of pious hope, is God Himself. Accordingly pious men cry out, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God” (Ps. 42:11). One of the dearest names by which God is known to His people is that of “The hope of Israel, the saviour thereof in time of trouble” (Jer. 14:8). To the end of time “the LORD will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel” (Joel 3:16). There is none like Him. He is the God of hope.

All genuine Christian hope is a fruit

of the mercy of God to sinners. It comes from heaven, and not from men. Vain, carnal hopes spring up spontaneously in the human soul. But truly pious hopes have a heavenly origin. Therefore when Paul would have the Romans abound in this grace, he prayed, "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 15:13). God "hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace" (2 Thess. 2:16). This is the first difference between a true and a false hope in religion. The former is above; the latter is from beneath. One is God-inspired; the other has Satan for its author.

The second mark of true religious hope is that it is no vain persuasion, no idle dream, but a sure expectation. It rests upon an immovable foundation, God's unchanging Word and oath and covenant. "We through the Spirit wait for the

hope of righteousness by faith" (Gal. 5:5). We shall not be disappointed. This "hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil" (Heb. 6:19). His Word is pledged in every form. "I will be a God to thee"; I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5); "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19); "Them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him" (1 Thess. 4:14). These are but samples of His Word.

To these He has added His oath: "So have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee" (Isa. 54:9, 10). Here we have this covenant as well as His oath. Indeed it is a covenant established upon promises and oaths.

Elsewhere God says, "I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers...which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them" (Jer. 31:31-32). Behold here are the sure mercies of David. God bids us rest our all on Him, and take His veracity for the basis of all our hopes. The wicked have no such foundation for their delusive expectations. Their hopes are all like a dream when one awaketh. They vanish before the realities of life, before any right test of truth. But the hope of the righteous endureth. It is the anchor, the sheet-anchor. It holds all steady, and enables the soul to outride the storms of sorrow which God permits to beat upon it. Behold here the excellent use of Scripture. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the

scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). Therefore a favorite form of prayer is that of pleading the promises: "Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope" (Ps. 119:49). This blessed hope, more than most things, makes Christians helpers of each other's faith and joy. "They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy word" (Ps. 119:74).

A third difference between a true and false hope is that the former is the fruit of the mediation of Christ, and has special regard to Him as a Redeemer; while the latter quite neglects His finished work. Many hope for impunity, and yet despise gospel grace. But a truly good hope always has a chief reliance upon Christ. Therefore Paul says of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He "is our hope" (1 Tim. 1:1). If you ever have a genuine "hope of glory," it must spring from "Christ in you" (Col. 1:27). Legal hope is just the opposite of

evangelical. The former springs from supposed personal obedience to the law; the latter relies upon Christ's obedience unto death. These two cannot agree. You must look to Christ exclusively, or not at all. If this be so, some may ask, "What is the difference between faith and hope?" To this question the answer is that though they are distinct, yet they are cognate exercises of the mind. Haldane says, "By faith we believe the promises made to us by God; by hope we expect to receive the good things which God has promised; so that faith hath properly for its object the promise, and hope hath for its object the things promised and the execution of the promise. Faith regards its object as present, but hope regards it as future. Faith precedes hope, and is its foundation. We hope for eternal life, because we believe the promises which God has made respecting it; and if we believe these promises, we must expect their effect."

Leighton says, "The difference of these two graces, *faith* and *hope*, is so small, that the one is often taken for the other in Scripture; it is but a different aspect of the same confidence, *faith* apprehending the infallible truth of those divine promises of which *hope* doth assuredly expect the accomplishment, and that is their truth; so that this immediately results from the other. This is the anchor fixed within the veil which keeps the soul firm against all the tossings on these swelling seas, and the winds and tempests that arise upon them. The firmest thing in this inferior world is a believing soul."

But like faith, hope admits of degrees, varying from a faint expectation, (Ps. 42:5), to a "full assurance" (Heb. 6:11). Like faith, it always keeps Christ in view. Like faith, also, it will last until death, and then give place to enjoyment; "for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" (Rom. 8:24). Let us therefore "hold fast the

confidence, and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end" (Heb. 3:6). "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:13).

A fourth difference between a true and false hope in religion is that the former is operative, and produces powerful, happy effects, while the latter is inoperative and dead. The hope of the Christian is expressly said to be "lively" (1 Peter 1:3). It has life in itself, and communicates animation to the soul. It arouses, awakens, and gives vigor to the mind. It produces the grandest effects, making the people of God triumphant over all their foes and fears, and bearing them up when all appearances are discouraging. But a dead hope is without any abiding effect. It does no good in the day of trial.

A fifth difference between a true and a false hope is that the former leads to

holiness, while the latter begets carelessness. Of genuine Christian hope it is said, that "every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he [Christ] is pure" (1 John 3:3). The stronger it is, the greater is the soul's aversion to evil. But the hope of the deluded makes him reckless. To him sin is a trifle, and holiness a thing of naught. This indeed is the great difference between all genuine and all spurious hopes. If any of our religious affections or mental exercises do not tend to holiness, we may surely know that they are not of God.

A sixth difference is that a spurious hope gives no support when we most need help; but a genuine hope bears up our souls above all our foes. Leighton says, "Hope is the great stock of believers. It is that which upholds them under all the faintings and sorrows of their mind in this life, and in their going 'through the valley of the shadow of death.' It is

the 'helmet of their salvation,' which, while they are looking over to eternity, beyond this present time, covers and keeps men head-safe amid all the darts that fly around them."

According to God's Word, genuine Christian hope has many and important uses. It does great things for the soul.

1. It makes us patient in tribulation.

"If we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it" (Rom. 8:25). Accordingly Paul alike commends in the Thessalonians the "work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 1:3). To this happy effect of this grace Jeremiah refers when he says, "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. He sitteth alone and

keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him. He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope" (Lam. 3:26–29). All Scripture and all experience show, that through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom of God. We can purchase no exemption. Patience must have her perfect work. Patience is fed by hope. It is thus we are supported by trials. What but this can give strength in the day of trouble? The church of God has often waded through rivers of blood; she has often been bound in affliction and iron; the fiercest onsets ever made upon her have often threatened something still worse; yet hope has begotten patience, a patience that could not be worn out. Despondency is unquiet, dissatisfied, and full of pain; but hope cries, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I [Christ]

will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

2. Hope also gives courage in facing danger, and fortitude in enduring pain. “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). Unless we have “for an helmet, the hope of salvation” (1 Thess. 5:8), we shall but play the coward in the day of battle. Here is the great difference between the real child of God and the self-deceiver. The former has an expectation of future glory which makes present ignominy to be esteemed as nothing. The latter has perhaps some vague hope of future good, but he has never relinquished his hold of present good. So when he finds he must let go either the present or the

future, he always cleaves to the present, vainly purposing hereafter to seize upon the things to come. Every man who knows any thing at all of his own heart, is painfully convinced of his sad timidity and wicked shame as to all that is good, until God by His grace gives him the hope of the gospel. Indeed, such is the fearful sway of shame over many minds, that some persons have seemed to think that almost the only hindrance to men's salvation. Our blessed Savior was not beating the air nor giving a vain warning when He said, "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38). You will never be able to overcome

your natural shame of religion but by a “good hope through grace” (2 Thess. 2:16).

3. The great animating principle in labor is hope. This encourages the mariner, the husbandman, and every industrial class. This is no less the animating principle in labors for the spread of gospel, the good of men, and the glory of God. Thus Paul argued: “It is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope” (1 Cor. 9:9–10). What would the apostles have effected but for a hope that entered within

the veil? They had regard to the recompense of the reward in a future life. God never puts and keeps His people at work for Him without adequate motives, without influences suited to their nature as men.

4. Christian hope is the great nourisher of Christian joy. We “rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:2). Our present circumstances have in them much to make us sad and desponding. But hope looks to the future, when the glory of God shall be revealed in us. So steadfastly does hope take hold on what is future, that both Haldane and Hodge propose to read the first clause of Romans 8:24, “We are saved by hope”; meaning thereby that we are saved in prospect, in expectation. No Christian in this life is in full possession of

all the blessings of salvation. He has indeed foretastes, earnestings, pledges of good things to come, but not the very things themselves. Yet his title to eternal life is good, is perfect. Nothing could be more so. In due time deliverance shall come in all its fulness. As "rejoicing in hope" is a duty (Rom. 12:12), so it is a great privilege. Charnock says, "Desired happiness affects the soul; much more expected happiness. Joy is the natural issue of a well-grounded hope. A tottering expectation will engender but a tottering delight; such a delight will madmen have, which is rather to be pitied than desired. But if an imaginary hope can affect the heart with some real joy, much more a hope settled upon a sure bottom, and raised upon a good foundation; there may be joy in a title as well as in possession."

5. It is Christian hope that makes death easy and comfortable. God's people know that their flesh shall rest in hope. They know who it is that has said, "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead" (Isa. 26:19). Job disarmed death of all his terrors by being able to lay hold on this very truth. So did Paul also, and so have thousands of the humble people of God.

In short, we may well unite with Owen in saying that "hope is a glorious grace, whereunto blessed effects are ascribed in the Scripture, and an effectual operation unto the supportment and consolation of believers. By it we are purified, sanctified, and saved.... Where Christ evidenceth His presence with us, He gives us an

infallible hope of glory; He gives us an assured pledge of it, and works our souls into an expectation of it. Hope in general is but an uncertain expectation of a future good which we desire. But as it is a gospel of grace, all uncertainty is removed from it which would hinder us of the advantage intended in it. It is an earnest expectation proceeding from faith, trust, and confidence, accompanied with longing desires of enjoyment.... The height of the actings of all grace issues in a well-grounded hope; nor can it rise any higher" (Rom. 5:4–5).

So that if what has been said be true, there is no force whatever in the infidel objection respecting the want of certainty as to external things. They are as certain as the existence and perfections of God—as certain as eternal truth and justice can make them. If our hope is weak, it is yet sure. What there is of it will never be disappointed. Nay, its largest expectations

will be infinitely more than realized. God will do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. Our hope is uncertain in no other sense than that it lays but feeble hold of things which it ought to seize with the utmost tenacity. Therefore to say that the Christian's hope is full of uncertainty is an untruth, unless men simply mean to say that the virtuous principle, even in good men, is weak. This all good men confess and bewail.

Nor do wicked angels and men offer us any thing worth our attention when they invite us to forego spiritual for carnal hopes, to give up the next world and lay fast hold of this. For what is this mortal life without the hope of the gospel? Is anything more uncertain? What is more delusive than worldly hopes? The conqueror of yesterday is the prisoner of today; the rich man of today is the beggar of tomorrow. Pleasures bring pains; honors provoke envy; and what

is more malicious or mischievous than that? Riches vex us while we have them, and may leave us any moment. He who forsakes heavenly for earthly hopes prefers the chaff to the wheat; he snuffs the wind, and delivers himself over to vanity.

Christians should therefore labor to be rid of all sinful despondency. True, our frames change, but God's nature and counsels are immutable. Our salvation is made sure, not by our strength, but by the strength of God; not by our goodness, but by the merits of the Redeemer; not by our wisdom, but by the wisdom of God. God sometimes withdraws, that we may learn our utter helplessness.

John Newton says, "If I speak my own experience, I find that to keep my eye simply upon Christ as my *peace* and my *life*, is by far the hardest part of my calling. Through mercy He enables me to avoid what is wrong in the sight of men; but it seems easier to deny self in a thousand

instances of outward conduct than in its ceaseless endeavors to act as a principle of righteousness and power." Yet to yield in this point is ultimately to sink into despondency. All good and lively and enduring hope springs from the cross alone. "Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption" (Ps. 130:7).

And how rich an inheritance have all the saints in God. He is their hope and their portion, their refuge and the rock of their inheritance. Bishop Hall said, "O my God, I shall not be worthy of my eyes if I think I can employ them better than in looking up to Thy heaven; and I shall not be worthy to look up to heaven if I suffer my eyes to rest there, and not look through heaven to Thee, the almighty Maker and Ruler of it, who dwellest there in all glory and majesty; and if, seeing Thee, I do not always adore Thee, and find my soul taken up with awful and admiring

thoughts concerning Thee.... While others look at the motions, let me look at the Mover, and adore that infinite power and wisdom which preserve those numberless and immense bodies in such perfect regularity." While others grow wiser, let us grow more holy. While they trust in the creature, and make flesh their arm, let us set our faith and hope in God. Let us think upon His name. If we are really His, we shall ever be with Him. You cannot dwell too much on future glory. Nor can you overestimate the value of your future inheritance. It is worth ten thousand worlds. It is worth a thousand times more than any man ever endured for it. Men of the world often congratulate each other on their prospects. But Christians may well give each other joy in view of their bright future, their sure and certain hopes. "Hope, like a star in the firmament, shines the brighter as the shadows of sorrow darken. A new view opens to us. We

live in the prospect of another and a happier world," says Dr. John James. A poet well describes this grace when he says,

Hope, like a cordial, innocent
though strong,
Man's heart at once inspirits and
serenes,
Nor makes him pay his wisdom for
his joys.

How dismal are the prospects of the poor guilty sinner! Scripture describes such as "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" (Eph. 2:12). Could more dreadful destitution exist? The question has sometimes been raised, "What will be the ingredients of future misery?" No man may be able to give a full answer. But it is certain that a poor soul, as destitute as sinners are here, and then shut out from

all that now renders existence tolerable, must be dreadfully and eternally undone. "The day cometh"—oh how soon it shall be here!—which "shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch" (Mal. 4:1). And as the wicked die without hope, without Christ, without God, so shall they continue without them forever.

Unconverted sinner, ask thy soul a few questions of great weight:

1. "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36).
2. Did ever any harden himself against the Lord, and prosper?
3. Can thy hands be strong, or thy heart endure, when he shall deal with thee? (Ezek. 22:14)

4. "What wilt thou say when he shall punish thee?" (Jer. 13:21).
5. "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" (Heb. 2:3).

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