

Romans 15:8-13

Overflow with Hope

Main idea: All of our hopes, if they're good hopes, pure hopes, godly hopes have their source as from God.

So I heard about this practice called "extreme embalming," have you heard about this? It's actually a very old practice, going back thousands of years, but it's recently been gaining popularity in certain parts of the world. Extreme embalming is posing the deceased, not in a casket, but sitting or standing up, as if they were still alive doing the things that they loved. I would show you pictures, but I don't want to be insensitive to those who lost their loved ones. So it might be the body of an 18-year-old sitting up in a chair with a PS4 controller in his hand, as if he were playing a video game. Or it could be a boxer propped up in the corner or a boxing ring, in his robe and gloves. Or it could be as simple as a grandma sitting up in her rocking chair. The point, however, is simply that this is how their families wanted to remember them; frozen in a fond memory.

But I also think the practice also arises at least in part because of doubt about what happens after we die. When we lose a heavenly focus, it's natural to cling to the experiences of this life.¹ We look back instead forward.² We choose denial of the reality of death over hope in the reality of heaven.³ And it's our

¹ Colossians 3:1-2

² Philippians 3:13

³ Romans 6:23

hope that ought to propel us forward to live a life of peace and joy.⁴

This is why it's so important that we know what we believe about heaven and hell.

Interestingly, in the Church of the first and second century AD, there were various beliefs about heaven and hell, and they all co-existed peacefully.⁵ It was actually quite similar to how our own church seems to function. We have various beliefs, but we're getting along. In the early Church, there were, of course, those who believed that hell was eternal, and unbelievers would spend eternity in hell. That view is typically referred to as eternal conscious torment, and it's perhaps the majority view among Christians today. Then there were also those who believed that hell was not eternal, and that both hell and the unbelievers in hell would eventually be destroyed. That's referred to as annihilationism, which is the second most common view about hell today. But then, in the early Church, the third most common belief was that hell would eventually be empty, because all would eventually praise God for His salvation, since God is reconciling all people to Himself. And, of course, this is my view that I've been sharing with you periodically this year as we've been studying Paul's letter to the Romans.

But today, I want to focus on something that I think all of us can agree on no matter which view you hold about hell. As followers

⁴ Isaiah 40:31, Romans 12:12

⁵ https://salvationforall.org/7_History/2-catechetical_schools.html

of Jesus, we can all agree that we only have hope because of Jesus.⁶

When I've talked about this topic with people in the past, even before I was convinced about what I now believe to be true, people typically all responded the same way. When considering the possibility that eventually everyone could be saved, we pretty much all respond, "Yeah, that would be nice, but I just don't see how that's biblical." In other words, we all hope that it's true, but we're just not sure that it's true.

We've probably all been to funerals in which we've hoped that the deceased had at some point in their lives trusted in Jesus as their Savior. Even if all the evidence pointed in the opposite direction, we still cling to the hope that maybe they did, whether it was a long time ago when they were a child, or maybe on their deathbed, we hope that they whispered a prayer of repentance.

Why do we do that? Why do we hope that all of our loved ones are in heaven, and should we do that? And what practical difference does our hope have?

Romans 15:8-13

For I say that Christ became a servant of the circumcised on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises to the

⁶ 1 Peter 1:3

fathers, and so that Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and I will sing praise to your name. Again it says, Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people! And again, Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles; let all the peoples praise him! And again, Isaiah says, The root of Jesse will appear, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; the Gentiles will hope in him. Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:8-13)

Father, thank You for the hope that we have in Christ. And I pray that we would be filled with all joy and peace as we believe, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, we may overflow with hope. In Jesus's name, Amen.

When you read the Bible from start to finish, there's a certain story that's gradually revealed. In the beginning, God made all things, and everything was originally good.⁷ But then pretty early in the story, the very first people to live were also the very first people to sin.⁸ And because they sinned, and because God is holy and perfect, their sin deserved judgment.⁹ Therefore, God told Adam and Eve exactly what would happen because of their sin: dying, they would die.¹⁰ And that's the consequence for all of our sin: for the wages of sin is death.¹¹

⁷ Genesis 1:31

⁸ Genesis 3:6

⁹ Galatians 6:7-8

¹⁰ Genesis 2:16-17

¹¹ Romans 6:23

But even while God was telling Adam and Eve the consequences of their sin, God promised that He would also send the Savior.¹² So in the course of time, God confirmed this promise to Abraham,¹³ who became the father of the Jews, who were then to share the promise with all the world,¹⁴ and then Jesus was born as the fulfillment of that promise.¹⁵ For God so loved His people, the Jews, that He sent His one and only Son, so that whoever among them who would believe in Him would not perish, but have everlasting life.¹⁶

But, of course, that's not exactly how John 3:16 goes, because that's not the end of the story. Verse 8.

For I say that Christ became a servant of the circumcised on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises to the fathers, and so that Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy.
(Romans 15:8)

So Paul makes the assertion that God did all this for His people, the Jews, so that the Gentiles may also glorify God for His mercy.

You see, we often refer to the Jews as God's chosen people, and that's true in that they were chosen to receive the blessing of salvation first, and the blessing of proclaiming the good news

¹² Genesis 3:15

¹³ Genesis 12:1-3

¹⁴ Isaiah 42:6

¹⁵ Matthew 2:1-2

¹⁶ John 3:16, referring specifically to the Jews.

of God's salvation.¹⁷ But God chose the Jews not to condemn the Gentiles, the other nations, but to invite them also into the family of God. God's hope was always to extend His mercy not just to Jews, but to all people.¹⁸

But this wasn't just an assertion that Paul was making based on his own authority. He was basing it on Scripture. Verse 9.

As it is written, Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and I will sing praise to your name. Again it says, Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people! And again, Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles; let all the peoples praise him! And again, Isaiah says, The root of Jesse will appear, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; the Gentiles will hope in him. (Romans 15:9-12)

These are quotations from the Old Testament, all that reveal God's plan not just to save Jews, but to save the nations. That's what the word "Gentiles" means. Gentiles refers to all the people in the world who aren't Jewish. That's the Romans, and the pagans, and that's us. So we see several passages from the Old Testament, and this is really just the tip of the iceberg, talking about all the Gentiles, all the nations, and all the peoples praising God.¹⁹

¹⁷ Deuteronomy 7:6, 1 Peter 2:9

¹⁸ Genesis 12:3

¹⁹ Genesis 22:18, 2 Samuel 14:14, Psalm 22:27-29, Psalm 46:10, Psalm 65:2, Psalm 66:3-4, Psalm 86:9, Psalm 145:9, Isaiah 19:21-22, Isaiah 25:6-8, Isaiah 45:22-23, Isaiah 66:23, Daniel 7:27, Zephaniah 3:8-9, Malachi 1:11

Now, before I believed what I now believe about these things, I would look at these verses and verses like them and say, “Yeah, but it’s not talking about every single person. It’s just saying that people FROM each tribe, people, language, and nation will be saved.²⁰ Maybe not every person, but at least SOMEONE from every people group.” And maybe that’s true, maybe that’s what Paul was saying here.

But let me ask you this: what do you hope it means? Now, I’m not saying we can just decide that Scripture means whatever fits best with our theology. Our job is to understand what Scripture actually teaches, and not force it to mean what we want it to mean.²¹ But when we read this text, we have two valid interpretations, and both of these are grammatically allowable by the verses Paul is quoting. So I’m just asking the question: which one do you hope is true?

Most Jews thought that all of the other people of all of the other nations, the Gentiles, were ungodly sinners, undeserving of God’s grace.²² And in the same way, we typically want grace for ourselves, but condemnation for others.

But the Old Testament, speaking to the Jews, was saying that they ought to praise God in such a way that the nations around them would hear about the salvation they had in God, so that they would also turn to God to be saved! And in the same way,

²⁰ Revelation 5:9

²¹ 2 Timothy 3:16-17

²² This is the sentiment that Jesus point out in Matthew 15:26 (not that He believed it, but that it was the common opinion of the Jews).

we ought to let our light shine before men so that they will see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven.²³

Do you do that? Is your main message to the world around you that you disagree with them and condemn them, or that you love them, just as God loves them, and that God has given you a peace and a joy that propels you to serve Him with rejoicing?²⁴

You might not know this, but Southern Baptists are one of the biggest groups on location wherever there's a major disaster in North America. Just recently, our Disaster Relief teams traveled to Florida and other states to serve meals and help rebuild homes after Hurricane Ian. And when we do things like disaster relief, when we help people in need in our community through the Nokomis Christian Missions, when we pick up peoples' kids and take them to church and invest in them, we give unbelievers reasons to praise God, so that they would then trust in Jesus and be saved.

So what I'm asking is this: do you hope that all those sinners out there will get what they deserve? Or do you hope that they will receive grace through faith, so that you then serve them and love them just as God loved you? Because you can't really do both. What about your kids? What about your parents, or your siblings? Even if they're not Christians, do you continue to love them and hope that they come to faith in Christ, or do you write

²³ Matthew 5:16

²⁴ 1 John 4:19

them off as a lost cause? And if any of them have passed away without ever making a profession of faith in Christ, do you still somehow hope that they're in heaven? Where does that hope come from?

Verse 13.

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

And this is really the crux of my argument today. All of our hopes are from God. God is the God of hope. All of our hopes, if they're good hopes, pure hopes, godly hopes have their source as from God. And I would argue that a person's salvation is a good hope.²⁵ It's a hope that God Himself has, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.²⁶

But I also want you to notice what our hope ought to cause us to do. Paul prays that as we are filled with joy and peace, that we would OVERFLOW with hope. In other words, our hope ought to spill out onto others.

When your hope is in Jesus, and you're thankful for how Jesus saves you from your sin, that ought to be evident to the people

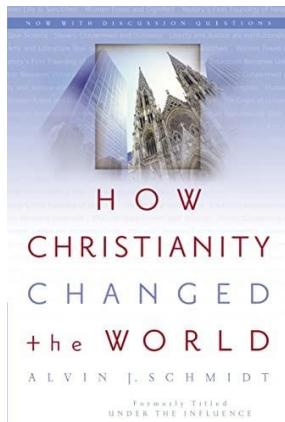
²⁵ Romans 9:3

²⁶ 1 Timothy 2:4

around you.²⁷ And this only happens because the Holy Spirit in you, who is God in you, helps you to rejoice.

As we rest in Jesus, we also begin to rejoice in Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. And when we do that, even unbelievers will start to take notice of how joyful we are in God, because we're joyfully serving them and all the world as our hope in God overflows.

[Picture of “How Christianity Changed the World”]



I have this book called “How Christianity Changed the World.” It describes how so many of the good things from history and in our world today, such as hospitals and scientific advancements and music and so much more, came about as a direct result from Christians living out their faith. In the book, the author, Alvin Schmidt wrote this:

No other religion, philosophy, teaching, nation, movement—whatever—has so changed the world for the better as Christianity has done. - Alvin Schmidt

²⁷ Colossians 4:6, 1 Peter 3:15

When we overflow with hope in God, it spills out onto the world around us. Did you know that most recipients of the Nobel Prize, those people deemed to have conferred the greatest benefit to mankind, have been Christians? Did you know that more than two-thirds of all adoptions are by Christians?²⁸ Surveys show that Christians are more likely to be generous with their time and money to help others. And it's all because we have hope in Jesus.

And yet there's also the temptation to hide our light under a bushel.²⁹ We're sometimes afraid of what others will think about us. Church, we need to let our light shine! We ought not hinder the Holy Spirit in us from showing the world just how good God is.³⁰ We ought to show the world that we overflow with hope because of Jesus, because God is the God of hope.

Instead of complaining about how far society is from where it ought to be, commit to doing the things that you want to see changed.³¹ It may be impossible by our strength to transform culture, but with God all things are possible.³²

For example, you often hear that prayer isn't allowed in school. That's actually not true. A couple years ago, Abby was in a stressful IEP meeting at school with the principal, some teachers, and Raelynn's therapists about options for Raelynn's

²⁸ <https://adoption.org/who-adopts-the-most>

²⁹ Matthew 5:15

³⁰ Ephesians 4:30, 1 Thessalonians 5:19

³¹ Philippians 2:14

³² Matthew 19:26

school that year. So Abby asked the people in the meeting, “Can I pray for us before this meeting?” And you know what? They were all **TOTALLY** fine with it! No objections whatsoever!

We sometimes complain about God being banned from places or censored or canceled, but we are the ones that don’t often speak His name enough. We can’t expect unbelievers to stand up and pray. We need to be the ones to stand up and offer to pray. We need to exercise the freedoms we have.

We have the freedom to bless others in Jesus’s name. We have the freedom to be generous to others in Jesus’s name, like when we did the diaper drive last month. We have freedom to stop and offer to pray with someone who’s struggling. And we’re going to do these things, and so much more when we’re overflowing with hope in Jesus.

Do you have that kind of hope? You see, our hope doesn’t just pertain to what happens after we die. It pertains to how we live today: rejoicing in Jesus, our Savior. And when we praise God among the unsaved, they will see our good works, and put their hope in the living God.³³

³³ 1 Timothy 4:10