

The Christian Life (29): Sanctification (Part 14)

Having put on his belt, breastplate, and shoes, and having taken up his shield, the Christian soldier must now put on his helmet of salvation. "The helmet of salvation is a critical piece of armor. No matter how well a soldier's body is protected, if his head is left uncovered, his chance of survival is minimal. A soldier must wear his helmet" (Beeke).¹

I. The Armor of God: The Helmet of Salvation

1. *What is it?* "And take the helmet of salvation" (Eph.6:17). Scripture speaks of salvation in three stages. Christians have been, are being, and will be saved. Salvation is past, present, and future. By "past" salvation is meant that which took place at our conversion. "But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which he have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Tit.3:4-5). Christians have been saved from the penalty and power of sin. By "present" salvation is meant our ongoing sanctification. "For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing in foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1Cor.1:18). Christians are being saved as Christ's rule advances in their souls. By "future" salvation is meant that which takes place at our death (when our soul is saved from all remaining sin) and final resurrection (when our body is saved from death). Scripture places the largest emphasis upon the latter of these, namely, the future bodily resurrection of the just. This future salvation is the Christian's hope (which is one and the same with our inheritance). "And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed" (Rom.13:11). "So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation" (Heb.9:28).

Nothing is more important for us than to learn what we may call 'the tenses of salvation.' There are tenses in salvation, past, present, and future. The Christian is a man who *has been* saved. He is justified by faith. But he is also a man who *is being* saved. He is not perfect, there is a work going on in him. But then also, Christians *will be* saved. The Christian has yet to experience final salvation. There is a day coming when he will be absolutely perfect. So you can describe the tenses thus: the past is justification, the present is sanctification, and the future is glorification.²

"What does 'salvation' mean in this text? I am satisfied that the Apostle Paul himself leads us to the right answer in what we say in 1Thessalonians 5:8-9. 'But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.' So I interpret this as meaning, not so much the realization of our salvation at the present time but of the 'hope' of salvation" (MLJ).³ "The head is protected by the best helmet, when, elevated by hope, we look up towards heaven to that salvation which is promised. It is only therefore by becoming the object of hope that salvation is a helmet" (Calvin).⁴ Biblical hope is the confident expectation of future realities as promised in God's word. "The hope of the hypocrite shall perish, whose confidence shall be cut off" (Job.8:13-14). "The hope of the righteous will be gladness, but the expectation of the wicked will perish" (Prov.10:28). The ground of true hope is

¹ Joel Beeke, *Striving Against Satan*, 50

² Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Sermons on Ephesians*, 7:319

³ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Sermons on Ephesians*, 7:314-315

⁴ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, 21:340

threefold: the unchanging character of God: "You are my hope, O God" (Ps.71:5); the person and work of Christ: "the Lord Jesus Christ who is our hope" (1Tim.1:1); and the unfailing promises of God: "remember the word to Your servant, upon which You have caused me to hope" (Ps.119:49). Thus, true or gospel hope is confident expectation in God (His character) and His promises (His word). "Hope is a supernatural grace of God, whereby the believer, through Christ, expects and waits for all those good things of the promise, which at present he has not received, or not fully" (Gurnall).⁵ "Hope is a grace wrought in the heart by the power of the Holy Spirit, whereby the soul quietly waits for, and expects the future good that God has promised in the covenant of grace, though there are many difficulties in the way to hinder the accomplishment of it" (Burroughs).⁶ "Hope is an expectation of such good things to come as God has promised, and Faith believed" (Gouge).⁷

And so the question becomes, What exactly is the Christian's hope? What exactly do we wait or long for? (1) Salvation from remaining sin. This takes place at death when "the spirits of just men" will be "made perfect" (Heb.12:23). That is, the spirits (souls) of justified people will be made morally and sinlessly perfect. Now we are plagued with remaining sin. "For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do" (Rom.7:15). But then we shall love Him without sin or distraction. "When I stand before the throne, dressed in beauty not my own; when I see Thee as Thou art, love Thee with unsinning heart; Then, Lord, shall I fully know, not till then, how much I owe."⁸ This is the Christian's hope. Salvation from the presence of sin. Knowing, loving, and serving God without fault.

(2) Salvation from a corruptible body. As our salvation includes our body and soul, the Christian's hope includes their body and soul. "I have hoped in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead" (Acts 23:6). "Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body" (Rom.8:23).

(3) Salvation from an evil world. This present world is filled with sin, distress, trouble, sorrow, and death. And while our souls are delivered from this world at death, our ultimate hope is for heaven in its final state. This is what Paul meant by "the hope which is laid up for you in heaven" (Col.1:5). It's "the hope of glory" (Col.1:27; Rom.5:2). The hope or expectation of a new and glorious earth. "Nevertheless, we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2Pet.3:13). Scripture describes this present earth (creation) as having the same hope. "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope, because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now" (Rom.8:20-22). Christians, along with non-moral creation around us, wait or hope for future salvation.

We have great things in hand, but grater things in hope; much in possession, but more in deed. Let this comfort us against the contempts cast upon us by the world. We are at present poor and mean, contemptible and sinful, the off-scouring of all things; but all sin shall be done away. These very bodies of clay that we carry about us shall be made like

⁵ William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armor*, 2:130

⁶ Jeremiah Burroughs, *Hope*, 8

⁷ William Gouge, *The Whole Armor of God*, 297

⁸ Hymn 600

His glorious body, and our spirits likewise shall have the image of the Father fully resplendent in us. We shall be in such a condition as is fit for enjoyment of communion with Him, to stand forever before Him, for we shall be like Him, and we shall see Him as He is. We see Him now but through a glass, dimly through the creature, through a lattice, through His ordinances, as an old man through spectacles, as a weak eye looks upon the sun; but in heaven we shall see Him as He is, so far as a blessed creature is capable of that blissful vision. Then we shall see Him face to face; we shall see Him even as He is. In the meantime, while this glory of God shall appear, we have the grace of hope put into our hearts; we wait for the time; we expect when this time shall come, and we rejoice with joy unspeakable. This is the hope of the saints that such a time is coming.⁹

2. *How does it protect?* "The Roman soldier's helmet was usually made of a tough-metal like bronze or iron. An inside lining of felt or sponge made the weight bearable. Nothing short of an axe or hammer could pierce a heavy helmet" (Stott).¹⁰ "The helmet offered the Roman soldier protection for his head. Paul is obviously concerned that the minds of God's people be protected from the assaults of the evil one. In the Christian life, as in all of life, your mind matters. How you think shapes how you live" (Hamilton).¹¹ "The spiritual application of the helmet is obvious: the Apostle is drawing attention to the head, to the mind, the understanding, the thinking of the Christian" (MLJ).¹² "The hope of salvation by Christ is a defense of the head against false doctrines; for the helmet is a piece of armor for the head; and it is an erector of the head in times of difficulty, affliction, and distress; and it covers the head in the day of battle, when engaged with Satan, the enemy of souls" (Gill).¹³ "Soldiers dare not fight without their helmet: despair, to which the devil tempts us, makes us quit our combat; whereas hope of salvation makes us lift up our heads in the midst of temptations and afflictions" (Poole).¹⁴ "True hope holds our head above water and makes the soul with outstretched neck expect future deliverance" (Trapp).¹⁵ "The hope of salvation is compared to a helmet, because just as the head of a soldier is armed with a helmet, he will dare to bring his head up even in the midst of the enemy, and it protects against darts. So with the help of salvation the head of the Christian soldier is covered, as it were. In the midst of temptations and afflictions, he raises himself and, constantly gazing into heaven, awaits that promised salvation" (Rollock).¹⁶

He who has his head and face well and safely covered will be bold and courageous without fear, lifting up his head, and looking his enemy in the face, and so boldly go forward, not fearing arrows, darts, or any such things that shall be shot or thrown at him. Even so, he whose soul is established with hope, waiting for salvation in the end, will with a holy resolution go on in his course to God, not fearing the manifold assaults of his spiritual enemies, being assured that they shall not pierce his soul, but that at length he shall remain a victor when the devil and his instruments have shot all their arrows against him.

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⁹ Jeremiah Burroughs, *Hope*, 2-3

¹⁰ John Stott, *Ephesians*, 281

¹¹ Ian Hamilton, *Ephesians*, 278

¹² Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Sermons on Ephesians*, 7:309

¹³ John Gill, *Commentary*, 9:111

¹⁴ Matthew Poole, *Commentary*, 3:679

¹⁵ John Trapp, *Commentary*, 5:601

¹⁶ Robert Rollock, *Commentary on Ephesians*, 222

¹⁷ William Gouge, *The Whole Armor of God*, 301

(1) Purity. The hope of salvation motivates us to pursue purity. "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1Jn.3:1-3). Everyone who has the hope of seeing and being like Christ purifies himself in this world. Hope has a powerful influence upon the soul. For example, think of a young wife who's waiting for her husband to return from war. Every day she reads his letters and looks out the window. Such hope motivates her to keep herself and her house in order. "The hope of the saints makes them purify themselves. The hope of the saints is of such high, great, wonderful, and glorious things. Their hopes are great, and therefore elevate their hearts. Their hopes being great and high makes them jealous of anything that may contradict their hopes. The greatness of their hope fills their hearts with comfort, and therefore it purifies" (Burroughs).

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The greatness of the hope of the saints has a great deal of efficacy in it to purge the heart, and that upon these grounds, because the hopes are hopes of such great things. Titus 2:11-13 shows that the greatness of the hope of the saints causes them to purge themselves from the filth of sin: 'For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.' The grace of God has appeared; and what does it teach us? 'To deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this imperfect world,' not to reserve our godliness for the world to come. And what's the ground of this? 'Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.'¹⁹

(2) Patience. Scripture weds together the concepts of hope, patience, and waiting. "It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD" (Lam.3:26). "But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience" (Rom.8:25). The hope of salvation enables us to wait for our inheritance. When we become Christians, a large portion of our salvation is given to us in the form of a promise. For most people, there's a long distance between the promise of salvation and its possession. Hope enables us to wait regardless of hardships and afflictions. "There is much time, much cross-bearing, and much strife between promise and possession. Hope comes and shows the glory of the benefits and the certainty of becoming a partaker of them" (Brakel).²⁰ Hope reasons "our light affliction, which is for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2Cor.4:17). "Every Christian knows the 'sufferings of this present time' (Rom.8:18). How are we then to keep ourselves from sinking under the weight of those sufferings? By taking the helmet of salvation and reminding ourselves that our hope of salvation is a living hope, a sure and certain hope. One day all the distresses and sufferings of this present life will be swallowed up in glory (2Cor.4:16-18)" (Hamilton).²¹

"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father" (1Thess.1:2-3). Faith works, love labors, and hope waits (or is patient). Faith reads

¹⁸ Jeremiah Burroughs, *Hope*, 57

¹⁹ Jeremiah Burroughs, *Hope*, 59

²⁰ Wilhelmus a Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 3:323

²¹ Ian Hamilton, *Ephesians*, 280

the promises of God in Scripture and hope waits for them to be fulfilled. Faith believes the promises and hope looks for them to be fulfilled. "Faith closes with the promise as a true and faithful word, then hope lifts up the soul to wait for the performance of it" (Gurnall).²² "Faith believes that God said nothing but truth, and lifts up our eyes to God; and hope looks for those things which faith has believed" (Bullinger).²³ "Hope is nothing else than the expectation of those things which faith has believed to have been truly promised by God. Thus, faith believes God to be true, hope awaits the time when His truth shall be manifested" (Calvin).²⁴

(3) Protection. The hope of salvation protects of from despair. It enables us to continue even when we are tired, weary, and discouraged. "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted (disturbed) within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance" (Ps.42:5). The grace of hope whispers in the Christian's ear: "Don't give up but keep running and fighting. Salvation is nearer than when you first believed." Hope keeps the soul sturdy and from being blown off course. "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us" (Heb.6:19-20). "When sailors have a good, sound anchor fast tied to the ship with a strong cable, and fast fixed on firm ground, they dare sleep quietly therein, though storms and tempests arise for the anchor will keep the ship safe and sure, so that it cannot be carried away by winds, nor beaten against rocks, nor swallowed by gulfs. Thus does hope, after a holy manner, make us secure, even though afflictions and temptations like storms be raised against us" (Gouge).²⁵

Not far from the spot where they were sleeping was a castle called Doubting Castle. The owner of it was Giant Despair, and it was on his property that they were sleeping. The Giant got up early the next morning, and walking up and down his grounds, he spotted Christian and Hopeful sleeping there. The Giant threw them into a very dark dungeon, which the two men found disgustingly foul and smelly. They lay there from Wednesday morning until Saturday night without even a crumb of bread or drop of water; there was no light at all, and they had no one to ask what would become of them. They were, therefore, in a very evil situation, far from all friends and acquaintances. Christian felt doubly sorrowful because it was his ill-advised haste that had brought them into this distress.

'I am leaving you a knife, a rope, and some poison,' said Giant Despair; 'you choose which means of death you prefer. Why should you choose life, seeing that it involves so much bitterness and pain.' But it so happened that on Saturday at about midnight the pilgrims began to pray and continued in prayer until almost daybreak. Then Christian a short time before daylight, became astounded and passionately exclaimed, 'What fool I am! Here I lie in a stinking dungeon when I could be walking in complete liberty! I have a Key in my pocket called Promise that I am sure will open any lock in Doubting Castle.' 'That's great news, my brother!' cried Hopeful. 'Get it out right now and try it.' So the pilgrims put the key into the lock and it opened and they were liberated from their despair.

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²² William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armor*, 2:130

²³ Henry Bullinger, *Decades*, 2:88-89

²⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.3.42

²⁵ William Gouge, *The Whole Armor of God*, 302

²⁶ John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, 139-146

3. *How is it put on?* "And take the helmet of salvation" (Eph.6:17). That is, take the helmet in hand and put it on. This means the grace of hope must be nourished and strengthened. "And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Heb.6:11-12). By "the full assurance of hope" is meant a strong assurance that comes from a strong and healthy hope. Three things are needed to grow or strengthen hope. (1) Prayer. "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom.15:13). "I do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers...that you may know what is the hope of His calling" (Eph.1:16-18). (2) Scripture. "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom.15:4). (3) Tribulation. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rom.5:1-5). "The buffetings of this world stir up our hope of, and our longings for, heaven. The more the world turns its back on us, the more sure we are that God loves us. Will He who loves us fail to bring us home? Would His Spirit stir up within us a hope that will never be realized" (Olyott)?²⁷

Therefore, all who desire to glorify God, be active to exercise hope continually. Be continually engaged in seeking for all manner of promises in the Word of God, appropriating them to yourself, and relying upon them. Do not cease to pray that the Lord may cause you to hope. Stir up others, and let the exhortation of others to hope steadfastly, find entrance into your hearts. While you are thus engaged, you will experience that your hope will not make you ashamed, but that you, upon patiently anticipating their fulfillment, will most certainly become a partaker of these blessings at the appointed time.²⁸

Have you heaven in hope? It is more than if you had the whole world in hand. The greatest monarch the earth has will be glad, in a dying hour, to change his crown for your helmet. His crown will not procure him this helmet, but your helmet will bring you to a crown, when he shall have none to wear – a crown, not of gold, but of glory, which once on shall never be taken off, as his is sure to be.²⁹

²⁷ Stuart Olyott, *Romans*, 63

²⁸ Wilhelmus a Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 3:330

²⁹ William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armor*, 2:166