

Confidence, Cheerfulness and Hope in the Holy Spirit

Confidence in the Gospel
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Matt. 9:2; John 16:33 (RSV) ... be of good cheer

Of Romans, Luther says: 'The epistle is in truth the most important document in the New Testament, the gospel in its purest expression. ...it is a brilliant light, almost enough to illumine the whole Bible'.¹ This being so, we anticipate that as we:

- (1) Pray for the Holy Spirit, *Oratio* (John Kleinig, *Grace Upon Grace*, p. 13)
- (2) Listen receptively - *Meditatio* - to the Word through **Romans 8**, we shall be well-equipped with cheerfulness and hope, so needful to
- (3) Engage in the next battle—the *Tentatio*—and, face further *Anfechtung*.

An ever-joyful word to us personally:

8:1 *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

8:11 *If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.*

An important detail—not to be missed or avoided—concerning our manner of personal living, for is a preventative measure, against accidie. The spiritual *fish oil capsule* to minimise despondency:

8:12-13 *So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh-- 13 for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*

We have received a spirit of adoption—Sonship—with a view to an inheritance

8:14-17 *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. 15 For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16 it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are sons of God, 17 and if sons, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ--if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.*

An objective view of present world happenings, and of the creation itself

8:18-19 *I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God;*

We live in the age from the incarnation to the parousia, and must understand that 'in the last days distressing times will come' (2Timothy 3:1; Hebrews 1:2). And since we know that red in the morning is a shepherd's warning, and red at night is a sailor's delight, we should also be mindful of Christ's Lordship over 'the sufferings of this present time'. Jesus alerts us to interpret our situation with faith:

You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times (Matthew 16:3).

An objective recollection of the fact of 'the curse' (Gen. 3:14-17) and of futility

Romans 8:20 *for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.*

¹ Martin Luther, *Preface to Romans*, in John Dillenberger (Ed.) *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, Anchor Books, 1961, p. 19

Genesis 3:14 The LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. 15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.” 16 ¶ To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” 17 ¶ And to the man he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; 18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

In his wisdom and mercy, God has placed this enmity among us, and this curse and limitation, upon the present creation so that it, and we, cannot reach the intended goal, apart from Jesus Christ. If we ignore, or indeed *minimise* the fact of the ongoing action of ‘the curse’ within the age in which we now live, then we will probably not only groan inwardly, as we do—but get angry, externally, at the rest of the world—for not living truly, and ethically, and for not believing the gospel, and for continuing to make bad decisions about all sorts of matters that directly affect all of life within the creation.

Therefore, we need to know this, in our daily gospel-minded thinking. Our minds must keep *being twisted back* (T.F. Torrance, to his 1st year theological students) to the perspective that while Christ is Risen the curse continues, and must take account of the present, including the future of our bodies, *redemption*, and the hope for ongoing, bodily activity.

The Redemption of our Bodies

Romans 8:22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; 23 and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

Philippians 3: 20 But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself (RSV).

Romans 8:29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family

Paul’s own body took a physical hammering. After a stoning in Lystra he was dragged out of the city, and basically left for dead. But we read *he got up, and the next day he went on!* (Acts 14:19-20). Although he had some ecstatic *visions*, he endured *countless floggings, a beating, three shipwrecks, many dangers, toils and ‘snares’* (thanks, John Newton), sleepless nights, hunger and daily anxiety for the churches (2Corinthians 11:23-28). The fact is, bodily pain, and deterioration is part of the deal. It is clearly part of our hope to look forward to *the redemption of our bodies*.

The Word of the Risen, Ascended, Unseen Christ—as man—awakens our hope.

Romans 8:24 For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

2Corinthians 5:7 for we walk by faith, not by sight.

Hebrews 2:8b God left nothing outside their [humanity’s] control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, 9 *but we do see Jesus*, who for a little while was made lower

than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Matthew 13:31 He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; 32 it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

Matthew 13:33 He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”

The unseen hidden quality of the God’s Kingdom is that to which our lives bear witness—namely, to the King! We are hearing a Living Word of hope from a Living Jesus, not merely being affected by images. In *The Humiliation of the Word*, Jacques Ellul writes very powerfully of the effects on us all, of our society’s all-encompassing preference for *Image*, rather than *Word*. We can take a camera on a holiday, and because of it, miss the very reality of the adventure itself, by our preoccupation with looking for and recording images, perhaps as the only *major proof of* the fact that we really went on the holiday. So facebook does have weaknesses! As do films, plays, and liturgical movement, and the serious illusion that politics *is* the primary reality. Where we are not hearing the Living Word, even because of so many words—mere chatter and chit-chat, ‘*Words, Words Words*’ (Shakespeare), then, as Ellul laments:

This hidden Kingdom is as uninteresting to everybody these days as the promised “Paradise”.²

The Spirit helps us in our weakness—as those in faith-union with God workings

Romans 8:26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. 27 And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. 28 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

Confidence in the gospel grows as faith *sees Jesus*, and takes heart in the decisive deeds of God. P. T. Forsyth writes:

God's participation in man's affairs is much more than that of a fellow-sufferer on a divine scale, whose love can rise to painless sympathy with pain. He not only perfectly understands our case and our problem, but He has morally, actively, finally solved it. The solution is for ever present with Him. Already He sees, and for ever sees, the travail of His soul and is satisfied. All the jars, collisions, contradictions, crises, pities, tragedies and terrors of life are in Him for ever adjusted in a peace which is not resigned and quietist, but triumphant and exultant; and nothing can pluck us from His hands. All history, through His great act at its moral centre, is, in God, resolved into the harmonies of a foregone and final conquest. And our faith is not merely that God is with us, nor that one day He will clear all things up and triumph; but that for Him all things are already triumphant, clear and sure. All things are working together for good, as good is in the cross of Christ and its saving effect.

Our faith is not that one day we shall solve the riddles of providence, and see all things put under us, but that now we see Jesus; and that we commit ourselves to one who has both the solution of every tragic thing and the glory of every dark thing clear and sure in a kingdom that cannot be moved, and therefore alone, moves forever on.³

² Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation Of the Word*, Eerdmans, 1985, p. 198

³ P. T. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, NCPI, p. 62

A Personal Note: ‘*Cheerfulness—and the Trouble with Apologetics*’

It has troubled me that I often see public issues from a very different viewpoint to others in Christ. However, what I need to see anew—if I am not to be awed into some silent passivity, or become verbose with self-justifying *biblically-based-opinion*—is that in Christ Jesus, I am, *free indeed*, totally, irrevocably, and unequivocally. We are so freed in Christ that we can see the whole human race, if we will—from a new, *new creation point of view*, and see no one merely from ‘a human point of view’ (read 2Corinthians 5:16-17). One is free to err, and to allow others to do so as well. In his book *The Ethics of Freedom*, Ellul said that *without* a revelation of God’s love, apologetics can become merely a form of intellectual terrorism. If we believe that this manner of speaking is preaching the gospel, we may well be greatly mistaken. I recall Rod James saying, ‘If the Word we bring is winsome we might even *win some!*’

It has been well said of Karl Barth, that ‘When all is said and done, he simply did theology as if it mattered’.⁴ Reflecting upon theology in the 19th Century, he said:

1. ‘Theology exposed itself to the world’—that was its *strength*, and
2. ‘Theology, however, went overboard—and this was its *weakness*—insofar as confrontation with the contemporary age was its *decisive* and *primary* concern... Theology never failed to react... to impulses from outside, at times with nervousness. This openness to the world meant ...there was hardly time or love or zeal left for the task to be accomplished within the house itself...Consequently it was forced to make reductions and oversimplifications, to indulge in forgetfulness and carelessness... fatal errors blew in.’⁵
3. ***Dogmatics can be good apologetics:*** ‘...we miss a certain carefree and joyful confidence in the self-validation of the basic concerns of theology, a trust that the most honest commerce in the world might best be assured when the theologians, unheeding the favors or disavors of this world, *confronted it* with the results of theological research carried out for its own sake. It did not enter their minds [in the 19th C] that respectable dogmatics could be good apologetics.’

Preachers need to *stay on task* unfolding the Word of God, as we find it in the bible. Do our theology. Make our contribution. Do so amidst a sinful human race, for Christ is at work, in us, through his word. We are *freed* to obey our calling with confidence.

‘All life today is in fact oriented to politics.... politics has gradually invaded everything ...In New Testament days there was a lively political life but it did not touch everything. Far from it! Most of life then was non-political.’⁶

‘I have found no Christian reasons, based on revelation, why I should be more right than left or *vice versa*, to take a modern example. Leftist convictions about progress, reason, productivity, and happiness are no more authentic or Christian than rightist ideas of country, hierarchy, honour, and order. Nor are they less so....The worst thing a Christian can do is to try to find theological arguments in justification of the chosen position.’

In the Christian life the first valid reason for taking part in political life is that we should be present among men, not primarily to cooperate with them but explicitly to declare the gospel to them.

As Andrew Klynsmith said: ‘The grind of ministry has polished us to a fine despondency!’ He added, Jesus may well say to any number of us: “Buck up! Your sins are forgiven!” Further, ‘In Christ Jesus, you are free indeed. Participate with cheerfulness, because you can’.

⁴ Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe*, Brazos Press, 2001, p. 150

⁵ Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, John Know Press, 1960, p. 18-20

⁶ Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, Eerdmans, 1976 p. 374, (also p. 376, and p. 378)