

Effective Hope And Everlasting Trust

A Sermon by Rev. J. Clark Echols, Jr.

"Wait silently for God alone, for hope is from Him ... Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him.." (Psalm 62:5, 8).

In what should we hope? In what should we trust? Obviously we should hope for salvation, and trust in God. And notice that we all have this hope now, and that leads us to trust in the Lord, even though hope applies to future things - what we would like later - and trust applies to the present - we want to trust the Lord now. We know this is true because as the Lord fulfills our hopes, we gain trust in Him.

Hope is commonly defined as a desire that we expect to be fulfilled. And trust is commonly said to be a confidence in someone or something. If this is so, why are so many hopeful people disappointed and hurt? And where is the evidence that our faith brings protection if we trust in it? And a final question: The Psalmist says that the Lord is "good to all and His tender mercies are over all His works" (145:9). What kind of mercy is it to let people's dreams be destroyed by, say, a violent storm? What kind of mercy allows faithful, trusting people to suffer, not to mention allowing the innocent to starve, the young to die needlessly, the old to languish. There are answers to these questions in the Word, where we find that the hopes that are dashed and the trust that fails are not the hope and trust that are God-given. That is what the Word shows us: that genuine hope and trust are given to us by the Lord, not made up or manufactured by us.

What we are to do is to live according to the dictates of the Word at the same time as we are in the hope and trust that the Lord will save us. We are supposed to acknowledge that we do nothing good of ourselves at the same time as we feel assured by the hope that the Lord will grant us an understanding of truth from which we can live a good life. We are supposed to acknowledge that we bear the responsibility of the choice between good and evil at the same time as we trust that the Lord will lead us to do only that which is good and believe only that which is true.

Genuine hope is not simply the desire to have our expectations fulfilled. It is not a vague wish that things will go as we would like them to. That wish could be based on an evil desire; or we could be ignorant of what is best for us; it could go against what the Lord would have us hope for.

When this kind of hopefulness is denied, it quickly fades, and we simply replace it with a new wish. It is a weak and temporary kind of hope. Genuine hope looks to what is eternal, so it never fades. It is given to us by the Lord, so it is most powerful. At the foundation of genuine hope for salvation is the promise the Lord has made that He will come to us and that He is in the constant endeavor to save us. That is His work. And we feel His work in us as a perception and assurance that the Lord helps us in our times of deepest despair - during combats of temptation.

We are not always conscious of it, but the Lord is very near us in states of spiritual struggle. If we continue to hope and trust in Him, and turn to Him, He can temper our despair with the hope of deliverance. Without Him there is no deliverer, no hope. He gives us hope in the realization that the purpose of temptation is that we will be saved and will receive heavenly happiness. Therefore, the hope we feel is His power working within us. Genuine hope is the Lord's answer as He flows into us with the power of His glorified Divine Human. In so casting evil out of our minds, the Lord fulfills our hopes and earns our trust.

The danger in temptation, of course, is that we will lose hope and fail to trust. We do not readily feel the Lord's help. In fact, we are most aware of the spiritual pain brought about by the hard choice before us. This mental, spiritual pain rules our thought, and anguish is our primary feeling. Yet in all this the Lord still maintains our ability to choose - that is His constant gift. It is His continual presence, in whatever state we are, that makes our freedom possible. We must make the choice - He cannot do that for us. Yet He does give us something of a perception of His presence. This perception is the hope He gives us, the hope He establishes. And it brings us consolation that our salvation is being wrought in us.

Now, the Lord wants to give us His hope, and He wants us to learn to trust Him. His Divine mercy will grant them to us when we have in us the vessels to receive them. These vessels are His truths, confirmed in our daily life. And so it is in His Word that we find the fulfillment of our hopes and the foundation for our trust. This hope continues with us to the farthest limits of despair; it is a hope that is not merely a desire for something we want; rather, it looks to our salvation and eternal welfare. In this hope we have a firm answer to doubt, despair, fear and death, for it is not limited by what we have or what we don't have, or by the grave, but looks beyond it. It is not man-made, but applied to us by the Divine mercy of the Lord Himself.

Such genuine hope establishes real trust. Our hope for salvation, our hope for our future, establishes a trust in the Lord - that He is helping right now on our journey to heaven.

Consider for a moment trusting in the Lord to lead us to everlasting peace, joy and fulfillment. That has to be the greatest trust we can have. It is not simply confidence that our desires will be granted. It isn't simply faith. If we believe that our faith alone saves us, our trust will be limited, and often too weak to stand up in times of natural or spiritual trial. When faith is not used in life, it is not saving; when it is, it becomes charity, which does save. We all must beware of the false sense of security merely having the faith can give us. If our trust in the Lord consisted merely in having faith in our memory, then all we would have to do is await salvation from the Lord, with our hands hanging down. This inaction does not reflect trust. In fact, such apathetic irresponsibility is what has led to the starvation, death and injustice that happens to the innocent and faithful that we wrongly ascribe to the Lord's inaction.

Genuine trust in the Lord leads us to act from our faith. We trust that the Lord will guide our steps as we strive consciously to follow His path to heaven. Real trust is a faith that originates from charity in our will, from the sincere desire to do what is good. When we live according to the truths the Lord has shown us, then we are really placing our trust in Him. The ultimate of trust is to stake our eternal happiness on the truthfulness of what He says.

As we hope in the Lord, we uphold our responsibility to flee from evils and do goods, and we are given a lasting trust. This trust stays with us even in the midst of temptation. Like genuine hope, real trust is a force from within whereby we are able to resist evil. And notice the cycle here: as we become aware in ourselves of a willingness to submit ourselves to the Lord, even in temptation, He brings us victory and a perception of the security we have in Him. As we apply this perception of truth to our lives, He then inflows into our will with even more power, increasing our trust in Him. Therefore, every time we actually, with conviction, submit ourselves to our trust in the Lord, He comes with more and more power to cast evil out of our minds, to enlighten us, and to fill us with joy.

This trust endures throughout all the trials and tribulations of life on earth. We are taught that "for those who trust in the Divine, all things advance toward a happy state to eternity, and whatever befalls them in time is still conducive" to that eternal state (AC 8478). Such people do

not blame the Lord for their temporal woes. They have the greatest confidence that the Lord will, if they let Him, use everything that happens to further their reformation and regeneration. These have genuine trust in the Lord.

Hope and trust in the Lord are not so hard to attain in this life. Actually, mere obedience to the Lord's laws, the ten commandments, requires trust in the Lord, and implies our hope for salvation through obedience. Beyond this obedience it is our responsibility to come to see that we have hope and trust solely because the Lord's Divine mercy affects them in us, and because they are the Lord's to give us (see AC 30). The Divine mercy is applied freely to all, and is always effective for those who abstain from evil. The Lord's mercy is of His Divine love which is constantly striving to lift us up if we allow Him to. Thus, the Lord grants His mercy not according to the doctrine we know, but according to the doctrine we live, that is, the charity we are practicing.

The Word teaches, then, that all real hope and trust are from the Lord, and are given to us from within. If our hope is in our salvation, then whatever we hope for will be granted. If we have trust in the truth we see working in our lives, we will always feel secure. The Lord has made this promise, and desires to give us these gifts. As we respond to His promise with a life of fleeing from evils and doing goods, out of the pure mercy of His Divine love the Lord will grant us eternal happiness. So hope and trust are gifts greatly to be desired.

As it is written in the 27th Psalm:

"Though an army should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident. One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple" (v. 3, 4).

Amen.

Lessons: Psalm 62, AC 8478