

# SUNDAY ARTICLE

ST DAVID'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ♦ 17 FEBRUARY 2019



## Justified by Faith, Anchored by Hope

*Douglas Kelly*

The great Apostle who so clearly teaches us the liberating gospel truth that sinners are justified by faith, later in the same epistle adds that “we are saved by hope” (Romans 8:24).

While Romans chapters 3 through 5 teach the joyous news that faith alone is the instrument of justification, Romans 8:24 exemplifies how faith is not alone in the person justified but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces.

How supremely powerful is hope in Romans 8! It is this hope, which always accompanies justification, that gets us through the trials and tribulations of life in a fallen world.

Hope is like a sweet, younger sister of faith who is always waiting to take us by the hand and get us victoriously through “tribulation, distress, famine, nakedness, peril or sword” (Romans 8:35).

Chapters 6 and 7 of Hebrews anchor this victorious hope in a person and in our relationship to Him. They explain how the One who justified us

by His blood and righteousness once-for-all (Hebrews 7:27) now lives continuously in the immediate presence of the Father to apply all the benefits of His redemption in the precise way we need them during all the testings of our earthly life (Hebrews 7:25). Sweet sister hope takes our hand and says: Look up to Him now; He will get you through this!

Hebrews chapters 6 and 7 show that the eternal Christ, because of His Melchizedekian priesthood, is able to keep us without intermission under the cleansing blood and in the immediate presence of God “by the power of His endless life” (Hebrews 7:16).

It is our dwelling in the immediate presence of God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit that supplies everything we need to triumph over the attacks of the world, the flesh, and the devil and get us safely home in due time to the Father.

Sweet sister hope is there to keep us looking up to who we really are in the exalted Christ, and she is there to remind us of the surpassing efficiency of His priesthood above everything Aaron’s priesthood could accomplish before “the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us” (John 1:14).

The significance of Christ’s being “a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Hebrews 6:20; Psalm 110:4) is precisely what keeps us so near to God in time and eternity.

***“We have this as a  
sure and steadfast  
anchor of the soul,  
a hope that enters  
into the inner place  
behind the  
curtain...”***

***Hebrews 6:19***

His Melchizedekian priesthood is what enabled Him (rather than the Aaronic order of high priests) “to enter into God’s presence for us as our fore-runner” (Hebrews 6:20), and thus “to save us to the uttermost” since “we come unto God by him” (Hebrews 7:25).

“Saving us to the uttermost” includes (as the greater includes the lesser) providing for our ultimately safe and fruitful passage through personal weakness and loss, grief, persecution, and, finally, death itself. It includes finishing successfully the work of sanctification on earth and glorification in heaven.

The inspired author of Hebrews magnifies the superior efficiency of Christ’s priesthood by contrasting Melchizedek to Aaron and his sons. He emphasizes Melchizedek’s superior standing to Aaron by anchoring Melchizedek’s ability to bless in terms of eternity rather than in terms of physical descent from previous priests.

The order of Aaronic priests derived their true, but very limited, authority by being born of earlier priests and by passing on their functions to their sons and grandsons (Hebrews 7:23). Thus, they were severely limited in their representative capacities by time in two different ways.

First, during their lives they could get into the Holy of Holies where they sprinkled blood on the mercy seat for their own sins and for the sins of the people only once per year. The animal blood they offered temporarily covered sin but did not remove it; only Christ’s blood could do that (Hebrews 9:12–14). Therefore, their sacrifices had to be repeated over and over.

Second, their ministry was limited by their own physical deaths, at which time they were replaced by other priests. But the Puritan commentator John Owen once wrote to the effect that while the Aaronic priests died from being priests, Christ, after the order of Melchizedek, died as our priest, totally completing to highest perfection that shedding of blood that conveys eternal remission of sin (Hebrews 9:22).

No genealogy is given for Melchizedek in Hebrews or where he is first mentioned in Genesis 14. His priesthood is unique in time; it depends not on ancestors but on God alone, and thus it represents eternal efficacy.

Christ, being of the tribe of Judah (and not of Levi, the father of Aaron) is in the line of Melchizedek, the representative of eternal and constant blessing who operates “in the power of an endless life” rather than in the temporally limited, “carnal” descent of Aaron (Heb. 7:16).

Because that endless life catches us up in union with Himself in highest glory (Ephesians 2:6), sweet sister hope reminds us, along with the writer of Hebrews, every hour of every day, that we are “drawing near” to God (Hebrews 7:19). And so this upward drawing of “the better hope” perfects that which justification by faith has inalterably established in those for whom Christ died.

***Christ provides for our ultimately safe and fruitful passage through personal weakness and loss, grief, persecution, and, finally, death itself.***



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