

How to Deal With Those Who Entertain False Hopes

by R.A. Torrey

The sermon discusses how to deal with those who entertain false hopes, including those who think they can be saved by their righteous life, those who think God is too good to damn anyone, and those who say they are trying to be a Christian.

Scripture: Romans 3:19, Galatians 2:16

Topics: "Faith vs. Works", "False Hopes in Salvation"

Description

R.A. Torrey addresses the issue of false hopes in salvation, emphasizing that many rely on their own righteousness or mere profession of faith rather than true belief in Christ. He highlights that salvation is not achieved through good works or feelings but through faith in Jesus, as outlined in Scripture. Torrey uses various biblical passages to illustrate that self-righteousness leads to condemnation and that true faith must be accompanied by repentance and a transformed life. He warns against the dangers of assuming salvation based on outward appearances or feelings, urging listeners to seek a genuine relationship with God through faith. Ultimately, Torrey calls for a reliance on God's Word as the foundation for hope in salvation.

Transcript

I. THE HOPE OF BEING SAVED BY A RIGHTEOUS LIFE.

1. This is the most common of false hopes. Even among those who profess to be Christians, there are many who are really depending upon their lives as Christians for their acceptance before God.

Those who are depending upon their righteous lives for salvation, are readily known by their saying such things as this: "I am doing the best I can."

"I do more good than evil." "I am not a great sinner." "I have never done anything very bad."

This mistake can be directly met by Gal. 2:16:

"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for **BY THE WORKS OF THE LAW SHALL NO FLESH BE JUSTIFIED.**"

After the passage has been read, you can say to the one with whom you are dealing, "Now you are expecting to be justified and accepted before God by what you are doing, by your own life and character; but God tells you in this passage, that 'by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.'" Follow this up by Romans 3:19-20:

"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore **BY THE DEEDS OF THE LAW THERE SHALL NO FLESH BE JUSTIFIED IN HIS SIGHT:** for by the law is the knowledge of sin."

Call attention to the fact that here again we are told that, "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight," and {91} furthermore, that the purpose of the law is to

stop the mouths of men. Then take him to Galatians

3:10:

"For AS MANY AS ARE OF THE WORKS OF THE LAW ARE UNDER THE CURSE; for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."

Before he reads it, say to him, "I want you to read a verse from the Word of God that tells you just how God regards one who is trying to be saved by his righteous life, as you are." Then let him read the passage. When he has read the passage, ask him where God says that he is, and hold him to the point until he sees that in depending upon his good deeds for salvation, he is under the curse.

James 2:10 will also be found useful:

"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet OFFEND IN ONE POINT, he is guilty of all."

Before the man reads the verse you can say, "Well, if you are going to be saved by your righteous life, let us see what God requires in order that a man may be saved on the ground." After he has read the verse, show him that if he is going to be saved by the law, he must keep the whole law, for if he offends in one point he is guilty of all.

A verse which is useful in showing the kind of righteousness that God demands, is Matthew 5:20:

"For I say unto you, That except your

righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

This verse shows that no man's righteousness comes up to God's standard, and if a man wishes to be saved, he must find some other way of salvation than by his own deeds. It is sometimes well in using this passage, to say to the inquirer, "You do not understand the kind of righteousness God demands, or you would not talk as you do. Now let us turn to God's own Word and see what kind of righteousness it is that God demands."

2. There is another way of dealing with this class, by using such passages as these:

"And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God KNOWETH YOUR HEARTS: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." Luke 16:15. {92}

"In the day when GOD SHALL JUDGE THE SECRETS OF MEN by Jesus Christ according to my gospel." Romans 2:16.

"But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but THE LORD LOOKETH ON THE HEART."

1_Samuel 16:7.

These passages show that God looks at the heart. Hold the inquirer right to that point. Every man, when brought face to face with that, must tremble, for he knows that whatever his outward life may be, his heart will not stand the scrutiny of God's all-seeing and holy eye. No matter how self-righteous a man may appear, we need not be discouraged, for somewhere in the depths of every man's heart is the consciousness of sin, and all we have to do is to work away until we touch that point. Every man's conscience is on our side.

3. Matthew 22:37-38 can also be used with those who expect to be saved by their righteous lives. You can say to the man, "If you expect to be saved by your righteous life, you are greatly deceived, and certainly entertain a false hope. For so far from living a righteous life, you have broken the very first and greatest of God's commandments." Of course he may not believe this at first, but you can turn him to the passage mentioned, and show him what the first and greatest of God's commandments is, and ask him if he has kept it. This passage is especially useful if a man says, "I am doing the best I can," or if he says, "I am doing more good than evil." you can say to him, "You are greatly mistaken about that. So far from

doing more good than evil, you have broken the first and greatest of God's laws," and then show him the passage.

4. A fourth method of dealing with this class is to use Hebrews 11:6 and John 6:29:

"But WITHOUT FAITH it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

"Jesus answered and said unto them, THIS is the work of God, THAT YE BELIEVE ON HIM WHOM HE HATH SENT."

These passages show that the one thing which God demands is faith, that the work of God is to believe on Him whom He hath sent, and that without faith it is impossible to please God whatever {93} else a man may possess. John 16:9 can also be used to show that unbelief in Christ is the greatest sin:

"Of sin, BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE NOT ON ME."

5. Still another way of dealing with this class is by the use of John 3:36:

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

This shows that the gift of eternal life depends solely upon a man's acceptance of Jesus Christ.

That the sin which brings the heaviest punishment is that of treading under foot the Son of God, can be shown by Hebrews 10:28-29:

"He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

Before using this passage, it is well to say, "You think you are very good, but do you know that you are committing the most awful sin in God's sight which a man can commit?" If he replies, "I do not think so," then tell him, "Let me show you from God's Word that you are." Then turn to this passage and read it with great solemnity and earnestness.

A very useful passage with many a self-righteous man is Luke 18:10-14. You can say to the man, "There is a picture in the Bible of a man just like you, who expected to be accepted before God on the ground of his righteousness, and who had, as men go, much righteousness to present to God, but let us see what God says to him." Then have him read the passage.

It is well to bring all those who expect to be

saved by a righteous life into the presence of God, for in His holy presence self-righteousness fades away. (See Isaiah 6:5 and Job 42:5-6.) But how shall we bring any one into the presence of God? By opening to them passages that reveal the holiness of God, and by praying the Holy Spirit to carry these passages home. It is also well whenever possible, to get the inquirer to pray. Many a man who is stoutly maintaining his excellence before God, has given way when he has been brought to get down on his knees in God's very presence. {94}

II. "GOD IS TOO GOOD TO DAMN ANY ONE."

This is what another class of those who entertain false hopes think.

1. When any one says this, you can reply, "We know nothing about God's goodness, except what we learn from the Bible. If we give up the Bible, we have no conclusive proof that God is love, and can therefore build no hopes upon His goodness. But if we accept the Bible statement that God is love, we must also accept the Bible representations of the goodness of God. Let us then go to the Bible and find out the character of God's goodness." Then turn the inquirer to Romans 2:4-5:

"Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long suffering; NOT KNOWING THAT

THE GOODNESS OF GOD LEADETH THEE TO REPENTANCE?

But after thy hardness and impenitent heart
treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day
of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment
of God."

When the man has read the verse, you can say to
him, "This verse tells us what the purpose of
God's goodness is; what is it?" "To lead us to
repentance." "And what does this verse tell us
will be the result if we do not permit the
goodness of God to lead us to repentance, but
trample it under foot and make it an excuse for
sin?" He will find the answer to this question in
verse five, and hold him to it until he sees it,
that if we despise the riches of His goodness,
then we are treasuring up unto ourselves "wrath
against the day of wrath and revelation of the
righteous judgment of God." You can also use John
8:21,24 and John 3:36 to show the man that however
good we may be, if we do not believe in Jesus with
a living faith, we shall die in our sins, and not
go where Jesus is, and that we shall not see life,
but that the wrath of God abideth upon us.

2. Still another way to deal with this man is to
show him that it is not so much God who damns men,
as men who damn themselves in spite of God's
goodness, because they will not repent and come to

Christ and accept the life freely offered. For

this purpose use 2_Peter 3:9-11:

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long suffering to us-ward, NOT WILLING THAT ANY SHOULD PERISH, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord {95} will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?"

Another good passage to use in this way is John 5:40:

"AND YE WILL NOT COME to me, that ye might have life."

Press the thought of this text home, that if any one does not obtain life, it is because he will not come to Christ, and that men therefore are damned in spite of God's goodness if they will not come to Christ and accept life. In much the same way one can use Ezekiel 33:11:

"Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn

ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

It is sometimes well to say, "You are right in thinking that God is not willing to damn any one: furthermore He offers life freely to you, but there is one difficulty in the way. Let us turn to John 5:40 and see what the difficulty is." When he has read it, you can say, "You see now, that the difficulty is not that God wishes to damn you, but that you will not come to Christ that you might have life."

3. If these methods do not succeed, 2_Peter 2:4-6,9 may prove effectual:

"For if GOD SPARED NOT THE ANGELS THAT SINNED, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness to be reserved unto judgment; and spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly;

"The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished."

Before using the passage you can say, "The best

way to judge what God will do is not by speculating about it, but by looking at what He has done in the past." Then turn to these passages and let him read. When he has read it, ask him, "What did God do with the angels that sinned?" "What did He do with the world of the ungodly in the days of Noah?" "What did He do with the wicked {96} in the days of Sodom and Gomorrha? What then may you expect Him to do with you in spite of any theories that you may have about His character and actions." This should all be done not in a controversial way, but with great earnestness, tenderness and solemnity. You can say still further, "God has not left us to speculate as to what He will do with the persistently impenitent, He has told us plainly in Matthew 25:41,46":

"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

"And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."

You may say still further that God does bear long with man, but His dealings with man in the past show that at last His day of waiting will end, and in spite of man's doubt of His word, and doubt of his severity in dealing with the persistently

impenitent, He does at last punish. You might use 2_Chronicles 36:11-21 as an illustrative case in point.

4. It is well sometimes to add to all the other passages, John 3:18-19:

"He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned ALREADY, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

Before having the inquirer read the verses, you can say, "You say God is too good to damn any one, but the truth is that you are condemned already.

It is not a question of what is going to happen to you in the future, but a question of your present position before God." When he has read the passage, ask him, "When is it that the one who believeth not is condemned?" "Already." "Why is it that he is condemned?" "Because light is come into the world, and he loves darkness rather than light."

5. Luke 13:3 is very effective in some cases, for it shows how the "good" God deals with persons who persist in sin. The passage can be used in this way: "You say God is too good to damn any one, but

let us see what God Himself says in His Word."

Then turn to the passage and read, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Repeat the passage over and over again until it has {97} been driven home.

An earnest missionary in the western part of New York was once holding meetings in a country village. The Universalist minister of the place was very anxious to engage the missionary in a controversy, but the missionary always said that he was too busy for controversy. One day the Universalist minister came into the house where the missionary was calling; he was delighted to see him, for he thought that his opportunity for a discussion had come at last. He began the customary universalist argument about God being too good to damn any one. After he had gone through the usual volume of words, the missionary simply replied, "I am too busy for argument, but I just want to say to you, that except you repent, you shall likewise perish." The Universalist was somewhat angry, but replied sneeringly, "That is not argument, it is simply a quotation from the Bible," and then ran on with another stream of words. When he had finished his second speech, the missionary simply replied, "I have no time for argument, but I just want to say to you, except

you repent, you shall likewise perish." Again the Universalist sneered and poured forth another torrent of what he called argument. What he had finished this time the missionary again said, "I have no time for controversy, I simply want to say to you that except you repent, you shall likewise perish. Now I must go, but let me say, you will not be able to forget what I have said." The Universalist preacher laughed, and said he guessed he would forget it quick enough, that the missionary had used no argument whatever, but had simply quoted the Bible. The following day there was a knock at the missionary's door, and when it was opened, the Universalist preacher came in. The missionary said, "I have no time for argument." "Oh, sir!" said the other, "I have not come to argue with you. You were right yesterday when you told me there was one thing I would not be able to forget; I feel that it is true, that except I repent I must perish, and I have come to ask you what I must do to be saved." The missionary showed the man the way of life, and the result was, the Universalist became a real believer in Christ, and a preacher of the truth he had previously labored to pull down.

III. "I AM TRYING TO BE A CHRISTIAN."

The third class of those who entertain false

hopes, are those who say, "I am trying to be a Christian." {98}

1. Show the inquirer that it is trusting and not trying that saves. For this purpose use Isaiah 12:2:

"Behold, God is my salvation; I WILL TRUST, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation."

When he has read it, ask him what it is the prophet says, "I will try?" "No, I will trust."

Another verse which can also be used to show that it is not trying to be a Christian, but believing on Christ that saves, is Acts 16:31:

"And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

John 1:12 is very useful. Before using it, you can say, "What God asks of you is not to try to be a Christian, or to try to live a better life, or to try to do anything but simply to receive Jesus Christ who did it all." Then have the passage read and say to the inquirer, "Will you now stop your trying, and simply receive Jesus as a Savior?" Make it very clear what this means and hold the inquirer to this point.

2. Another way of dealing with this class is to show the inquirer that it is NOT TRYING what we can do, BUT TRUSTING what Jesus has done that

saves from guilt. Use for this purpose Romans

3:23-26:

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just and THE JUSTIFIER OF HIM WHICH BELIEVETH IN JESUS."

When the inquirer has read the passage, ask him if this teaches us that we are justified by trying to do something. "No." "Then how are we justified?" Hold him to it until he says, "Freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," and sees that it is on the simple condition of faith. Another very effective passage to use in the same way is Romans 4:3-5:

"For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But TO HIM THAT WORKETH NOT, BUT BELIEVETH on him that justifieth the ungodly, HIS FAITH is counted for righteousness." {99}

This makes it clear as day that it is not our trying, but our believing on Him that justifies us. Acts 10:43 and 13:38 can be used in a similar way.

3. It is also well to show the inquirer that it is not our trying in our own strength, but our trusting in Christ's strength that saves from the power of sin. To make this clear, use the following passages:

"Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." Jude 24.

"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" 1_John 5:4-5.

"For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." 2_Timothy 1:12.

"Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." 1_Peter 1:5.

IV. "I FEEL SAVED", OR "I FEEL THAT I AM GOING TO

HEAVEN"

There are very many in this class, very many who think that their entrance into heaven is sure because they "feel saved," or feel that they are going to heaven.

1. The first thing to do with this class is to show them the utter unreliability of our feeling as a ground of hope. An excellent passage for this purpose is Jeremiah 17:9:

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

Follow this up with Proverbs 14:12:

"There is a way WHICH SEEMETH RIGHT unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

After reading the latter passage, you can say to the inquirer, "The way you are going seems to be right, it seems to you as if it would lead to heaven, but what does this passage tell us about a way that seemeth to be right unto a man?" "The end thereof are the ways of death." Then drive the thought home that it will not do to rest our hope upon anything less sure than the Word of God. Luke 18:9-14 may be used in this way. You can say, "We are told in the {100} Bible about a man who felt saved, and felt sure of going to heaven, let us read about him." Then let him read the story of the Pharisee, and show how he was not saved for

all his self- confidence. Isaiah 55:8 can also be used to enforce the thought that God's thoughts are not our thoughts, and while we may think we are saved, God may clearly see that we are not.

2. Having shown how little confidence is to be put in our feeling, show the true ground of hope, namely God's Word. Use for this purpose Titus 1:2:

"In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began."

You can say, "Paul had a hope of eternal life.

Upon what was that hope built?" "The Word of God

'that cannot lie.'" Then say to the person, "Do

you want a hope built upon that sure ground?" Take

him then to John 3:36. That verse tells clearly

how to get such a hope.

One afternoon I was speaking to a woman who a few

weeks before had lost her only child. At the time

of the child's death she had been especially

interested, but her serious impressions had

largely left her. After a time I put to her the

question, "Do you not wish to go where your little

one has gone?" She replied, "I expect to." "What

makes you think that you will," I asked. She

answered, "I feel so: I feel that I will go to

heaven when I die." I then asked her if there was

anything she could point to in the Word of God

which gave her a reason for believing that she was

going to heaven when she died. She replied that there was not. She then turned to me and began to question me: "Do you expect to go to heaven when you die?" "Yes, I know I shall." "How do you know it? Have you any word from God for it?" "Yes," I answered, and turned to John 3:36. She was then led to see the difference between a faith that depended upon her feeling, and a faith that depended upon the Word of God.

V. THE HOPE OF BEING SAVED BY A MERE PROFESSION OF RELIGION, OR BY A FAITH THAT DOES NOT SAVE FROM SIN AND LEAD TO REPENTANCE.

In many communities it is very common to meet men and women who believe they are saved because they hold to an orthodox creed, or because they have been baptized or made a profession {101} of religion. This is one of the most dangerous of all false hopes, but it can be readily dealt with.

1. A good passage to begin with is Titus 1:16:

"They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate."

You can say to the person, "You profess to know God, but God Himself tells us that many who profess to know Him are lost; let me show it to you in His Word." When they have read the verse, you can say, "Now if one professes to know God,

but denies Him in his life, what does God Himself say that such a one is?" "Abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate."

Another passage which can be used in very much the same way is Matthew 7:21-23.

"NOT EVERY ONE THAT SAITH UNTO ME LORD, LORD, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

You might say, "God tells us plainly in His Word that one may make a profession of religion, may be active even in Christian work, and yet be lost after all." Then have him read the verses. When they are read, you can say, "According to these verses, will a mere profession of religion save any one?" "No, doing the will of the Father which is in heaven." "Are you doing His will?"

2. A second way of dealing with this class is to say, "God tells us plainly that in order to be saved we must be born again." Then show them John 3:3-5:

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily,

I say unto thee, EXCEPT A MAN BE BORN AGAIN, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

When these verses are read, you can say, "Now these verses make it clear, that in order to enter the kingdom of God, one must be born again. Now let us turn to other parts of the Bible and see what it is to be born again." For this purpose use the following: {102}

"Whosoever is born of God DOTH NOT COMMIT SIN, for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." 1_John 3:9.

"If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that EVERY ONE THAT DOETH RIGHTEOUSNESS is born of him." 1_John 2:29.

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, HE IS A NEW CREATURE: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." 2_Corinthians 5:17.

3. A third method of dealing with this class is by saying, "Yes, faith does indeed save, but it is a certain kind of faith that saves." To show what the faith that saves is, turn to Galatians 5:6:

"For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but FAITH WHICH WORKETH BY LOVE."

This passage says that it is faith which worketh by love. Romans 10:9-10 that it is a faith of the heart:

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe IN THINE HEART that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. FOR WITH THE HEART man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

while James 2:14 tells us that it is faith which shows itself in works:

"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith but have not works? can that faith save him?" (RV)

4. 1_John 5:4-5 is also very useful as showing that one who really has faith in Jesus as the Son of God, and is born of God, overcomes the world.

The passage reads as follows:

"For whatsoever is born of God OVERCOMETH THE WORLD; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"

The fact that one is living in sin and not

overcoming the world, but being overcome by it, is
conclusive proof that he really has not faith that
Jesus is the Son of God, and that he has not been
born of God.

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