



# A Closer Look

AT THINGS PERTAINING TO THE FAITH

August 2003

## Hope is a Virtue

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Christianity is composed of three great virtues—faith, hope, and love (I Cor. 13:13). Paul wrote to the Colossians, “We give thanks to God... since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all the saints; because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven” (Col. 1:2,4; cf. I Thess. 1:3). So central are these three virtues to the Christian life that, broadly speaking, Paul could be deemed “the apostle of faith,” Peter “the apostle of hope,” and John “the apostle of love.” Our study in this article will give a closer look at the biblical concept of “hope.”

### THE MEANING

Words change meaning. Nowhere is this truth more important than in a consideration of the word “hope.” The common usage of this word today is quite different than the biblical usage. For instance, we should recognize the difference between, “I hope it rains” and “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.” The former is a pie-in-the-sky wish, the latter states a conviction of the soul based upon real knowledge gleaned from indisputable evidence. The word is often used today to express a desire for a certain result that will be determined by pure chance (“I hope I roll a double-six”) or by natural law (“I hope it rains”). But children of God possess hopes that are based upon the immutable promises of a sovereign God who cannot lie (Titus 1:2).

Both of these usages are seen in a single verse in the New Testament. The Romans were reminded that

when God promised Abraham that he and Sarah would produce a son in their old age, Abraham “contrary to hope, in hope believed” (Rom. 4:18). That is, contrary to any natural hope, in the hope of God believed. The infertility of the aged Abraham and Sarah precluded any possibility of natural conception (see v. 19), but God had made the promise and thus Abraham knew Sarah would conceive. “He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief” (v. 20). The writer of Hebrews also explains that Abraham’s well-founded hope stemmed from his understanding of the immutable nature of God’s word (Heb. 6:13-18). It is clear that the hope of God is never mere “wishful thinking,”

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### Focus:

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but rather a firm conviction based upon our belief in the infallible promises of God. When we know what future promises God has made in His word, we can have a hope that serves as “an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast” (Heb. 6:19).

### THE MOTIVATION

The most prominent hope mentioned in the Bible is the Christian’s hope of heaven. Since the hope of heaven is yet future, it ever beckons us forward in our spiritual journey toward righteousness. Paul elucidates on the unique way our future hope generates patient endurance, “hope that is seen (already realized) is not hope... if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance” (Rom. 8:24). Since we know what God has promised the faithful Christian after this life (cf. Jn. 14:1-3), we can glean the strength to overcome temptations and impurity.

John said, “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... And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (I Jn. 3:3). John reminds us:

- (1) our hope is based upon our knowledge of future promises (“we know...”),
- (2) our hope will motivate us to greater faithfulness, and
- (3) our hope will be realized by those of us who purify ourselves in conformity to Jesus Christ.

What greater motivation is needed? The Christian’s hope of eternal salvation urges us to persevere in the sanctification process and “be conformed to the image of His dear Son (Rom. 8:28-30). No wonder this hope is an essential element of the Christian’s armor in the battle for the soul. Paul said our helmet is the “hope of salvation” (I Thess. 5:8; cf. Eph. 6:17). If we should remove our helmets in the battle we will be casualties of war!

### THE EMOTION

Further, the future hope of eternal life with God is a huge source of joy. After accessing the grace of God through faith we “rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:2). Probably the greatest aspect of this hope, that brings deep-seated joy to the Christian, is its inviolable nature. Paul says explicitly, “Now hope does not disappoint” (Rom. 5:5). Did you hear that?! God’s promise of eternal reward is certain. No faithful Christian will approach the dawn of eternity after this life to find that God has changed His mind. No brother in Christ who has persevered through the trials of life and remained steadfast in his service to the Lord will later learn that some unforeseen factor has prevented God from fulfilling His promise of heaven. After having lived a faithful Christian life, Paul says, our hope will not be disappointed!

Notice now the truth upon which Paul bases this assertion—the crucifixion of Jesus. Paul says our hope will not disappoint because “the love of God has been poured out in our hearts...” (Rom. 5:5). He then proceeds to explain what is involved in that love. “Christ died for the ungodly... God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners,

Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:6-8). The thrust of Paul’s argument is that if God “did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32). When we look at the cross of Christ, we see just how firm and certain God’s promises really are. One thing humanity has always desperately needed is security—a sure and steadfast foundation upon which to build our lives. This security is found only in God and His promises of forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus Christ.

In application of his argument Paul states, “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, be we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.” Truly in our hope of eternal life there is “joy inexpressible and full of glory” (I Pet. 1:9).

### CONCLUSION

The three necessary virtues of faithful lives are faith, hope, and love. While all deeds of service are to be guided and motivated by love, the Christian faith reveals the mystery of the ages—which is, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).

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### Upcoming Issues:

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A bumpersticker I once saw read as follows: “Ever since I gave up hope, I feel much better.” While intending to be humorous, the statement nevertheless reflects the way that many presently live their lives—without hope

To live without hope is to have nothing to genuinely live for. Without hope we succumb to despair, loneliness and meaninglessness in living. Often times our indulgence in the fleeting pleasures of sin is the result of our efforts to escape the painful reality that our lives have no meaning. Contrary to the bumpersticker’s counsel, giving up hope does not lead to “feeling better” but only produces the pain and inner emptiness that too often describes the manner of life of many.

Is there any answer to the problem of a life without hope? According to the Apostle Paul there is. He proclaims that in the gospel is found the message of hope that every soul needs to hear. It is “the hope of the gospel” (Col 1:23). The hope of the gospel tells us that in the midst of a world of sin and sorrow life does have meaning. The gospel offers us the full assurance that the promise of eternal life is not a “pie in the sky” fantasy but a reality that we can build our entire life on. Such claims certainly demand the attention of every honest inquirer. Let us then consider the hope of the gospel from three points of view: 1) The nature of hope, 2) The hope of the gospel, and 3) The assurance of hope.

### THE NATURE OF HOPE

The first step in gaining a proper understanding of the biblical concept of hope is to be sure we do not equate it with the idea of “wishing.” To wish is to have a desire for something while having no assurance that you will get it. To hope includes not only a desire for something but also the assurance that what you desire will one day become a reality. For example, a child who wants a bike for Christmas may say “I hope I get a bike” but all he is really expressing is a wish for it. It may be the case that he won’t get a bike. However, if his parents inform him that he will be getting a bike he cannot “wish” for it because he now knows he will

receive it. Instead, he lives each day “in hope” until the promised bike arrives on Christmas morning.

In the same way the Biblical notion of hope involves both desire and assurance. This explains why Paul could write that “hope does not disappoint” (Rom. 5:5). A wish does not always come true but a hope does. Once we possess what we hope for we

no longer live in hope but in the satisfaction of what we desired. As Paul says, “hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still

hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance” (Rom. 8:24-25). That we live “in hope” as Christians means there is something we have a deep desire for and know will one day be ours. What then is this “hope?”

### THE HOPE OF THE GOSPEL

We can perhaps best summarize the Christian’s hope by identifying it as “eternal life.” Titus 1:1 speaks of “the hope of eternal life” which God “who cannot lie promised before time began.” What then is this “eternal life” the gospel offers?

While eternal life does indeed point to a never ending existence this alone does not constitute eternal life. The disobedient will also experience a never ending existence but apart from the presence of God (Matt. 25:46). Jesus described the essential nature of eternal life in John 17:3: “And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” For Jesus eternal life is entering into fellowship with the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3) and growing in the peace, joy and love that results from such a union (John 14:27; 15:11; 17:23,26). Thus eternal life is a quality of life and not just the quantity of everlasting existence. When we respond to the gospel we pass “from death to life” (1 Jn. 3:14) and live with the assurance that we “have eternal life” (1 Jn. 5:13).

But if we now have eternal life how can we hope for it as well? It is important to notice that in Scripture eternal life has both present and future aspects. While the saint presently enjoys fellowship with God there are aspects of eternal life that have

## The Hope of the Gospel

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yet to be realized. For example, in the Romans passage wherein Paul described hope for us he began by saying “...we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope...” (Rom. 8:23-24). Paul knew he was saved (a present reality), but he was saved in the hope of having his body raised from the dead to never die again (a future reality). This is an aspect of our salvation that few in the church seem to appreciate and yet it was central to the Apostles’ teaching. For Paul eternal life was fully realized only when one was in the very presence of God in an immortal and incorruptible body (2 Cor. 5:1-10; 1 Thess. 5:23) . Since this is not a present possession we live in the hope of it. Appreciating the present and future elements of eternal life can also help us to understand how one may be saved and later through unfaithfulness forfeit the gift of eternal life.

### THE ASSURANCE OF HOPE

If eternal life is living forever in the very presence of God in an immortal body how can anyone know this is true? Peter said that God “has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet. 1:3). It was the historical reality that Christ died, was buried, and was raised from the dead (1 Cor. 15: 3-4) that formed the basis of the saint’s hope of eternal life.

To His disciples Christ “presented Himself alive after his suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days” (Acts 1:3). The Apostles fearlessly proclaimed themselves to be “eyewitnesses” of the resurrected Christ (Acts 2:32; 3: 15; 4:20; 5:32) and on one occasion Jesus was seen by over 500 brethren at once (1 Cor. 15:6). Jesus “has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10). The entire gospel stands or falls on whether Jesus was raised from the dead. As Paul reasoned, if Christ was not raised from the dead then the apostles are liars, our faith is in vain, we are still in our sins and “if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable” (1 Cor. 15:12-19). The abundant testimony to Jesus being alive from the dead assures us not only that He was raised but that we too shall participate in the resurrection to life at the last day should we respond to the gospel and remain faithful until death

(John 11:2-26; 1 Cor. 15:50-57; Phil 3:20-21; Rev. 2:10).

### CONCLUSION

The Hebrew writer describes our hope as being “an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast” (Heb. 6:19). While hope looks to the future it enables us to live with joy now. Jesus’ resurrection reveals that life does not have to end in the meaninglessness of the grave but in everlasting life in the presence of the one who loved us and rescued us from sin and death. Let us then renew our minds daily with the hope of eternal life that we might live “with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (1 Pet. 1:8).

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So now faith, hope, and  
love abide, these three;  
but the greatest of these is  
love.

1 Corinthians 13:13

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## A Closer Look

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