

Hope—Confident Expectation

*“Now abideth faith,
hope, charity
[love].”*
—*I Corinthians 13:13*

LIFE, FOR THE MAJORITY

of people in this present evil world, has been filled with despair. This should come to us as no surprise when we review our own previous condition and the condition of all the people in the world who do not have a knowledge of God and his plan. It is amazing that, under the circumstances, people can have any kind of hope. Yet, the old adage we hear so often is true, “Hope springs eternal in the human breast.” Innately, mankind continues to hope that a bad situation will get better, even though at the time it is a situation of despair.

Many are inclined to think of hope as meaning “desire,” but the true definition of hope is “desire with expectation of fulfillment.” Unfortunately, the hope that arises in most human breasts has not been fulfilled. This may explain why most of the world thinks of hope in terms of desire only. The expectation of fulfillment is, in so many cases, very dim.

The biblical use of the word “hope” is definitely that of expectation. Furthermore, the hope of the

Bible, by being associated with the promises of God, is a virtue which includes a “confident and favorable expectation of good.” It is a virtue that we as Christians are admonished to develop so that we will not despair, but be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

FORMERLY WITHOUT HOPE

When the Apostle Paul described our former condition—before we came to a knowledge of God—he said, “At that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.” (Eph. 2:12) Notice he stressed that we had “no hope.” Now that we have come to a knowledge of Christ and of God and his plan, we have a most marvelous hope. We become especially aware of this hope when someone who is dear to us dies and we recall the Apostle Paul’s words in I Thessalonians 4:13: “I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.”

The reason we do not sorrow as those that have no hope is that we have faith in the promises of God. Hence, in I Thessalonians 4:14, we see how, by the logic of Paul, this faith is tied to the resurrection of those who “sleep in Jesus.” From other scriptures, we see that Jesus has promised to raise all mankind from the dead. “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the

resurrection of [judgment].”—John 5:28,29, *Revised Standard Version*

As we have noted, faith in the promises of God is directly related to our hope. Through faith we are able to assemble all the facts we find in God’s holy Word, leading us to certain important conclusions. We are glad that the truth we find in the Bible does not cause us to conclude that the great majority of mankind will find themselves in eternal torment, or that all mankind will merely return to the dust from whence they came, or that we alone will be saved. If our perusal of the Bible’s teachings would lead us to any of the foregoing incorrect conclusions, we would have no hope, or at best a limited, selfish hope.

Thanks be to God, who has given us our hope! We know that the wonderful hope we possess is not wishful thinking but comes directly from God. Our ability to see it revealed in his Word is because of the power of his Holy Spirit. This is clearly stated by the Apostle Paul in Romans 15:13: “Now the God of hope [the author of this hope] fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit.”

HOPE IN THE RESURRECTION

The very close association of this hope to the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead is evident from other scriptures. The Apostle Paul spoke of it in Acts 23:6, when standing before the Sanhedrin: “When Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the

son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.” Later, when brought before the governor, Felix, he told how he believed all those things which are written in the Law and the Prophets, saying, “[I] have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.”—Acts 24:15

Still later, when standing before Festus and King Agrippa, Paul again mentioned this hope, saying, “Now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope’s sake, King Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?”—Acts 26:6-8

The first indication of this hope and how it would be fulfilled was given by God in his statement to the serpent in the presence of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” (Gen. 3:15) This hope was to be based on the coming of one, born of woman, who would crush evil for all time. Later, the promise made to Abraham, “In thee and thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed,” further defined this hope as being associated with the seed of Abraham. Finally, when Jesus came as the promised seed of Abraham and was put to death, this hope became associated with his resurrection. The Bible assures us that all peoples are to participate in the realization of this hope.

HOPE OF GLORY

The hope which footstep followers of Christ have goes beyond restoration to life. For these, there is the added hope of glory like unto that possessed inherently by the Father, and now possessed also by Jesus. This hope is mentioned in several scriptures: "The hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel." (Col. 1:5) Again, "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." (vs. 27) In Romans 5:2, the Apostle Paul mentions a rejoicing in the "hope [of sharing] of the glory of God." In Hebrews 6:18-20, we are told that it is a secure and sure hope: "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec."

The Apostle in the above scripture is alluding to the Tabernacle and to the hope we have of entering into heaven itself, pictured by the Most Holy. A reward of the divine nature awaits all who are able to reach this condition by being faithful unto death. Jesus, our forerunner, was able to do so. Hebrews, chapters 5 and 6, provide the background for this picture. They give us an insight into the experiences of Jesus in carrying out God's purpose for him. We must follow his steps in order to realize this glorious hope.

In Romans, chapter 8, the Apostle Paul explains that we must be willing to suffer with Christ and walk after the Spirit and not after the flesh. This is not easy. Sufferings for righteousness' sake will be encountered. Nevertheless, these sufferings are insignificant when compared with the glory of our hope. "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."—Rom. 8:18

The Apostle Paul tells of the need for our willingness to undergo suffering for the attainment of this hope. "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us." (Rom. 5:1-5, *RSV*) Hence we might say that we rejoice in our sufferings and have hope—a confident expectation of good from these experiences—because we can see God's love in our every experience. Hope, then, comprises our inspiration and incentive for continuing on in the narrow way to the best of our ability, even as we endure afflictions.

LINKED TO LOVE AND FAITH

Although hope is associated with the future, God does not leave us without any evidence today of the assistance he liberally gives us for attaining

this hope. He convinces us through his love that what he promises to give us is true.

Hope is a virtue because, like faith, it is rare. Children have a sincere hope of good. Adults, however, because of the severity of life's experiences, become skeptical and absorbed by selfishness in preserving themselves. Hope is truly a link between faith and love. Faith uses facts on which to conclude matters. Hope is associated more with that part of faith which we call "heart reliance upon God." Such reliance is based on our supreme love for him. God, seeing that we have this hope together with faith and love, is pleased.

Paul says, "We are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." (Rom. 8:24,25) Soon our hope will become reality, and then it will cease to be hope. Our confident and favorable expectation of good will be real and will be seen by all. Until then, let us continue to have a favorable and confident expectation of good and, with patience, wait for its fulfillment. ■