

Hope, The Neglected Triplet

by J. W. Jepson, D.Min.

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Faith, hope, and love are powerful virtues, basic qualities of the Christian life. First Corinthians 13:13 (NKJV) speaks of "faith, hope, love, these three." Paul wrote to the Thessalonian believers that he remembered their "work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope" (1 Thessalonians 1:3 KJV). In Chapter 5, verse 8 he tells us to put on "the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation" (NKJV). Also, in Ephesians 1:15-18 Paul again links the three together. He heard of their "faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and love to all the saints" and prays that they will know "the hope of His calling."

Faith and love challenge and inspire people. Much has been written and preached about them. But what about the third member of "the big three"--hope? It too is an essential dynamic in the life of the believer, and the Bible contains a full development of this mighty truth. Yet for some reason we tend to neglect her. We do not usually see her standing in her proper place with her two sisters.

Perhaps the major reason is the deterioration of the word *hope* in common speech. In modern usage *hope* carries a connotation of uncertainty. When we say, "I hope so," we mean we are not sure. That idea is the opposite of the meaning of the word in the New Testament. The biblical doctrine of hope is this: hope is our destiny in Christ; it is laid up for us in Heaven (Colossians 1:5).

Hope is essentially objective. It is a certainty in itself--real, concrete; it is an established fact (objective). Our hope is already *there*--in Heaven, in Christ. Hope (subjective) is the believer's anticipation of what is already certain. Objective hope is not a virtue; it is certainty in itself; it is what is *there*. Subjective hope *is* a virtue; it is our confident anticipation of absolute

certainty. Objectively, our hope is *where* we are going; subjectively, hope is *knowing* where we are going.

Jesus spoke of our hope as objective, real, certain. He said that in His Father's house are many residences, and He is getting them ready for us. We will be where He *is*. (John 14:1 - 3). He instructs us to lay up treasures there (Matthew 6:19 - 21). Also, Hebrews 10:34 says that in Heaven we have "a better and enduring substance" (possessions).

Hope is future; faith is present. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for" (Hebrews 11:1 KJV). Hope is knowing where we are going; faith keeps us going; and love is the path that gets us there. All three work together, and love leads the way, bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things (1 Corinthians 13:7).

Our hope is in *the* hope. Our hope is keeping the certainty itself in view.

Suppose you are going to play in a crucial football game. You don't know if you can win this one or not. Just suppose that before you go out onto the field, God gives you a vision of the last three minutes of the game. You see the scoreboard, and the final score is 23-17 in your favor! What does that do to you? Do you go into the game with a careless attitude, thinking "this one's in the bag"? No way! You are energized. You give it your best. You know the times you are thrown for a loss will not change the outcome. So what if you are behind 10-0 at the half. You are not discouraged; in fact, you begin the second half "pumped." The victory is certain, and you know it!

The difference between that and the Christian hope is this: the certainty is not in our self-efforts but in what God has done in Christ. That really makes our hope sure and energizes the believer. Christ is the Captain of your team. He has never lost; He always wins and He always will.

Christ Himself is our hope (1 Timothy 1:1). It is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). It was established by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:3 says that we have been begotten again "into a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Verse 21 says that because God raised Christ from the dead and glorified Him, our "faith and hope are in God." Without the resurrection of Jesus Christ our faith would be vain, worthless, futile; believers would be the most miserable people of all and the most to be pitied (1 Corinthians 15:17-20).

Our hope is accurately recorded for us in The Scriptures. "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4 NKJV). Believers can pick up the Bible *and read their future!*

Eternal life is the Christian hope. "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the truth that leads to godliness--a faith and a knowledge resting

on the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the beginning of time" (Titus 1:1, 2 NIV). In 3:7 the apostle again affirms that, "being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (KJV).

In 2 Thessalonians 2:16 we read that God "loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope" (NIV).

Remember that in 1 Thessalonians 5:8 we are admonished to put on "for a helmet, the hope of salvation" (KJV). This includes the confidence that in Christ we shall stand righteous before Him on that day. "By faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope" (Galatians 5:5 NIV).

With this glorious hope set before us, how should we live in this present world?

Our destiny should motivate us to live disciplined, confident lives. The NIV of 1 Peter 1:13 reads, "Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is to be revealed." The original Greek phrases this as two participles followed by an imperative verb. "Therefore, preparing your minds, being self-controlled, *hope*..." Here is how this works in a game. If a team loses its poise and becomes careless, the coach calls "time" and brings the team over. He says, "Get your head in the game. Don't get careless. Follow through!" That is what 1 Peter 1:13 is saying to us. The glorious certainties of the Christian hope motivate us to be diligent--keep our head into our discipleship; not get careless and draw fouls; follow through to the ultimate victory!

The Christian hope is in Heaven; it also dwells deeply in the heart of the individual believer. Yet it is not a private, isolated hope that a person creates just for himself or herself. Far from it. It is a common hope, and each believer in Christ is united with all other believers in its certainties. "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling" (Ephesians 4:4 NKJV).

Our hope stabilizes us. It keeps us on a steady course.

"For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it" (Romans 8:24, 25 NASB). Though our hope is invisible, it is real; it is certain; it is *there*. We are saved in it. The context declares that at the resurrection, the creation itself shall be released from the curse. Colin Brown says that hope "feels solidarity with the whole creation."

Colossians 1:22 and 23 says that we will be presented blameless in God's sight if indeed we "continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel" (NKJV). We are to "hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end" (Hebrews 3:6 NKJV).

Because our hope in Christ is steadfast, we have an unshaken hope regarding the Church. Paul expressed this confidence in his letter to the church at Colosse (see Colossians 1:1-8). The Corinthian church was experiencing serious internal problems; nevertheless, Paul assured them, "Our hope for you is firmly grounded" (2 Corinthians 1:7 NASB).

Through this hope we draw near to God (Hebrews 7:19). With our hearts and minds set on our destiny, we endeavor to get as close to God as we possibly can. The closer we get to God the stronger and more stable we become spiritually.

Believers are to show diligence "to the full assurance of hope until the end (Hebrews 6:11 NKJV). By God's immutable promise and immutable oath we have a strong encouragement, we "who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us" (verses 17, 18). This hope is an "anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil" (verse 19).

Our hope is still unseen (Romans 8:24, 25). Imagine that you are standing on the deck of a large ship. You look at the anchor chain in the water. You see it perhaps only a few inches below the surface. Beyond that it is out of sight. Nevertheless, you are confident it is securely in place at the bottom. The ship might move up and down with the waves; nevertheless, the anchor holds. The believer's hope is the unseen anchor of the soul. It reaches out of sight, beyond the veil, into the presence of Christ, our High Priest. *Grab hold of your hope* and do not let it go--it is the anchor chain that is firmly tied to Christ Himself! Your feelings and experiences might move up and down; nevertheless the anchor--your hope--holds!

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23 NKJV).

Remember 1 Thessalonians 5:8. We are to put on the hope of salvation as a helmet. Keeping this hope in view will stabilize our thinking and prevent us from being distracted by worldly thoughts.

Our hope purifies us. At the core of our hope is the assurance that believers are predestined to be conformed to the character image of Christ (Romans 8:28-30). Also, in 1 John 3:2, 3 we read, "Beloved, now are we the 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, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (NKJV).

Our hope gives us boldness. "Since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech" (2 Corinthians 3:12 NKJV). And we are instructed in 1 Peter 3:15, "always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (NKJV). The NIV says "with gentleness and respect."

Our hope gives us great joy. It does not disappoint (Romans 5:5).

To the Thessalonian believers Paul declared confidently, "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy" (1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20 NKJV). Yes, in spite of everything, the Church is going to triumph!

Romans 12:12 says that we are to be "rejoicing in hope."

Romans 15:13 records this benediction: "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (NKJV). Here we see again the relationship between faith and hope. As we believe in "the God of hope," the Holy Spirit causes our hope to overflow, filling us with joy and peace.

With joy we are "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13 KJV).

We are not to sorrow, as the rest do who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). At one time we, too, "were without Christ . . . having no hope, and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12 KJV).

No hope. These are words of total despair. Yet, that is exactly where people are who are without Christ. This secular world has no hope. It says that the individual and even the cosmos itself are headed for ultimate extinction. That leaves the unbeliever completely hopeless.

Deprived of hope, mankind is dehumanized. Some try to escape into work, pleasure, drugs. Some try to find meaning in relationships. It is tragic that some even choose suicide. A growing number are attempting to find hope in the mirage of New Age mysticism.

Friend, the stark reality is that if you are without Jesus Christ, *you are without hope.*

But here is the good news! If you will turn to God with all your heart and receive Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, you will have a glorious hope that will not disappoint you. The certainties of the gospel will be yours. Your sins will be forgiven. You will have peace with God and also with yourself. You will know who you are, why you are, and where you are going. This is eternal life, and it is yours right now, a free gift as you come to Jesus Christ.