

Hope: Christ in You
Edited and posted by Bob Young

Faith, Hope, Love. Today's study is hope. Jesus is our hope. Why do we lose hope? Why do we let go?

A television commercial for the Armed Forces said, "Be all that you can be." It implied that if you joined the Army, the Navy, the Air Force or the Marines, then you could be all that you could be. I don't believe that! Does anybody? But a promise like that has strong appeal. Everybody wants to be all that he can be. I have never met anyone who doesn't want to be all that he feels himself capable of being. We all hunger for that. No matter how degraded, downcast or frustrated, everyone longs for fulfillment. And yet, as we observe the bewildering tragedy of human life, we are left shaking our heads at the seeming impossibility of that. I have been listening to stories all week from relatives, friends, and on the media, describing endless shame, hurt, pain, murder, divorce, cruelty, abuse and personal failure. Is there any real possibility of reversing this in someone's life? Can the downward slide be arrested?

The gospel answers with a resounding "yes." It is possible! That is what Paul says here in the letter to the Colossians. This is a first century description of how a life can be changed: Colossians 1:21-23.

What a marvelous thing to find hope in this dark world. How wonderful that God himself has acted to make this change. That is a good word for us to remember. God is at work. He is sovereign. He can and does reconcile people to himself and make a change in their lives. The text (Col. 1:21-29) is a tremendous description of the process of change in a human being. It traces four factors—the essence of hope, the evidence of hope, the enigma (mystery) of hope, the expression of hope.

Hope involves a reversal of attitude. As Paul states it here, there was a time when all of us who are now Christians were "alienated from God." We did not have any use for God. We did not consider him important. We started and ended each day without a thought of him. We went about our own plans, lived for ourselves, and did what we felt like doing, never giving a thought to God. If we did think of him, we regarded him as a remote Being on the horizon of life, but we never expected anything from him. Because we cut him out of our thinking—even though he was sustaining our very life—we ended up as "enemies in our minds," hostile toward God. We did not want anything to do with him. We avoided God. We thought he would interfere with our plans; that he was out to make us live uneventful and unhappy lives. We were enemies of God, and as a result we expressed that enmity in evil behavior. Inner alienation—estrangement from God and hostility toward him—causes evil behavior.

"But now we are reconciled to God." Something happened within us. It occurred when we saw that the death of Jesus was for us, that he had done something to set aside our estrangement, our brokenness and hurt, and that if we came to him in faith he would deliver us. So we came. Something happened then to our inner attitude. We were changed in our thinking. We no longer saw God as an enemy but as a loving Father. We recognized that the cross was not a symbol of failure in the life of a religious fanatic, but was a moment when the great enemies all men face were conquered; when death was overcome and all the evil powers against mankind were set at naught. Our whole life was changed.

The essence of hope—Christ

Let us examine how a life is changed, Col. 1:21-23.

The gospel is the grand secret: the mystery of mysteries. It was hidden for ages and generations, but is now made manifest to the saints. To the mass of mankind it was unknown; and the chosen people who saw something of it only perceived it dimly through the smoke of sacrifices and the veil of types. It remained a mystery which no level of intelligence could guess nor invention unravel; it would have forever continued a secret had not God in his mercy been pleased to reveal it.

We live in a time when the gospel is clearly revealed in the word of God. Let us take care that we do not despise the mystery. Let not the commonness of the blessing cause us to undervalue it. Remember

how in the wilderness the Israelites fed upon manna until they had enjoyed it so long, so constantly, and so abundantly that in their wicked discontent they called it "light bread." Many today are saturated with the gospel like those who eat too much honey. They even venture to call the heavenly word "commonplace," and talk as if it were not "the old, old story," but a stale story. Many hunger after novelties, long for startling things, thirst after sensational preaching, dissatisfied with Christ crucified.

Christ is the "mystery," the "riches," and the "glory." The essence of this mystery is Christ himself. The center of the blessed mystery of the gospel is Christ. The first thought of the incarnation was born in the unsearchable wisdom of the mind of God, the idea of "Immanuel, God with us."

When we think of Jesus we remember the glorious work which he undertook and finished on our behalf. Being found in fashion as man he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. He took upon himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. The heir of all things girded himself to be among us one that serves.

The evidence of hope--perseverance

We come now to the second part of this description of how a life can be changed, Col. 1:21-23.

The testimony is clear. God is in the business of changing lives. That is what the good news is about. If you need your life changed, that is where you start. It is a process toward a specific goal: "to present you holy [whole, complete, well balanced in spirit, soul and body] in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation." That is God's goal, and he fully intends to accomplish it. "If you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel." Many people start out the Christian life, filled with joy because they have found a new sensation. But it does not last.

The enigma (mystery) of hope—Christ in us

Christ in you means....that you have accepted Christ as Lord.

Is it not a wonderful thing that Christ Jesus should ever enter into a man? Yes, but I will tell you something more wonderful, and that is, that he should enter in by so narrow an opening as our little faith. Grow in faith, and enlarge your receiving power till you take in Christ into your inmost soul by the Holy Spirit; for it is Christ in you by faith that becomes the hope of glory. Note these truths:

You are possessed by Christ, owned by Christ.

You see nothing is so much a man's own as that which is within him. When a man gets Christ into him, the devil himself cannot win a suit against him to recover Christ; for that matter is settled beyond question. Christ in you is yours indeed.

You are empowered by Christ.

There may be a valuable medicine that works like magic to expel a man's pains, and cure his diseases; but it is of no efficacy till it is within him. Christ in you, curing your sin, Christ in you filling your soul with love to virtue and holiness, bathing your heart in comfort, and fining it with heavenly inspirations. Christ believed in, Christ possessed, Christ experienced, Christ in you, this is worth a world.

You are ruled by Christ.

Christ in you is a royal concept. Christ rules from the center of your being, over every power and faculty, desire and resolve, bringing every thought into captivity to himself, the imperial sovereignty of Jesus.

You are filled by Christ.

It is wonderful when Christ once enters into a life. Did you ever hear the legend of a man whose garden produced nothing else but weeds, till at last he met with a strange foreign flower of singular vitality? The story is that he sowed a handful of this seed in his overgrown garden, and left it to work its own sweet way. He slept and rose, and knew not how the seed was growing till on a day he opened the gate and saw a scene which much astounded him. He knew that the seed would produce a dainty flower and he looked for it; but he had little dreamed that the plant would cover the whole garden. So it was; the flower had exterminated every weed, till us he looked from one end to the other from wall to wall he

could see nothing but the fair colors of that rare plant, and smell nothing but its delicious perfume. Christ is that plant of renown. If he be sown in the soil of your soul, he will gradually eat out the roots of all ill weeds and poisonous plants, till over all your nature there shall be Christ in you.

You are transformed by Christ.

When Christ enters into us, he elevates us to a nobler state: "I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me." Jesus sanctifies us wholly, spirit, soul, and body, and takes us to dwell with him.

The expression of hope, the effect of hope--we proclaim him

We continue on, we do not give up, we are faithful; this is the continuing expression of our faith.

Major Ian Thomas put it very succinctly:

First, Jesus had to be what he was, in order to do what he did! We see in Colossians that Jesus had to be both God and man in order to die in our place, be raised again, ascend into the heavens, and send the Holy Spirit, and thus come into our life.

Second, He had to do what he did, in order that we might have what he is. We could never have this new power, this new source of energy, this new comfort and strength in our life, if Jesus had not done what he did. It is on the basis of his death and resurrection that we have what he is.

Third, ...we must have what he is, in order to be what he was. That is what this text is saying. God wants to present us "holy, without blemish, and free from accusation." We are being conformed to the image of his Son. He is "bringing many sons to glory." We must have what he is in order to be what he was.

That is why it is important to understand this great mystery, "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

The world knows nothing of this mystery, and thus knows nothing of genuine hope. You will never find it mentioned by the media. You will never learn about it in the great universities of the world. In all secular wisdom and knowledge there is no recognition of this incomparable source of change in a human life. It is found only in the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is why this message is such a powerful, world transforming, revolutionary statement, and why we ought to give ourselves to understanding it more than any other thing in life.

In Colossians Paul tells believers what is theirs **IN CHRIST**. In Eph 1:18 wrote "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know the hope of His calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints..." Paul prayed that God would shine the light of this truth in their hearts. It is good to know this truth intellectually as head knowledge but it must enter our hearts to affect our everyday life. Prayer is a key aspect of taking the truth from one's head to one's heart. My prayer for you as you is for this Spirit-given enlightenment. Please pray the same for me. The principle is that we pray for the promises of God to be realized in our hearts for only the Spirit can reveal spiritual truth.

Let me summarize. The apostle points out three stages of change.

→First, the new birth begins a process which is intended to perfect us, spirit, soul and body.

→Second, to advance that process requires pain and commitment on the part of others on our behalf; and when we come to Christ we are to undertake that same pain and commitment on behalf of others.

→Finally, all progress occurs only by coming to understand and to practice the mystery of "Christ in you, the hope of glory." That is how to stop the terrible downward slide of any human life.