

## The Hope, and its Effects

F. B. Hole.

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During Old Testament times hope was pre-eminent. Faith, of course, was there, as Hebrews 11 so strikingly shows, and love also, but that which was revealed so as to present an object to faith was but small and partial, and every saint had his eyes directed on into the future. Hebrews 11 while emphasizing faith makes this element of hope very plain, as may be seen if verses 10, 13, 14, 16, 20, 22, 26, 35 and 40 are read.

The appearing of the Saviour in humiliation, that He might accomplish redemption, has fulfilled many an Old Testament hope and prediction, and in Him the great Object that fills faith's vision has been discovered. By that epoch-making event a whole range of things that were matters of promise have been translated into matters of accomplished fact, and thereby they have been removed from the category of hope and placed upon that of faith. To these things the saint of to-day does not look on, he looks back upon them instead.

But though this is so, hope still remains a very potent force with the Christian, and many things remain to be fulfilled. Hope is no longer preeminent as once it was; indeed, we may say that faith and love have stepped out beyond it; still it *abides* with faith and love as 1 Corinthians 13: 13 reminds us. We are "saved in hope" (Rom. 8: 24, N. Tr.), and our hopes are sufficiently pronounced for Christianity itself to be designated not only "the faith," but "a hope." We refer to Hebrews 7: 19. In the New Translation the passage runs thus: "There is a setting aside of the commandment going before for its weakness and unprofitableness (for the law perfected nothing), and the introduction of a better by which we draw nigh to God."

The law introduced hopes of a sort, but they were connected with a system that necessarily prohibited access to God. Christianity has introduced the one great hope, which hangs upon the great High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, who is shortly to come forth *from* the presence of God. But meanwhile He is *in* the presence of God, and as there on our behalf, crowned with glory and honour, He gives us title to draw near and maintains us in our access to God. When He comes forth again, at His second Advent, we shall begin to see our hopes fulfilled.

The Christian hope is not something of an advanced nature to be apprehended only by those of ripe experience. It lies at the very beginning of things. The Colossian believers heard of it "in the word of the truth of the Gospel" (Col. 1: 5), and the Thessalonians were still an infant assembly when Paul wrote to them his first epistle, in every chapter of which he speaks of the coming of the Lord. There were details of His coming concerning which they needed further instruction, but the fact of His coming again was known to them from the hour of their conversion, for it could be said of them, "Ye turned to God from idols . . . to wait for His Son from heaven" (Col. 1: 9, 10).

A very large number of those who will read these lines are in this respect like the Colossians and the Thessalonians. A century ago it was far otherwise. Then the coming of the Lord, the proper hope of the Christian, was very largely ignored altogether or else was relegated to a future so hazy and far distant that it excited little or no influence as a hope. Now it occupies a prominent place in the minds of most evangelical Christians, and has for many decades been preached with increasing conviction and clearness. Some of our readers who are of an older generation may be able to look back to a moment subsequent to their conversion, when the truth of the imminent, pre-millennial coming of the Lord

shone into their hearts as a hope, and began mightily to influence their lives, but the great mass of those who are younger have heard about His coming from the outset. It, perhaps, played a part in producing exercise which eventuated in their conversion, and it has never burst upon them with quite that thrilling power that a genuine hope conveys. The writer of this article stands in this latter category himself.

The danger with us, then, clearly is that we may hold the coming of the Lord as an item in our theology without it being a hope, potent to influence our lives.

We earnestly ask for close attention to this point and for an honest spirit of self-examination and self-judgment. We challenge especially every Christian young man or young woman as to whether they are "like unto men that wait for their Lord," and, consequently, shaping their course through the world's present gloom in view of the day that will be manifested when Christ appears, or whether, while avoiding its gross sins and excesses, they are conforming to the world's ways and spirit, and seeking their own things rather than the things of their Master, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We need not go outside 1 Thessalonians 1, for clear evidence as to the effect of the hope upon the Thessalonian believers, and the marks it left upon them and upon their lives may serve as very useful tests to us if we wish to examine ourselves upon the point.

The Gospel came to these believers of primitive days, "not . . . in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance" (verse 5). The heralds of it amongst them, Paul and his companions, were men of a most unusual "manner" in their grace and devotedness, and they preached the Gospel with uncommon power and fulness. Jesus, the Son of God, risen, in heaven, and coming from heaven was their theme (verse 10).

Embracing such a message in faith *great moral results at once appeared in them*. Divine life was now theirs, and it began to manifest itself. An extraordinary revolution took place in their characters. New life meant a new nature; and a new nature meant transformed characters. Things now appeared in them personally that had never been there before — things not donned outwardly as an article of raiment, but rather produced outwardly as the fruit of the working of life within, as the feathers of a bird or the leaves of a tree. Faith and love and hope were working in their hearts (verse 3).

Each of these three things, however, had its own appropriate manifestation. Faith expressed itself in work; love in labour; hope in patience, or endurance. God could see fully and appreciate the faith and love and hope — the things wrought *in* them. Man could see and consequently "remember without ceasing" the work and the labour and the patience — the things manifested *by* them as a fruit of the work within.

It has been said that God has more to do in us than by us, and the remark is profoundly true. What, then, about the work of God in us? Shall we test ourselves? Have we the spiritual fibre to do so? Look at the young people of the world, viewing them in the most favourable light, as they express themselves in their most innocent pleasures; what marks them? We should answer by naming a trio of things which are very opposite to the trio of 1 Thessalonians 1: 3. *Absence of fixed principle — egotism — a gay recklessness*, begotten of a feeling of insecurity as regards the future, no vision beyond the immediate present, and a determination to exploit that present for all it is worth.

Brother or sister in Christ, is the hope burning brightly in your soul? Faith gives you an Object that instantly fixes your course across this world. Love delivers you from a self-centred existence, and sets you at the happy task of labouring for Christ's glory and the good of others. Hope steadies your soul, and nerves you with the absolute certitude of final victory and glory, and so you endure. Again, we ask, is the hope burning brightly in your soul, or are you, while perhaps quite nicely carrying out all

the outward observances of religion in meetings and the like, largely living an insipid, aimless existence, much centred on self, and bent upon extracting as much mild and lawful pleasure from the world and the earth as you can?

Not only was there this work wrought in the Thessalonian believers, but *God took them up and made of them something for His glory and the furtherance of His interests*, as the later verses of the chapter show. They became: —

1. "Followers of us, and of the Lord" (verse 6).
2. "Ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia" (verse 7).
3. From them "sounded out the word of the Lord . . . in every place" (verse 8).

Again we find three things. The first defines what they were made as regards the Lord. The second, as regards their fellow-believers. The third as regards the world.

As regards the Lord, they became *followers* or imitators. They were attached to Him as His disciples, and they began to walk in His ways and manifest His character. This they did not as mere copyists, but because they now possessed His life and nature.

As regards their fellow-believers, they became *examples*. All those who believed in Macedonia and Achaia could find in them a practical exemplification of the grace that the Gospel brings and promotes in those who receive it.

As regards the surrounding world they became *advertisements* of the power and efficacy of that word which they had believed. From them the word of the Lord "sounded out," and in every place their faith towards God was "spread abroad," and that to such an extent that no testimony was needed on the part of the apostle.

All these three characters were now worn by people who came out of very unpromising surroundings. The Thessalonians are in Acts 17 contrasted unfavourably with the Bereans, who are said to have been "more noble than these in Thessalonica." The main part of the Thessalonian inhabitants were "Jews which believed not, moved with envy" and "lewd fellows of the baser sort."

Let us again test ourselves at this point, and ask each one, What is the character that I wear? Is it that of a follower of the Lord, and consequently an example and an advertisement of His grace? Or am I a follower, though in a modified and inoffensive form, of the fashions of the world, and consequently an example of poor and anaemic Christianity and an advertisement of warning to all who have eyes to see?

The last verse of our chapter carries the story of these early Christians one further step forward and shows us how, having turned to God from idols, with these remarkable results flowing therefrom, they were waiting for Christ with full expectancy, and meanwhile were serving the living and true God. When hope burns brightly the service of God is diligently pursued. And the converse is equally true.

It has been supposed by some that the hope of the coming of the Lord is an unpractical and visionary thing, that those whose hearts are filled with it are thereby left idly standing and "gazing up into heaven" like the "men of Galilee" (Acts 1: 11). It is possible, no doubt, to misuse the Christian hope in this fashion but its use is far otherwise. A proof of it lies in the very Scripture alluded to. It was His departure into heaven that for the moment rooted the disciples to the spot and left them gazing upwards. Directly their hearts were assured of His actual and visible coming again by the testimony of the two angels, they returned to Jerusalem, and in the rest of Acts 1 we find them continuing in *prayer*;

in Acts 2 and onwards they continue in *preaching* with overflowing results. With this 1 Thessalonians 1 agrees.

"Ye turned . . . *to serve the living and true God.*" The words we have italicised just describe the normal and proper life of the Christian. The service of God is every Christian's business. We may hold the doctrine of the second advent and be cold and lethargic to a degree in that high and holy service, and at the same time we may be very active in the pursuit of earthly pleasure; but if His coming holds our hearts as a burning and shining hope it will be far otherwise: we shall be diligent servants of God.

Shall we close by once more testing ourselves? What is the aim and purpose of my life? *Serving* something or somebody I certainly am. Am I serving the living and true God or my own ease and convenience, my own whims and pleasures? Is the truth of the second advent of Christ to me a mere doctrine, a matter of theology, or is it a bright, an inspiring, and a compelling HOPE?