

# What is Your Christian Hope?



By [Dr. David R. Reagan](#)

In [1 Corinthians 13:13](#) the apostle Paul wrote that there are three cardinal Christian virtues "faith, hope and love." As I was thinking about this statement one day, it suddenly occurred to me that I had heard hundreds of sermons on faith and love, but hardly any on hope.

What about you? Can you remember hearing a single sermon about hope? How would you articulate your hope? How would you define it? How would you put it into words?

Are you aware of the fact that both the quality and strength of your hope are directly related to what you know about Bible prophecy? And that, of course, is the reason most Christians have so little hope. Their preachers have ignored God's Prophetic Word.

## Lack of Hope

I was born into a Christian family, and I was raised in church. I'm thankful to say that my family was present every time the church's doors were open Sunday morning and evening, Wednesday evening, Vacation Bible School, and Gospel meetings. Yet, after 30 years of faithful church attendance, I had little hope.

The preachers in the church I grew up in rarely ever spoke about Bible prophecy. During all those years of church attendance, I never once heard the word, "rapture." Even worse, when prophecy was preached, we were taught Greek mythology rather than Hebrew theology.

The result was that after all those years of Bible teaching, if you had asked me to define my hope, I would have given you a pathetic answer like the following: "My hope is that if I die before the Lord returns, my soul will sleep, waiting for the resurrection. When Jesus returns, a big bang' will occur, resulting in the annihilation of the created universe. At that point my sleeping soul will be awakened, and I will be resurrected to live eternally with the Lord as a disembodied spirit in an ethereal world called heaven. I will spend my time floating around on a cloud playing a harp."

Needless to say, the only thing in that scenario that appealed to me was the promise of a resurrection. I couldn't get excited about lying comatose in a grave for eons of time. The "big bang" concept scared me to death. I was appalled by the idea of continuing my existence as a disembodied spirit an ethereal blob with no individuality.

And I was both bored and amused by the thought of playing a harp eternally. The reason it amused me is because my boyhood church did not believe in instrumental music. Praising God with an instrument was considered a sin. Yet, I was going to spend eternity playing a harp! It made no sense to me, so I wrote it all off as bunch of nonsense. I tossed the whole scenario out the window, and with it went my hope.

## **My Discovery of Hope**

You can imagine, therefore, how excited I became years later when I started studying God's Prophetic Word, and I began discovering the Lord's fantastic promises about the future. I started jumping pews and swinging from chandeliers! People thought I had gone Pentecostal overnight! For the first time, I started getting excited about the future, and my hope began to grow.

Let me share with you some of the discoveries I made in my study of Bible prophecy. I think you will find them thrilling, and I pray they will build your hope.

**1) Consciousness** — My first discovery was that the concept of soul sleep is unbiblical. It is true that when we die, our bodies "sleep" metaphorically, but the spirits of the dead never lose their consciousness.

Jesus clearly taught this in His story about the rich man and Lazarus ([Luke 16:9-31](#)). When they died, their spirits went to Hades. The rich man's spirit went to a compartment called "Torments." The spirit of Lazarus went to a compartment referred to as "Abraham's bosom." On the Cross, Jesus called this compartment "Paradise" ([Luke 23:43](#)). The two compartments were separated by a "great chasm" which could not be crossed.

In Jesus' story both men are pictured as fully conscious. They even carry on a conversation with each other. Their souls are not asleep.

Paul affirmed consciousness after death when he wrote in [2 Corinthians 5:8](#) that he would prefer to be "absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord." He repeated this sentiment in his Philippian letter where he wrote "to live is Christ, and to die is gain" ([Philippians 1:21](#)). He elaborated on the meaning of this statement by adding that his desire was "to depart and be with Christ" ([Philippians 1:23](#)).

When Jesus died for the sins of Mankind, Paradise was moved from Hades to Heaven. Paul attests to this in [2 Corinthians 12:4](#) where he states that he was taken up to the "third heaven," which he identifies as "Paradise." The Redeemed could not go directly to Heaven before the Cross because their sins had only been covered by their faith, not forgiven. Their forgiveness awaited the shedding of the blood of Jesus ([Hebrews 9:22](#)).

This means that when a believer dies today, his soul is taken directly to Heaven where he resides in an intermediate spirit body until the time of the resurrection. Martyred believers during the Tribulation are pictured in their spirit bodies standing before the throne of God clad in white robes and waving palm branches ([Revelation 7:1-9](#)). They are fully conscious as they sing, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" ([Revelation 7:10](#)).

**2) Bodies** — My second discovery was that we are not destined to an ethereal existence as disembodied spirits. It is true that at death we receive an intermediate spirit body which the Bible does not define in any detail, but God has promised that the Redeemed will one day receive new glorified bodies.

In [1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#) we are told that when Jesus returns, He will bring with Him the spirits of those who have died in Christ. Their bodies will be resurrected in a great miracle of re-creation; their spirits will be reunited with their bodies; and their bodies will then be glorified. Those who are alive in Christ will be translated to meet the Lord in the air. Their bodies will be glorified on the way up, without experiencing death.

What a glorious promise! It is no wonder that Paul begins this passage by saying it is intended to give hope to believers ([1 Thessalonians 4:13](#)). He concludes it by saying, "Comfort one another with these words" (verse 18).

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul reveals that the glorified body will be "imperishable" and "immortal." It will be raised in "glory and power" and will be spirit controlled, rather than controlled by the flesh ([1 Corinthians 15:42-44,52-54](#)). In [Philippians 3:21](#) Paul further states that the glorified bodies which will be given to believers will be like the body that Jesus had after His resurrection.

Think about that for a moment. Jesus had a tangible body that could be touched and recognized ([Luke 24:41-43](#) and [John 20:27-28](#)). It was body very similar to the bodies we have now, and yet it was also very different. It could pass through a wall into a locked room ([John 20:26](#)), and it could move about from one place to another at a high rate of speed ([Luke 24:30-36](#)).

His disciples were so startled and frightened by His ability to vanish and reappear suddenly at another place that they thought they were seeing a spirit. But Jesus countered that idea immediately by telling them, "Touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have" ([Luke 24:39](#)).

To summarize, the Redeemed are promised glorified bodies that will be tangible, recognizable, and immortal. Further, the implication of a "glorified" body is that it will be perfected. The blind will see; the deaf will hear; the lame will walk; and the mentally impaired will have their minds healed. There will no longer be any pain or death ([Revelation 20:4](#)).

**3) Activities** — During the Millennial reign of Jesus, the Redeemed are going to be doing anything but floating around on clouds playing harps. We are going to reign with Jesus over those who are allowed to enter the Millennium in the flesh (which will be those believers who are alive at the end of the Tribulation). Jesus will reign over all the earth from Jerusalem ([Isaiah 2:1-4](#)) as King of kings and Lord of lords ([Revelation 19:16](#)). David in his glorified body will reign as the king of Israel ([Ezekiel 37:24](#)). The Saints will be scattered across the earth to assist with Jesus' reign ([2 Timothy 2:12](#)).

Every person on earth who is in a position of governing authority will be a glorified Saint. Some of us will be in administrative positions, sharing in Jesus' reign as presidents, governors, or mayors ([Luke 19:11-27](#)). Others will serve as judges ([1 Corinthians 6:3](#)). Most of us will serve as "shepherds," or teachers, trying to bring those who are born during the Millennium to faith in Jesus ([Isaiah 66:18-21](#) and [Jeremiah 3:15](#)).

In the process, we are going to be given the blessing of seeing this old sin-sick world flooded with peace, righteousness and justice as the waters cover the seas. I can hardly wait!

When the Millennium ends and we move into the Eternal State, the Bible does not go into detail as to what our activities will be. It simply says that we will "serve" God ([Revelation 22:3](#)). Whatever that means, I'm sure it will be a meaningful and fulfilling service. I would imagine that, for one thing, our gifts and talents will be magnified and that we will use them to glorify the Lord. Thus, a singer will be able to sing with a perfection never before achieved, and a painter will be able to paint with a glory never imagined.

**4) Location** — What will be the location of this Eternal State? Will it be in an ethereal, spirit world called Heaven?

Most Christians are amazed to discover that the Bible never promises that the Redeemed will spend eternity in Heaven. Instead, the Bible says that the eternal abode of the Redeemed will be in a new Jerusalem located on a new earth (Revelation 21).

Since the Bible says that the current earth is eternal ([Psalms 78:69](#) and [148:6](#)), I have concluded that the "new earth" will be the current earth renovated by fire ([2 Peter 3:12-13](#)).

Instead of our going up to Heaven to live eternally with God, the Bible says He will come to earth to live with us ([Revelation 21:3](#)). Since Heaven is located wherever God resides, Heaven will come to earth, and in that sense only will we reside forever in Heaven.

God loves His creation, and He intends to redeem it all of it and not destroy it with some mythical "big bang." He is going to restore it to its original perfection when He created it.

Jesus died on the Cross not only to redeem Mankind but also to redeem the creation. That's the reason the High Priest in Old Testament times sprinkled the blood not only on the mercy seat but also on the ground ([Leviticus 16:15](#)).

The blood on the mercy seat of the ark was a symbolic prophecy pointing to the fact that the blood of the Messiah would cover the law of God (the tablets inside the ark) with the mercy and grace of God. The blood on the ground was a reminder that the sacrifice of the Messiah would make it possible for the Curse to be lifted and for the animal and plant kingdoms to be returned to their original perfection ([Isaiah 11:6-9](#) and [Romans 8:18-23](#)).

## **Living with Hope**

What I have outlined above are a series of glorious promises that are designed to give God's people a strong sense of hope as they live as strangers and pilgrims in the midst of an evil, God-rejecting world ([Hebrews 11:13-16](#)).

When you read these incredible promises, you can understand why Paul wrote these words in [1 Corinthians 2:9](#) — "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, nor has the mind of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him."

As this verse says, we cannot even begin to imagine the wonderful blessings God has in store for the Redeemed, but the very next verse says that the Holy Spirit has revealed those promises in God's Word.

The sad thing is that most Christians are ignorant of those promises and therefore have no idea what Paul meant when he wrote: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" ([Romans 8:18](#)).

If You know Jesus as your Savior, you are an heir to some incredible promises, and if you know those promises and believe in them, you can live in the midst of this evil world with hope, joy, and great expectations.

## **C. S. Lewis on Hope (from *Mere Christianity*)**

Hope is one of the theological virtues. This means that a continual looking forward to the eternal world is not (as some modern people think) a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do.

It does not mean that we are to leave the present world as it is. If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the slave trade all left their mark on earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven.

### **The Importance of an Eternal Perspective**

It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this one. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you will get neither.

It seems a strange rule, but something like it can be seen at work in other matters. Health is a great blessing, but the moment you make health one of your main, direct objects, you start becoming a crank and imagining there is something wrong with you. You are only likely to get health provided you want other things more food, games, work, fun, open air.

### **The Longing for Heaven**

Most of us find it very difficult to want Heaven at all except insofar as Heaven means meeting again our friends who have died. One reason for this difficulty is that we have not been trained. Our whole education tends to fix our minds on this world.

Another reason is that when the real want for Heaven is present in us, we do not recognize it. Most people, if they had really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world. There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise.

The longings which arise in us when we first fall in love, or first think of some foreign country, or first take up some subject that excites us, are longings which no marriage, no travel, no learning, can really satisfy. I am not speaking of what would ordinarily be called unsuccessful marriages, or holidays, or careers. I am speaking of the best possible ones.

There was something we grasped at, in that first moment of longing, which just fades away in reality. I think everyone knows what I mean. The wife may be a good wife, and the hotels and scenery may have been excellent, and chemistry may be a very interesting job but something has evaded us.