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IS HOPE AN ASSET OR A LIABILITY?

By: C. D. COLE

Introduction: This may seem a strange question for debate. But it is not so one-sided as might at first appear. Hope may be a curse as well as a blessing. Hope may give pain as well as pleasure. Hope may be a false prophet as well as a true prophet.

It is interesting to read the poets on the subject of hope. One of them, after thinking how hopes have ended in disappointment, wrote these lines:

"Hope tells a flattering tale,
Delusive, vain, and hollow.
Ah! let not hope prevail,
Lest disappointment follow."

But another poet writes in defense of hope and says:

"Hope! of all ills that men endure,
the only cheap and universal cure."

And Wordsworth expresses his doubt about the value of hope:

"Hopes! what are they? Beads of morning,
Strung on slender blades of grass;
Or a spider's web adorning
In a straight and treacherous pass."

Then comes Oliver Goldsmith, who says:

"Hope, like a gleaming taper's light,
Adorns and cheers our way."

Hope may be defined as the faculty of the soul that anticipates the future with a sense of peace and pleasure. All men have hope of some sort. Popewell says, *"Hope springs eternal in the human breast. Man never is, but always <u>to be</u> blest."*

Hope is one of the principal springs of action; the thing that keep men in motion. Without hope human endeavour would sicken and die. Without hope of harvest the farmer would not plant and cultivate. Without hope of pay the miner would not hazard his life in the treacherous mine. Without hope of profit the merchant would close up shop. Without hope of happiness lovers would not march to the marriage altar. *"In all the wedding cake hope is the sweetest of the plums."*

While all this can be said about the worth of hope, it is also true that hope can give pain as well as pleasure. Many a hope has ended in disappointment. It is true that hope often lies to us. Not half the good things we have yearned and hoped for have been realized. If hope deferred makes the heart sick, then how terrible is a dead hope; a hope never realized. As a pastor I have entertained hopes that have ended in utter disappointment. I have hoped for faithfulness in church members who would not be faithful. I have hoped for cooperation from many who never gave it.

The hope of a happy home has turned out to be a lie with many a husband and wife. And think of the parents whose hope concerning their children was turned into black despair. I expect it is true that hope ends in despair more often than in joy. Hope has too often made us toil and struggle and then fed us on mighty husks. Either we did not get what we expected or when we realized the thing hoped for we found it was not as good as we thought it would be from afar.

But back to the thought that "hope" like a gleaming taper's light, adorns and cheers our way.

A study of women workers in a factory showed that at the end of the day's work some were limp with fatigue, while others were bright-eyed and wide-awake. All had worked the same number of hours, and it was discovered that difference in ages had not made the difference. It was found that most of the bright and wide-awake ones had plans for the evening; some pleasure to look forward to. Some of these plans were not very noble and godly, but they were expecting a good time, and their hope of a good time had a good effect on their bodies and spirits. The tired ones had nothing to look forward to with pleasure; they were to face the drudgery of cooking and doing the dishes and the company of a man who was interested in nothing more than getting the news or reading the paper.

If I were not a Christian and a preacher, I think I would be interested in psychiatry as the best means of being useful. If there is no eternity; no heaven or hell; if this life ends all; then the best hope anybody could have would be to eat, drink, and be merry, have a good time, without any thought of any eternal tomorrow.

We have been speaking of hope in general; hopes that lie within the realm of this present life. But the believer's hope is farsighted; it pierces the veil between this world and eternity and expects joys beyond this life. And the believer's hope is well founded; it will never end in disappointment. It is a hope that is both sure and steadfast.

There is no room for debate as to whether Christian hope is an asset; there is no danger that it will end in disappointment. And there is no danger that heaven will not come up to our expectations.

Let us look at some adjectives that describe the Christian's hope:

1. It is called a **good hope** through grace. II Thessalonians 2:16, *"Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace."* This good hope based on grace is well founded. This hope is no illusion; it does not come from fumes of fancy or play of imagination. It is not mere desire where the wish is father to the thought.

2. It is lively or living hope. It is no poor pale ghost frightening and then fading; fainting and then reviving and then fainting again. Proverbs 4:18, *"But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."*

3. It is the blessed or happy hope. All other hopes may pay into sorrow. The gospel hope gives lasting joys. In all earth hopes there is an element of unrest.
Hope of wealth; health; friends; fame, etc.

4. It is referred to as the glorious hope. It is the hope of the glory of God for ourselves, the hope that one day we will be conformed to the image of Christ. Nothing here to be ashamed of. The hope of the atheist is that he will die like a cat or dog and be done for. Others hope that when they die they will go to purgatory and after so much prayers and payments finally get to heaven. But the glorious hope is that when we are absent from the body we will be present with the Lord. I Thessalonians 4:16-17, *"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."*

THE GROUND OF THIS HOPE

This hope rests upon the word of God about the value of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Faith is satisfied with Christ as Saviour and Lord; satisfied with what He has done and this gives support to hope of future glory. When this Bible is found to be false our hope will die. When the blood of Christ is found to be of no value to a poor helpless sinner, our hope will turn to despair.

The child of God, with a hope so well founded, and of such a glorious nature, ought to be bright-eyed and on tip-toe with expectancy of such a glorious future. It will help the spirit of the believer to be occupied with the promises of God concerning his eternal good. If it is the Lord's will I want to keep my eyes on the glory that shall surely follow this life of sorrow and suffering. I want to hope and hope to the end for the promises of glory; the hope of appearing with Him in glory.

"Hope on, hope on, O troubled heart,
If doubts and fears o'ertake thee,
Remember this - the Lord hath said,
He never will forsake thee;
Then murmur not, still bear thy lot,
Nor yield to care or sorrow;
Be sure the clouds that frown today
Will break in smiles tomorrow.

"Hope on, hope on, through dark and deep
The shadows gather o'er thee;
Be not dismayed; thy Saviour holds
The lamp of life before thee;
And if He will that thou to-day
Shouldst tread the vale of sorrow;
Be not afraid, but trust and wait;
The sun will shine tomorrow.

"Hope on, hope on, go bravely forth
Through trial and temptation,
Directed by the worth of truth,
So full of consolation;
There is a calm for every storm,
A joy for every sorrow,
A night from which the soul shall wake
To hail and endless morrow."

POCKET-WATCH CHRISTIANS

Many Christians are like wheelbarrows: no good unless pushed.

Others are like canoes: they need to be paddled.

Some are like kites: if you don't keep a string on them, they fly away.

Still others are like balloons: full of wind and just waiting for a chance to explode.

Then there are others like footballs: you can't tell which way they will bounce.

But praise the Lord, many Christians are like good pocket watches: with open faces and busy hands, they are well-regulated and full of good works. Christians like this are the backbone of every church!

HOW TO LIVE FOREVER

By: C. D. COLE

Life is precious. Everybody wants to live. The very law of life is self-preservation. The average person is willing to part with all worldly possessions for the sake of living even a few days longer. The doctor does his utmost to keep people well and to restore them to health when ill and when they are beyond hope of recovery to keep them alive. We pray for the sick that they may recover their health and live. When a person no longer wants to live, we become uneasy lest he take his own life.

Some years ago, an army plane crashed and landed near Interlaken, Switzerland. The survivors in their SOS for help, said, "we want to live."

Even the miserable want to live. We have some people with twisted and tortured bodies, victims of arthritis, hardly recognizable as human beings, and yet they hold on to life.

WHAT IS LIFE?

We can recognize life, but who can define it? Who knows what life is? Physicists tell us that there is no scientific definition of life. We know that life comes from God. Genesis 2:7, *"And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and* ***man became a living soul****."* Someone has defined life as the sum total of forces that resist death, but what are these forces? In jest and irreverence life has been defined as "the predicament that precedes death."

When that silly slogan "millions now live who will never die," was first advertised, it was done with fervor and enthusiasm. But about all those millions have since died.

A few years ago a young man, in a state of frustration over a book he had written, rushed into the office of the American Physical Society, at Columbia University, and shot to death a young office girl named Eileen Fahey. The book he wrote was on "How To Live Forever." He thought he had found the secret to eternal physical life. But the Bible says in Hebrews 9:27, *"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment."*

But these ills remind us of how something can be true and yet false. When people talk about living in these present physical bodies, they are talking through their hat. We belong to a passing generation and all of us without exception, unless the Lord comes and winds up things; and then we will get new bodies which will be spiritual.

THERE IS A WAY TO LIVE FOREVER

John 14:6, *"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."* But there is no way to live for ever in these physical bodies. Why should anyone want to live for ever in these bodies, when he can have a body fashioned like unto the body of Christ? Philippians 3:21.

MAN IS MORE THAN A PHYSICAL BEING

Life and death are used in two senses; in the sense of physical and in the sense of moral. If man were nothing more than a physical being; if he had nothing but a body, then life and death would have but one application. But man is more than a physical being; he is a moral being with eternal existence. Physical death does not put one out of existence, but merely changes his condition of existence. Luke 16:22-24, *"And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame."*

The Bible is interested in man as a moral being, who has eternal existence. It is a moral book primarily. It does not tell how to live in this present body, but how to live as a moral being, now and for ever. The Bible does not diagnose man's physical but his moral condition. The Bible is a text book on how to live for ever, as a moral being, rather than how to live physically for a few days or years.

As moral beings the Bible declares that all men by nature are dead; dead in trespasses and sins. Ephesians 2:1-3, 5, *"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins: Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others...Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved.)."* What is death? We may have difficulty in defining death, but we can give the cause of it. Physical death is the result of separation of body and spirit. James 2:26, *"For as the body without the spirit is dead..."* Moral death is the result of sin and sin slays because it separates from God. Isaiah 59:2, *"But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear."*

WHAT IS MORAL LIFE?

Moral life is more easily defined than is physical life, although not as evident to the physical senses. Not a matter of sense-perception, but by faith. Moral life is not for those physical dead, but for those morally dead. Moral life must be received while man is alive physically. Moral life is to love before God. The old preachers would talk about sinners being at a guilty distance from God. I John 4:7-8, *"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God: and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.*