

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

COLOSSIANS 1:1-8

HEAVENLY HOPE OR WORLDLY PESSIMISM



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

Problem

Pessimism abounds in our culture. That's hardly surprising when we look at the daily drip-drip diet of dark and depressing news stories. Little wonder that rates of depression are soaring year after year.

But the problem of pessimism is not limited to the culture; it's also invaded and infected the church. Church attendance in general is down, young people are leaving the church, prominent church leaders have fallen into immorality, and even apostasy. The church is increasingly on the defensive as religious freedom is threatened. Many have given up on mission and evangelism.

Effects

Why is pessimism such a spiritual problem?

- Pessimism drains prayer and gratitude
- Pessimism is barren
- Pessimism is obsessed with bad news

Solution?

But we don't need to stay like this. The Gospel can move us from worldly pessimism to heavenly hope as the Apostle Paul shows us in Colossians 1:3-8.

CONTEXT

Geography

Colossae was a small town 80 miles inland of Ephesus (Western Turkey).

History

Paul preached in Ephesus and two visitors believed, Epaphras and Philemon. The Colossian church met in Philemon's house.

Conflict

This young church had been infiltrated by Gnostics (Know-it-alls). They considered themselves as the spiritual elite, as superior to others because they had access to special religious knowledge through secret rituals and formulas. They also denied the reality of Christ's incarnation and the sufficiency of Christ for salvation.

Theme

Paul's theme throughout this letter is **the absolute supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ as the head of all creation and the church. Therefore, Christians are complete in Christ (Col. 2:10).**

Hope

Paul's triple reference to Gospel hope in chapter one (1: 3, 23, 27) tells us that he wanted to develop and strengthen the Colossian's hope. Perhaps the trouble with the Know-it-alls had discouraged the young church. Paul wrote to move them from worldly pessimism to heavenly hope.

THERE IS NO BOOK IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, INCLUDING JOHN'S GOSPEL, WHICH PRESENTS SUCH A COMPREHENSIVE PICTURE OF THE FULNESS OF CHRIST.

KENT HUGHES



How did Paul move the Colossians from worldly pessimism to heavenly hope? First of all, he shows them how heavenly hope creates thanksgiving



1. HEAVENLY HOPE CREATES THANKSGIVING (3-5)

Paul thanks God for the Colossian's faith and love

(3) We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, (4) since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints.

Paul always includes at least one prayer in his letters to the churches. In his prayer for the Colossians the first thing he does is to thank God for them. Indeed, thanksgiving is a constant theme in this letter (1:12; 2:7; 3:15; 3:16; 3:17; 4:2). He thanks God specifically for their faith and love. In other words, he traces their faith and love to the sovereign grace of God alone. He doesn't thank them; he thanks God for them.

Paul thanks God for the Colossian's heavenly hope

...because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven (5a).

Hope has two sides to it. There is the subjective experience of hope (the Colossians were hoping for heaven) and there is the objective content of hope (the future prospect of heaven was what they were hoping for). In this context, it is primarily the latter, what they were hoping for. But, of course, both strengthen each other. The clearer the objective content of hope is, the stronger the subjective experience of hope is, and vice versa. Perhaps the children remember how their hope for that new bike at Christmas time was increased every time they saw a picture of it.

The hope is "laid up for you in heaven." It is set aside with your name on it for your future enjoyment. Just as Walmart offers layaways at Christmas with the prospect of the present being eventually paid for before Christmas, so God offers the greatest layaway of all—heaven. But this is purchased by God, not us; it is paid for once, rather than in installments; and it is paid for with blood, Christ's blood, not plastic or paper.

APPLICATION

♥ Do you have heavenly hope? Is your hope of heaven purchased by the blood of Christ or are you attempting to pay for it with your own works? If so, you have a false hope that will never be realized. You are in for a great disappointment. "Lord Jesus, help me to forsake false hope and embrace true hope that you have purchased. Give me heavenly hope because at times I am in deep despair."

♥ If you have such a heavenly hope, thank God for it. Worship Christ for paying the ultimate price for it. Imagine life without hope of future heaven! In some ways it's amazing more people aren't totally depressed. "Lord Jesus, I thank you for purchasing the hope of heaven for me. And Holy Spirit, I thank you for applying it to my heart. Please give it to others too."

CULTURAL PESSIMISM WILL DRAG YOU DOWN IN DISCONTENT, BUT HEAVENLY HOPE WILL LIFT YOU UP WITH GRATITUDE.



Is this hope all heavenly and all future? Is it of any practical use on this earth? This hope is also productive here and now.



2. HEAVENLY HOPE IS PRODUCTIVE (4-6)

Heavenly hope produces fruit in individuals

***(4)...since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints;
(5) because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven.***

Their faith and love is "because of the hope." The NIV says their faith in Christ and love for the saints "spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven." How can this be? Surely faith is first, and everything else springs from faith? In some ways it's difficult to put these graces in strict order. While it would be hard to have hope without faith, it's also difficult to have faith without hope. How can you have faith in Christ if you have no hope of salvation through him?

A God-given hope of mercy and heaven is usually required for faith and repentance to seed (see Westminster Shorter Catechism 87). But, most heavenly hope comes after initial faith and love. As such, hope continually sustains, renews, revitalizes, and stimulates ongoing faith and love. It is this ongoing and increasing hope that Paul is focused on here rather than the initial hope that seeds with initial faith. He's saying to the Colossians, "Because you increasingly know how many blessings are reserved for you in heaven, it continually increases your faith and love."

Heavenly hope produces fruit in the church

(5)...the hope...of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, (6) which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth.

This hope produced fruit not only in individual Christians, but also in the Christian community. Hope is like a fertilizer for church growth. The specific fruit mentioned is their "love in the Spirit" (8). Heavenly hope is driving pessimism and hatred out of hearts and churches all over this world. The light of hope and love of heaven is transforming the darkness and despair of this world through the church.

APPLICATION

♥ Do you have a heavenly hope that produces faith and love? If your hope of heaven does not produce faith in Christ and love for the saints, whatever hope you have it's not this kind of hope. "Lord give me living, productive, fruitful hope that I might have faith and love too."

♥ Praise God for real "hope and change" because this hope is real and leads to real change. "God of hope, give me more hope that I might have more change. And help our church to be filled with hope and to spread this hope around our dark world so that it can be transformed by hope."

**DON'T JUST HOPE FOR CHANGE,
BUT USE HOPE TO CHANGE
YOURSELF, YOUR CHURCH, AND
YOUR WORLD.**



**How do I get this productive hope? How do I increase this fruitful hope?
There's only one way, that is, through the Gospel.**



3. HEAVENLY HOPE IS ANNOUNCED IN THE GOSPEL (5-8)

This hope is heard in the Gospel

(5)...the hope ...of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel.

This hope is "in the word of the truth of the Gospel." In other words, it is true not false, real not pretend, fact not fiction. So how do we get and increase this hope? Step one, as Paul makes clear, is to hear the Gospel. We can only get heavenly hope through hearing the Gospel. But the Colossians not only **heard** the truth, they "heard **and knew** the grace of God in truth" (7). This is not just intellectual understanding, but spiritual understanding. If you want to get hope and increase hope, hear the Gospel more and believe the Gospel more.

This hope is a gift of God

(5)...the hope... (6) which has come to you, as it has also in all the world.

Yet, for all the responsibility placed upon us to hear and believe the Gospel, Paul reminds us that ultimately hope is a gracious gift of God. Colossians, you have not come to the gospel; it "has come to you." This is not a quid pro quo (something for something); it's everything for nothing.

APPLICATION

♥ What is your hope based upon? If your hope is not based on the Gospel alone, then you have no hope. Cultivate hope by hearing, learning, and believing the GOOD NEWS. "Lord, I have no reality-based hope, no Gospel-based hope, no grace-based hope. I am HOPELESS. Therefore give me hope."

♥ "God of hope, make me more hopeful by making me more Gospel-full. Help me not just to hear the Gospel more but also to understand and believe it more, so that I can hope more. Thank you Lord for giving me everything for nothing in the Gospel."

Jesus Christ my Living Hope

Who could imagine so great a mercy?
What heart could fathom such boundless grace?
The God of ages stepped down from glory
To wear my sin and bear my shame
The cross has spoken, I am forgiven
The King of kings calls me His own
Beautiful Savior, I'm Yours forever
Jesus Christ, my living hope.

Hallelujah, praise the One who set me free
Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me
You have broken every chain
There's salvation in Your name
Jesus Christ, my living hope

BE OBSESSED WITH THE GOOD
NEWS OF THE BIBLE,
NOT THE BAD NEWS OF THE MEDIA.



**Do you see how to get and grow hope through the Gospel?
Let's recap our problem, God's solution, and the action he requires.**



CONCLUSION



FURTHER STUDY

Online Articles

- [Two Options for the New Year: Optimism or Hope](#) by Eric Geiger
- [Win the World with Hope](#) by K. Scott Oliphant
- [Six Steps out of Disappointment](#) by David Murray

Books

- [Hope...The Best of Things](#) by Joni Eareckson Tada
- [Infinite Hope . . . in the Midst of Struggles](#) by Joni Eareckson Tada
- [Laughing at the Days to Come: Facing Present Trials and Future Uncertainties with Gospel Hope](#) by Tessa Thompson
- [Heaven on Earth](#) by Derek Thomas

Discussion Questions

- What makes you pessimistic?
- What are the effects of pessimism in your life?
- How can you avoid or reduce the sources of pessimism in your life?
- When it comes to getting into heaven, what are some of the false hopes people have?
- If someone asked you the reason for the hope that is in you (1 Pet. 3:15), what would you say?
- What fruit is hope producing in you?
- How can you increase your hope on a daily basis?
- How will you use hope to start a gospel conversation this week?

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Worldly pessimism

- drains gratitude
- barren and damaging
- obsessed with bad news

Biblical answer?



Heavenly hope creates thanksgiving

- Paul thanks God for the Colossian's faith and love
- Paul thanks God for the Colossian's heavenly hope

CULTURAL PESSIMISM WILL DRAG YOU DOWN IN DISCONTENT, BUT HEAVENLY HOPE WILL LIFT YOU UP WITH GRATITUDE.

Here and now?



Get and grow in Gospel-fertilized heavenly hope to increase fruitfulness and gratitude.



Heavenly hope is announced in the Gospel

- Hope is heard in the Gospel
- Hope is the gift of God

BE OBSESSED WITH THE GOOD NEWS OF THE BIBLE, NOT THE BAD NEWS OF THE MEDIA

Action?



Heavenly hope is productive

- Hope produces fruit in individuals
- Hope produces fruit in the church

DON'T JUST HOPE FOR CHANGE, BUT USE HOPE TO CHANGE YOURSELF, YOUR CHURCH, AND YOUR WORLD.

Get and increase?

