

HOPE (Greek elpis – ελπις)

‘God’s promise encourages us to seize the hope set before us. We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered’(Hebrews 6:18-20).

‘Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful’(Hebrews 10:23).

‘Christ in you, the hope of glory’(Colossians 1:27).

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‘Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer’(Romans 12:12).

‘There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling’(Ephesians 4:4).

‘YHWH, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvellous for me. I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother. My soul is like the weaned child that is with me. O Israel, hope in YHWH from this time on and forevermore’(Psalm 131).

- In non-Biblical Greek *elpis* means ‘estimation’ or ‘expectation’. We should have a sound basis for our judgment of what the future might hold for us.
- In the Greek translation of the Hebrew Psalms and prophetic writings *elpis* translates words expressing ‘trust’ and ‘taking refuge’. The focus is on the present and on God as the one in whom we place our trust.

- In the Wisdom literature the influence of non-Biblical Greek can be seen. The focus is still on trust, but with the focus shifting from the present to the future.
- This is its meaning in the New Testament, where we could define ‘hope’ as a present trusting confidence in regard to the future – a trust based on one’s faith in God. Trusting that God is faithful we are sure that what God has promised will happen and we can leave the future peacefully to God.

- Hope is not the same as eager longing, for with hope the focus is on present assurance because of the God in whom one now places one's confidence, on whom one now relies, to whom one now looks.

‘The only thing that counts is faith working through love’(Galatians 5:6).

The distinction between faith and hope

Faith is concerned with objective reality: the fact that God is real, the fact that God’s will has been revealed, and that our basic response (our ‘faith’) is to accept this truth revealed in our history, base our life upon it and act accordingly. The objective reality in which we believe is what God has revealed in Jesus.

Hope speaks of an attitude of trust whereby, because we believe, we can leave the present and the future in God's hands. We are frail. How easily we fall back into sin. We know that the fullness of communion with God is something for the future. Our faith encourages us to eagerly await the promised communion, but to trust that God knows our longing; it is, after all, God's gift to them. God is faithful. Let us believe in Jesus and live accordingly: which means giving ourselves to his Spirit. If we do this, we will find that the love which we see burning in his heart will set fire to our own, and this is all that matters.

The object of our hope is 'glory'

'When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory'(Colossians 3:4).

'This slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure'(2Corinthians 4:17).

'We boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.'
(Romans 5:2).

'We suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him'(Romans 8:17).

‘I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints’(Ephesians 1:17-18).

- ‘Glory’ is the working of God’s powerful love in the world
- ‘Glory’ is being ‘saved by the life of God’s Son’(Romans 5:10)

- ‘Glory’ is communion in God’s life

‘God poured the Spirit out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life’(Titus 3:6-7).

- ‘Glory’ is the fulness of this communion beyond death

‘If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied’(ICorinthians 15:19).

‘Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure’(1John 3:2-3).

‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you’(1Peter 1:3-4).

‘The hope laid up for you in heaven’(Colossians 1:5).

Motives for hope

- God's promise
- Jesus' redemptive death, resurrection and glorification

‘If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us’(Romans 8:31-34).

Motives for hope

- Our experience of God's Spirit

‘Hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us’(Romans 5:5).

‘We who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.’(Romans 8:23-24).

‘Hope is the theological virtue by which we are graced to reach out to an always transcendent God. It remains in the Beatific Vision, for the absolute mystery [God] is never finally ‘overcome’ or ‘solved’. In heaven our longing will no longer be able to be suppressed and we will experience no distractions. We will delight in self-surrender, a full yielding to the Translucent.

Hope makes it clear that the basic attitude of the Christian is not to guard and preserve, but rather, informed by, guided by, and faithful to tradition, we are called to remain open to the constant surprise of the always transcendent.

Karl Rahner SJ

Hope is not simply the attitude of one who is weak and at the same time hungering for a fulfilment that has yet to be achieved, but rather the courage to commit oneself in thought and deed to the incomprehensible and the uncontrollable which permeates our existence, and, as the future to which it is open, sustains us. Such courage has the power to dare more than what can be arrived at merely by planning and calculations.

In the final and definitive consummation hope still prevails and endures, because this definitive consummation is God.

St Bernard of Clairvaux

‘When the soul happily finds God its desire is not quenched but kindled. Does the consummation of joy bring about the consuming of desire? On the contrary, it acts like oil poured upon the flames. Joy will be fulfilled, but there will be no end to desire, and therefore no end to the search. Do not think of your eagerness to see God as caused by God’s absence, for God is always present; and think of the desire for God as without fear of failure, for grace is abundantly present’(On the Song of Songs, Sermon 84,2).