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## Exhortation

# "The God of my life"

## 5. The God of hope

Mark Guntrip

**T**HE VALUE and benefits of hope within an individual are well recognised. Hope affords motivation, encouragement, endurance, positiveness, balance, perspective, focus and resilience. How much more does the "hope of the gospel" effectively work in those who are "grounded and settled" in the faith (Col. 1:23)! In Christ all these virtues acquire an added dimension, and actively strengthen our spirit as disciples as we "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God" (Phil. 3:14).

Proverbs 18 states: "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?" (v. 14). On the natural level it is a man's knowledge that the body's immune system will come to his aid that gives him hope of being restored to full health. When a man's spirit is wounded his recovery is usually slower, the sustaining and revitalising principle of hope has been extinguished. Hope, the "one hope" (Eph. 4:1-6), is part of our spiritual immune system.

The hopes of those "in Adam" are but fleeting and shallow. They contain nothing of spiritual substance. Therefore, in reality, according to God's perspective and wisdom they have no hope (2:12). In Christ, however, "the eyes of [our] understanding [have been] enlightened; that [we] may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (1:18).

A firm hope in God not only holds promise for the future but also brings tangible help to us now. The psalmist asked: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God" (42:5). His soul was cast down and disquieted (Heb. *hamah*, 'loud sound', 'commotion', 'tumult'). The antidote is identified for us as "hope in God". It is our hope in God that banishes the depression and stresses that tend to crowd in on our minds. It is hope in God that encourages and strengthens us to continue in the face of difficulty.

A realistic hope must have a good basis—a reason why we possess that particular hope. Otherwise it would be as vain, unrealistic and unobtainable as many a dream. Psalm 119 says: "Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in Thy word" (v. 114). Our reason and basis of hope is God's unfailing Word. A regular, prayerful and diligent reading of God's Word will establish and maintain the hope of the gospel in our hearts and minds. Verses 49 and 81 contain a similar message. Consider also Psalm 146. This psalm exhorts us not to put our trust in the princes of men (v. 3), but to "hope . . . in the LORD [our] God" (v. 5). Verses 6 to 10 then supply us with twelve wonderful and compelling reasons why we can hope and trust in the God of Jacob. How appropriate to be given *twelve* reasons to encourage us in our Israelitish hope by "the God of Jacob", the father of Israel (v. 5)!

The Israelitish nature of the "hope of the gospel" is further emphasised in Paul's letter to the Romans. Romans 4:18 cites the wonderful example of Abraham, "Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations; according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be". What seemed to be, humanly speaking, an impossible hope became a realistic hope because God had promised and Abraham believed it.

These very promises of God to Abraham concerning his seed provide the foundation of the gospel of hope, and are specifically said to be confirmed by the ministry of our Lord Jesus (15:8). They constitute the hope of Israel, in which we have come to believe and rejoice (vv. 9-12). Therefore Paul says: "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy . . . that ye may abound in hope" (v. 13).

No wonder that Paul identifies hope as one of the three great virtues that should characterise our lives: "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity" (1 Cor. 13:13)!