

## Hope or Hype?

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The hope that is offered by the gospel must not be confused with the hype that is peddled by religious charlatans. It's easy to entangle the two.

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*“This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil” (Heb. 6:19).*

*“They have envisioned futility and false divination, saying, 'Thus says the Lord!' But the Lord has not sent them; yet they hope that the word may be confirmed” (Eze. 13:6).*



Christianity is a religion of hope. In a world full of pain and disappointment, the religion of Christ provides assurance that we have something better to look forward to. Whatever storms we encounter in this life, this “hope of eternal life” (Tit. 1:2) in the here-after serves as “an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.”

The value of hope is not hard to recognize. Hope has a symbiotic relationship with perseverance and character. It not only gives us a reason to stand firm in the face of hardship and temptation, it becomes stronger the more we persevere (Rom. 5:3-5; 8:25; 1 Pet. 1:13). Hope provides a strong incentive to live a pure and holy life (1 Jn. 3:3). Armed with hope, we have a reason to be optimistic, even joyful, despite the burdens we must carry (Rom. 12:12; 1 Pet. 1:6-7). Most importantly, this hope cannot be tarnished by the travails of this life (1 Pet. 1:3-4).

Without hope, life is miserable (Eph. 2:12). That's why humans are so desperate for hope, something they can cling to that gives them promise for their future. But that desperation can lead people to embrace *false* hopes. This was a problem that plagued Israel in the Old Testament. Whenever they wandered away from God, He would chastise them with affliction. But rather than repent and turn back to God, they would seek refuge in false prophets who enticed them with false promises. Again and again, the people got burned by putting their confidence in religious hucksters who told them what they wanted to hear. In the end, all of them—people and prophet alike—saw their hopes crushed. They had hope, alright, but it was a false hope based on lies.

The same process is at work today. Many religious leaders—including many who claim to follow Jesus—peddle messages of hope that have no basis in God's truth. The health-and-wealth gospel, for example, deceives the gullible into believing that faith in Jesus will make all their problems go away. A happy marriage and family! Financial prosperity! No more disease! Certainly, the moral principles of the gospel can have a positive influence in all these areas. But the gospel was never designed to be a cure-all for our earthly troubles, and those who expect that kind of outcome from a life of faith will be bitterly disappointed.

Some religious leaders use their influence to promote political solutions to moral problems. If Christians would only rally around the right candidates for high office, then our nation would be saved from the evil that is corrupting it! But Christ's kingdom is not of this world, and efforts to inject His kingdom into earthly governments will never work. If anything, these tactics are more likely to generate a backlash that, in the long run, will do more harm than good.

This world is a broken mess and will remain so until the Lord returns. We can be a beacon of light in that dark place, but we cannot transform it into Paradise. Feeding on the misguided hype that too often passes for Christian “hope” will only set us up for discouragement. Our hope lies in another realm altogether, and it is on that distant end that we must set our aim. It is only by fixing our hope on the glory that awaits us in heaven that we can find the strength to endure the trials that afflict us here on earth.

— David King