

Hope Is To Be Found In Christ

Bill Hall

"I wish I could think that I have come just a short distance toward being as prepared as he was," a woman said to me recently concerning a man who had died. Her statement was intended to be an expression of confidence in the deceased, and I shared her confidence, but the truth is: if that lady is living a faithful life in Christ, she is fully as prepared as any other person in Christ.

Entrance into heaven will not be based upon a long list of credentials built up accumulatively through the years (so many new converts, so many passages memorized, so many lives influenced, so many years in the service of the Lord, so many sermons preached, etc.), the person's chances of going to heaven being enhanced with each new credential. Entrance into heaven will be based on the merit of Christ's blood. One prepares for heaven by entering into Christ through faith, repentance, and baptism (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3); living a faithful life in Christ; and dying in Christ. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord" (Rev. 14:13). This is the true basis for one's hope, whether he has been a faithful Christian for fifty years or is just rising from baptism in newness of life.

Now if the lady had said, "I wish I could think that I have come just a short distance toward being as Godlike as I believe he was," that would have been different. Here is the prevailing purpose of every Christian, to become more like God every day. "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:3). Regular worship, liberal giving, unceasing prayer, concerned benevolence, unfeigned love of the brethren, self-control, etc.--all of which are commanded of God--are a means to the end of becoming like Him, or as stated by Jesus, "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:45). One who ignores these commands shows his contempt for God, becomes unfaithful, ceases to be like God, and loses his hope of heaven. On the other hand, one who does conscientiously obey the commands of God becomes more Godlike, and the person who has done so for fifty years will obviously have attained a greater degree of Godlikeness than one who has just begun the Christian life. But while we recognize different levels in attainment toward becoming like God, all who are faithful, and are thus purifying themselves as He is pure, share equally the hope of heaven. None has earned his way to heaven. All are dependent on God's grace, and His grace is extended to all the faithful.

Let not the young in the faith, then, be intimidated by the attainments of the more mature in the faith. Let not the mature become proud and over-confident. All must be faithful. All must be growing. All must become more and more like God. And all must die in the Lord. And to all who do so, the Lord will say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou has been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."