

NCC Question #1

Q: What is our only hope in life and death?

A: That we are not our own but belong, body and soul, both in life and death, to God and to our Savior Jesus Christ.

*¹¹ My days are past; my plans are broken off, the desires of my heart. ¹² They make night into day: 'The light,' they say, 'is near to the darkness.'
¹³ If I hope for Sheol as my house, if I make my bed in darkness, ¹⁴ if I say to the pit, 'You are my father,' and to the worm, 'My mother,' or 'My sister,' ¹⁵ where then is my hope? Who will see my hope? ¹⁶ Will it go down to the bars of Sheol? Shall we descend together into the dust?"
(Job 17:11-16, ESV)*

The Bible has much to say about hope. It also has much to say about hopelessness. Mercifully, it also shows us how to move from a state of wearying hopelessness to a state of life-giving hopefulness.

The book of Job – like the book of Ecclesiastes – majors on the theme of how and where to find hope in what seem to be apparently hopeless situations. Naturally, when we are in a painful trial, we find it almost impossible to look at or think about anything *but* the pain. This was the error of both Job and his friends: they were too busy listening to themselves and one another. It is not until the end of the book, when God is ‘allowed’ to speak, when Job’s hope is ultimately restored.

From Job, we learn an important and extremely practical truth: when we keep our eyes on the gospel, hope flourishes; when we keep our eyes anywhere else, hope languishes.

This is taught all throughout the Scriptures.

- For example, in Psalm 42-43, the psalmist, who in dire straits is being tempted to despair, must preach the gospel to himself afresh, for his salvation – and thus hope – is found only in God. Why is his soul cast down? Why is he in turmoil? Why does he “go about mourning?” Because his focus has shifted from his heavenly Captain to his earthly circumstances. But when he remembers the covenant-keeping faithfulness of I AM, he knows

that even if his pain remains and his circumstances remain unchanged, he can yet praise God *now* part, knowing that he will one day praise God fully when his invisible hope becomes a visible reality.

There is only one true and living hope in this world, and it is to belong to the living God. All other hopes will eventually rot, rust, or be burned up. Mercifully, trials, pain, and suffering remind us of this.

- Job was one of the wealthiest men alive at that time. And yet in this season of severe suffering, all his wealth and possessions were both quickly taken from him and quickly forgotten by him.
 - Cf. Psa. 39:4-7 – “O LORD, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am! Behold, You have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime as nothing before You. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! Surely a man goes about as a shadow! Surely for nothing they are in turmoil; man heaps up wealth and does not know who will gather! And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in You.”

Our hope then, is not so much in how much perishing stuff belongs to us, but rather in how much our never-perishing persons belong to the living God.

The OT saints indeed had a “hope” beyond the grave, knowing that one day Yahweh would make all things new and again dwell with His people in a restored and renovated – a regenerated and new – heavens and earth.¹

But this “hope” is most clearly seen for us in the NT, in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.²

- In fact, in 1 Tim. 1:1, Christ Jesus is simply called “our hope.”

It is only by belonging to the resurrected Christ that we have a hope not only in this life, but in the life to come, since through His resurrection He has been

¹ Cf. Matthew 19:28. Here Jesus promises His apostles that in the regeneration (Greek = *palingenisia*) they will rule with Him as the Son of Man. NET = “when all things are renewed”; NLT = “when the world is made new”; LSB = “in the regeneration”; ESV = “in the new world”. Jesus is clearly drawing from Isa. 65:17ff.

² Cf. especially the book of the Acts, where Israel’s “hope” is clearly equated with Christ’s resurrection (see 2:26; 23:6; 24:15; 26:6-7; 28:20). According to Hebrews 7:19, we as Christians have a “better hope” than even the OT saints.

appointed³ as Lord over both life and death, which gives the Christian a never-dying hope that defies the grave and transforms the life lived before it.

- 1 Cor. 15:18-22 – “If in Christ we have hoped in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”

Because our fear of death has been removed through Christ’s resurrection, we are now free to live in hope in the now:

- According to 1 Thes. 1:3, hope produces endurance,⁴ especially in times of persecution and difficulty.
 - Cf. Rom 15:4
- Rom. 5:1-5 – “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because the love of God⁵ has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”
- Rom. 12:12 – hope for the future produces joy and rejoicing in the now.
- Rom. 15:13 – our hope in Christ also produces peace
- According to Col. 1:4-5, hope produces an increasing love for the saints.

³ Unfortunately, the ESV, CSB and NASB translate Romans 1:4 that Christ “was declared” to be the Son of God in power through His resurrection. Literally, He was “appointed” (NET, NIV) or “designated” (LSB) as Son-of-God-in-power. This better represents the picture Paul has in mind, where God’s Son – the anointed king – would ascend to his throne on coronation day. Jesus’ resurrection and ascension is His ascension to receive ruling authority from His Father over all creation. His reign will be fully realized when He establishes the new heavens and earth when He returns.

⁴ I am following the NIV’s lead as translating the genitive subjectively: “

⁵ I have deviated from the ESV’s “God’s love” translation and kept it more literal (i.e. “the love of God”), which allows not only for the genitive as subjective (“God’s love for us”) but also objective (“our love towards God”).

- In 2 Thes. 2:16-17, our “eternal comfort” is linked to our “wonderful hope” (NLT), which also encourages and establishes our every good work and word.

Before we were in Christ, says Paul, we were not only “without God,” but also “without hope in the world” (Eph. 2:12). But now, in Christ, we have a “confident hope” (Eph. 1:18, NLT): we are truly and eternally⁶ God’s treasured possession and glorious inheritance.

Moreover, in Christ and through His resurrection, we have been born again to “living” hope (1 Pet. 1:3).

If this is so, what is our response to be?

- “So think clearly and exercise self-control.⁷ Look forward to the gracious salvation that will be come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world” (1 Pet. 3:13, NLT).

This is why catechisms are so valuable.

- Remembering that those who are in Christ no longer our own but fully and eternally belong to God is gloriously freeing, especially in times of trouble and in the throes of death.

Key Scripture: Romans 14:7-9

⁷ For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. ⁸ For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹ For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

Matt Papa – “If we love anything more than the Lord, it is going to betray us, by its death or ours.”

⁶ Cf. Eph. 1:13-14, where Paul says that those who are in Christ have been “sealed” by the Spirit, who has been “given as a pledge or our inheritance” (LSB), “until we acquire possession of it” (ESV).

⁷ Literally, “Therefore, girding up the loins of your mind and being sober-minded/self-controlled, set your hope on the grace being brought to you in the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

