

'Hope Kept in Heaven' in Colossians and 1 Peter



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In Colossians 1:5, Paul (who is assumed to be the author for the purposes of this article) writes of 'the hope stored up for you in heaven' (New International Version [NIV]). This text appears to present hope (ἐλπίς) as an objective reality, which can be 'stored up' in heaven, rather than a description of the subjective attitude of Christian believers. This article attempts to clarify the content of the term *hope* in this particular text by means of careful attention to the immediate context of the verse (particularly the connection between 'hope' and 'gospel'). Attention will also be paid to the use of the term ἐλπίς on two further occasions (Col 1:23; 1:27) and to other texts, which might be understood to be conceptually related to 'hope' without using that explicit terminology (particularly the reference to Christ appearing in 3:1–4). It is also argued that further light can be shed on Colossians 1:5 by considering texts in 1 Peter (particularly 1:3, but also 1:13, 21 and 3:5, 15 where ἐλπίς or the cognate verb is used). I will then reflect on any similarities and/or differences between the presentations of the concept of hope in these two canonical documents and draw some conclusions for New Testament theology.

Introduction

The most striking characteristic that distinguished the early Christians from their pagan neighbours was their *hope*. (Witherington 2007:79)

Hope is the proper response to the promises of God. (Nelson 1996:356)

What oxygen is for the lungs, such is hope for the meaning of human life. (Brunner 1954:7)

Hope is recognised by many authors as an important aspect of Christian thought. In spite of the statements quoted above, however, the subject of hope often receives relatively little attention in both biblical commentaries and systematic theologies.¹ It is also the case that hope is generally understood as the subjective attitude of Christian believers (as, apparently, in each of the quotations which open this article).

In this article, several texts, which relate to the concept of hope from two New Testament documents, Colossians and 1 Peter, will be considered.² The intention is to clarify the nature of the hope which is spoken of in these letters. In particular, I wish to argue that there is significant (though not exclusive) emphasis in both documents on hope as objective. I will begin with the texts which use the term ἐλπίς or cognates. However, I will not restrict myself to these texts, but will include also texts which appear to relate to the concept of hope.³

But what has Colossians to do with 1 Peter? Why consider Colossians and 1 Peter together?

In his recent Durham University dissertation,⁴ Robert Cavin (2010:1–2) identifies a number of points of similarity between these two letters, including their claim to be written by an apostle and their 'strikingly similar paraenesis'.

1. For example, there is only a single reference to one page against 'hope' in the subject index of Seitz (2014) and similarly one reference to one page in the large volume of Grudem (1994). Bird (2013), on the other hand, is notable for having a more substantial discussion of both specific texts and the theological topic (similarly Bavinck 2008).

2. I am delighted to offer this article to honour Prof Fika Janse van Rensburg. I am grateful to Fika for his friendship and encouragement from the time we first met in South Africa until now. This article brings together my current work on Colossians and 1 Peter, which has been a particular focus of Fika's research for many years. In his article on the eschatology of 1 Peter, Fika Janse van Rensburg (2010) identifies 'hope' as a significant concept in the eschatology of 1 Peter. He (Janse van Rensburg 2010:218) describes hope as "*n sekerheid van die toekomstige vervulling van verlossing as 'n huidige werklikheid'*" ['a certainty of the future fulfilment of salvation as a present reality' – *author's translation*]. He (Janse van Rensburg 2010:219) also emphasises that hope in 1 Peter is '*gebaseer op die opstanding van Christus*' ['based on the resurrection of Christ' – *author's translation*]. In this article, I will attempt to highlight a complementary perspective to the first of these points by Fika and to reinforce the importance of the second of his points.

3. What Mark Elliott (2000:559) says about the Old Testament is also relevant to the New Testament: 'Although hope is clearly associated with various Hebrew roots, the concept is present in many OT texts even when these roots are absent. For this reason, it is important to look beyond the distribution of specific vocabulary when assessing the importance of hope in the OT.'

4. Now published as Cavin (2013).

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One of the points he identifies, is the common use of the language of hope (Cavin 2010:2), both in the opening section of each letter and elsewhere. The language of hope is, of course, used in several other New Testament documents and is not unique to the two letters chosen for this article. However, there is an apparent similarity in the way that hope is understood. This is notable, for example, when one compares Colossians 1:5 and 1 Peter 1:3, where a similarity of thought has been noted by commentators. Gupta (2013:41), for example, claims that ‘the kind of “hope” Paul is talking about [*in Colossians 1:5*] appears to parallel what we find in 1 Peter 1:3’. More specifically, Cavin (2010:2) explains, ‘This hope is an object in heaven described metaphorically as an “inheritance” (κληρονομία, Col 3:24; 1 Pet 1:4)’.

I suggest that this provides sufficient justification for considering these two New Testament documents together.

Method

The intention is not to carry out extensive diachronic lexical analysis of ἐλπίς and its cognates. Such research has its place and the article of Silva (2014:183–189) provides a very good discussion of the relevant terminology in ancient literature. Rather, a different route will be followed. For reasons of space, the lexical discussion, which Silva and others provide, will be assumed. I will focus my attention on the contextual interpretation of several texts in each of these letters. First, relevant passages from Colossians, on their own terms and also how they interpret each other, will be considered. Then I will do the same with respect to 1 Peter. Finally, I will consider how the texts from the two letters contribute to biblical theology.

The intention is not to devote significant attention either to the so-called ‘Colossian heresy’ or to the social context of the recipients of 1 Peter. This decision is partly due to limitations of space, but it is also made with the conviction that analysis of texts in their immediate literary context should take priority over the possible implications of historical reconstructions. This is true, particularly when such historical circumstances are highly contested. Commenting on the nature of the ‘Colossian Heresy’, Barclay (1997:54), followed by Gupta (2013:18) states:

We may simply have to accept that it is an unsolved, and insoluble, mystery, and redirect our attention to the content of the letter’s response; while that too concerns a ‘mystery’ (2:2), at least we have in this case direct access to a body of evidence, the letter itself.

In her discussion of the language of hope in 1 Peter 1:3–4, Jobs (2005:84–85) gives priority to the syntax of the Greek text. While she then reflects on the significance of the words in various historical circumstances, she acknowledges that the precise circumstances cannot be identified with certainty. Also with reference to 1 Peter, Green (2007:9) states, ‘In fact, the situation presumed by 1 Peter is easy to place throughout the Roman Empire and therefore difficult to pinpoint more precisely on a timeline’. On this basis, the available space will be devoted to the analysis of the Greek text.

Hope in Colossians

Hope is so significant in Paul’s thought that he can describe God as ‘the God of hope’ (ὁ δὲ θεὸς τῆς ἐλπίδος) in Romans 15:13.⁵ Although the authorship of Colossians is disputed, for the purposes of this article it is assumed that Paul wrote Colossians (see the helpful discussion of authorship in Gupta 2013:3–10; see also Brown 1997:610–617 for a survey of the issues, which cautiously favours non-Pauline authorship). It should not be surprising, then, that we find several references to hope in Colossians. All three uses of the noun ἐλπίς in Colossians are found in the first chapter (1:5, 23, 27) and we will consider them briefly in turn.

Hope kept in heaven (Col 1:5)

The first reference to hope in Colossians appears in 1:5, in the context of the thanksgiving section of the letter:

³ Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι

⁴ ἀκούσαντες τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην ἣν ἔχετε εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους

⁵ διὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα τὴν ἀποκειμένην ὑμῖν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς ἣν προηκούσατε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀληθείας τοῦ εὐαγγελίου

⁶ τοῦ παρόντος εἰς ὑμᾶς καθὼς καὶ ἐν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ ἐστὶν καρποφορούμενοι καὶ αὐξανόμενοι καθὼς καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν ἀφ’ ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσατε καὶ ἐπέγνωτε τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ

⁷ καθὼς ἐμάθετε ἀπὸ Ἐπαφρᾶ τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ συνδούλου ἡμῶν ὃς ἐστὶν πιστὸς ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διάκονος τοῦ Χριστοῦ

⁸ ὁ καὶ δηλώσας ἡμῖν τὴν ὑμῶν ἀγάπην ἐν πνεύματι

Paul reports his thanksgiving to God for the Colossian believers on account of their faith and love. The reference to faith and love (Col 1:4) is followed by a reference to hope (1:5), thus completing a familiar triad of terms (see 1 Cor 13 and 1 Th 1). However, in contrast to the usage in 1 Corinthians 13 and 1 Thessalonians 1, hope can here not be understood as a subjective experience on the part of the Colossian Christians, but is an objective reality, which is ‘laid up for you in heaven’.⁶ Seitz (2014:78) claims that ‘Paul is here giving thanks because of the hope he is convinced, in consequence of the faith and love manifested by them, is laid up for them’. This, however, does not take seriously enough the causal significance of διὰ + accusative case, which means ‘because of’ or ‘on account of’ (see Campbell 2013:4; Wallace 1996:368–69). This hope, says Paul, is the reason for the faith and love, which is shown by the Colossians. It is ‘because of’ this hope that they demonstrate the other virtues. Hope, here, is the basis of faith and love.

5. Occurrences of ἐλπίς and cognates occur within the Pauline corpus in Romans 4:18; 5:2, 4, 5; 8:20, 24; 12:12; 15:4, 13; 1 Corinthians 9:10; 13:13; 2 Corinthians 1:7; 3:12; 10:15; Galatians 5:5; Ephesians 1:18; 2:12; 4:4; Philippians 1:20; Colossians 1:5, 23, 27; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2:19; 4:13; 5:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:16; 1 Timothy 1:1; Titus 1:2; 3:7.

6. Calvin (1965:301–302) appears to hold both subjective and objective views together: ‘For the hope of eternal life will never be inactive in us and fail to produce love in us’ and then, shortly thereafter, ‘Now, there is a metonymy in the word “hope”, as it is taken for the thing hoped for. For the hope that is in our minds is the glory which we hope for in heaven. But when he says that there is a hope laid up for us in heaven, he means that believers ought to be as assured of the promise of eternal felicity, as if they had already a treasure laid up in a safe place.’ However, it seems to me that Calvin interprets the language of the hope being ‘laid up’ as a metaphor (‘as if they had already a treasure laid up’) and that he lays primary emphasis on the subjective aspect of hope.

This hope is 'kept' or 'reserved' (ἀπόκειμαι) in heaven. This verb is used rarely in biblical texts (elsewhere only Gn 49:10; Job 38:23; Lk 19:20; 2 Tm 4:8; Heb 9:27). Bauer *et al.* (BDAG) (2000:113) suggests two related interpretations: firstly, 'to put away for safekeeping' (Lk 19:20); and secondly, 'to reserve as reward or recompense, *reserve*' (Col 1:5 and 2 Tm 4:8).⁷ In each case, some object is kept. This confirms the view that the hope is objective rather than subjective.

So, we now have to consider what this hope is. Context will be important in coming to a conclusion on this. Therefore, I intend to allow further references to hope in Colossians and also in 1 Peter to shape the interpretation of this term.

Paul explains that the Colossian believers heard about the hope, which is the basis for their faith and love in *the gospel*. Paul links 'hope' and 'the gospel' twice in this chapter: in 1:5 and again in 1:23. This points to, at least, a deliberate connection and possibly also an inclusion, which would indicate that the combination of hope and the gospel are dominant motifs for this section of the letter.

'The gospel' is clearly a central term and concept for Paul. It has also been the subject of much debate in recent scholarship. Unfortunately, in his letters Paul frequently assumes that his readers are already familiar with the content of the gospel (doubtless because he or his colleagues had already made it clear in person). There are, however, a number of places in Paul's letters where he offers a concise summary of the gospel. Perhaps the most significant of these is 1 Corinthians 15:1–5. Paul's introductory remarks in that section of 1 Corinthians emphasise the foundational nature of the gospel. In particular, Paul highlights that this gospel was what he had preached to the Corinthians, what they had received (using the language of transmission of tradition), and on which they had taken their stand (1 Cor 15:1). He also indicates that it is the means by which they are saved, provided that they continue to hold to it. What follows in 1 Corinthians 15:3b–5, and which may be understood as Paul's definition of the gospel, is a very carefully shaped presentation, which focuses on Jesus' death, burial, resurrection and appearance. What is more, it takes the form of two couplets, each of which contains the phrase *according to the scriptures*. Finally, Christ's death is given further theological interpretation by the phrase *for our sins* (1 Cor 15:3). All of this allows us to say that, for Paul, the gospel was the proclamation of the historical events of Jesus' life with particular reference to the events of his death, burial, resurrection and appearance – all of which was to be understood in the context of the entire narrative of the Hebrew scriptures and with particular emphasis on the effect of Christ's death on our sins.

Therefore, it is proposed that we understand the hope, which Paul refers to, as a hope that relates closely to the content of the gospel – a gospel that focuses particularly on the crucified and risen person, Jesus Christ. Barth and Blanke (1994:172) correctly state, 'Hope, in this sense is the Messiah, who has

⁷There is also a third impersonal use of the verb, which is idiomatic and has quite a different significance in Hebrews 9:27.

already *now* begun his reign' and hope means "the object of hope, the Messiah, who sits in heaven."⁸

Finally, with respect to this passage, we should note that the hope of which Paul speaks is 'kept' or 'reserved' in heaven (ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς). What is the hope that is kept in heaven? Moo (2008:85) suggests that the phrase, provided by Bauer *et al.* [BDAG] (2000:113), is appropriate: 'the totality of blessings that awaits the Christian in the life to come' and this would certainly tie in closely with the notion of the objective hope being an inheritance (as in 1 Pt 1:3–4; similarly Sunney 2008:35). While I am sympathetic to this suggestion, I think there may be more of a focus on the personal presence of Jesus in heaven. The only references to what the Colossians have in heaven are here in 1:5 (a 'hope') and also in 4:1 (a 'Lord' or 'Master'). Furthermore, in Colossians 3:1–4, Paul speaks of Christ as being 'above', as 'seated at the right hand of God', and of the believer's life as 'hidden with Christ in God' (see O'Brien 1982:11–12). Indeed, Paul can say to the Colossians that Christ is 'your life'. So, it is Christ who appears to be the focus of the believers' attention rather than the benefits he brings. Lohse (1971:18) argues for this interpretation: 'The hope of the Christian community is indeed directed toward nothing other than its Lord, who is enthroned at God's right hand (3:1) and is himself the "hope of glory" (ἐλπίς τῆς δόξης, 1:27)'.

It is true that the only other use of the verb ἀπόκειμαι within the letters attributed to Paul (2 Tm 4:8) appears to refer to an object ('the crown of righteousness', ὁ τῆς δικαιοσύνης στέφανος), but even in that text, there is a particular Christological emphasis with repeated reference to Christ's judgement (κρίνειν, 4:1; ὁ δίκαιος κριτής, 4:8) and appearance (ἐπιφάνεια, 4:1, 8) forming an inclusion around the charge, which is addressed to Timothy. It suggests that the real emphasis of the passage lies on the person of Christ rather than on the object that he will give (see the discussion of this passage in Marshall 1999:796–810). Mounce (2000:581–582) notes, 'Despite the use of the imagery of God giving Paul a crown, there is no suggestion that Paul is thinking of a specific reward beyond that of life with Christ'. The sense of something kept safe, which will be experienced at Christ's appearing, is very close to the thought of Colossians 3:1–4.

Hope of the gospel (Col 1:23)

The same combination of hope and gospel can be seen in Colossians 1:23:

²¹Καὶ ὑμᾶς ποτε ὄντας ἀπηλλοτριωμένους καὶ ἐχθροὺς τῇ διανοίᾳ ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις τοῖς πονηροῖς

²²νυνὶ δὲ ἀποκατήλλαξεν ἐν τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου παραστήσαι ὑμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους καὶ ἀνεγκλήτους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ

²³εἰ γὰρ ἐπιμένετε τῇ πίστει θεμελιωμένοι καὶ ἑδραῖοι καὶ μὴ μετακινούμενοι ἀπὸ τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ εὐαγγελίου οὗ ἠκούσατε τοῦ κηρυχθέντος ἐν πάσῃ κτίσει τῇ ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸν οὗ ἐγενόμην ἐγὼ Παῦλος διάκονος

According to Pao (2012:110), the phrase τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ εὐαγγελίου suggests "the hope generated by the gospel" with

“the gospel” being a genitive of source’. However, this seems to suggest a different sense of hope to that which is found in 1:5 despite of Pao’s claim that ‘As in 1:5, this hope is not a subjective sentiment but the object on which such sentiment rests’. It is argued that a closer parallel to Colossians 1:5 would be a reading of the Greek phrase as, ‘the hope presented in the gospel’ (NIV: ‘the hope held out in the gospel’) (also see Lightfoot 1999:163). Moo (2008:145) agrees with the NIV reading and sees a close connection between this verse and Colossians 1:5 (as do I), but interprets the meaning of ‘hope’ as subjective. However, I take hope’s association with the proclamation of the gospel combined with the reference to it being kept to support an objective reading (also see Bird 2009:61 who comments that Paul urges the Colossians in 1:5 not to depart ‘from the hope laid up for them in heaven’).

Hope of Glory (Col 1:27)

²⁵ ἢς ἐγενόμην ἐγὼ διάκονος κατὰ τὴν οἰκονομίαν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν δοθεῖσάν μοι εἰς ὑμᾶς πληρῶσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ

²⁶ τὸ μυστήριον τὸ ἀποκεκρυμμένον ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν γενεῶν νῦν δὲ ἐφανερώθη τοῖς ἁγίοις αὐτοῦ

²⁷ οἷς ἠθέλησεν ὁ θεὸς γνωρίσαι τί τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης τοῦ μυστηρίου τούτου ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ὃ ἐστιν Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν ἢ ἐλπίς τῆς δόξης

In Colossians 1:27, the phrase ἢ ἐλπίς τῆς δόξης stands in apposition to the phrase Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν, which itself is an explanation of πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης τοῦ μυστηρίου τούτου. So hope is apparently identified with Christ (also see Lincoln 2000:591; Lohse 1971:18, 66; Still 2004:129).

Drawing together the various implications of the texts we have considered, Marshall (2004) states:

Hope is here used concretely as the object of hope that is already there in heaven, waiting for believers, namely, the glory already bestowed on Christ and that will be shared with his people (Col 1:27). (p. 367)

I think this is largely right, except that I would argue that it is Christ who is ‘the hope of glory’ which is in heaven.

Hope in 1 Peter

Cothenet (1981) suggests a significant difference in emphasis between Peter and Paul:

Si les emplois des mots, ἐλπίς, ἐλπίζειν sont peu nombreux, ils apparaissent en des passages-clefs: de ce fait on peut dire que Pierre privilégie l’espérance, alors que Paul insiste surtout sur la foi. [If the uses of the words, ἐλπίς, ἐλπίζειν are few in number, they appear in key passages: from this fact one can say that Peter privileges hope which Paul insists above all on faith.] (p. 564, [author’s translation])

However, while I agree that Peter does place a particular emphasis on hope, I believe that our consideration of the texts from Colossians indicates that Paul places no less emphasis on hope, at least in Colossians.⁸

8.Piper (1980:214, footnote 10) similarly challenges an unduly sharp distinction between Pauline and Petrine thought.

Chester and Martin (1994:131) highlight the theme of hope in 1 Peter: ‘His emphasis on hope runs through the letter and gives it a deep structural unity (1:3, 13, 21; 3:5, 15, 20)’. Elsewhere they (Chester & Martin 1994:89) write, ‘The letter concentrates on hope as the incentive needed to carry them [the readers] through their trials to hope’s ultimate reward (1:3, 8, 13; 3:5, 15; 5:10)’.⁹

Vouga (2001:178) regards hope as ‘une attitude existentielle’ [an existential attitude]. Chester and Martin (1994) seem to take a similar line:

Hope is much more than vague optimism that ‘all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well’; rather it is that virtue, along with faith (1:21), that pins us to the living Christ who is the same in every age. (p. 132)

Similarly, Cavin (2010) comments:

The author’s emphasis on a present ‘hope’ (ἐλπίς) rests upon a future σωτηρία prefigured in the story of Christ. Because Christ endured far worse suffering yet now sits at the right hand of God (3:22), the recipients gain hope that the Great Shepherd (5:4) will return (1:3–5, 7, 9, 13, 21; 2:2, 6; 3:7, 9; 4:13; 5:4, 5, 6) to deliver their inheritance currently laid up in heaven (1:4). (pp. 76–77)

There are at least some passages, however, which I believe are better interpreted as speaking of an objective reality similar to what we have seen in Colossians and, particularly, the opening verses of the letter to which we now turn.

A living hope (1 Pt 1:3–5)

As in Colossians, we find that hope is introduced in the opening section of 1 Peter.

³ Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ὁ κατὰ τὸ πολὺ αὐτοῦ ἔλεος ἀναγεννήσας ἡμᾶς εἰς ἐλπίδα ζωῶσαν δι’ ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐκ νεκρῶν

⁴ εἰς κληρονομίαν ἀφθαρτον καὶ ἀμίαντον καὶ ἀμάραντον τετηρημένην ἐν οὐρανοῖς εἰς ὑμᾶς 5 τοὺς ἐν δυνάμει θεοῦ φρουρουμένους διὰ πίστεως εἰς σωτηρίαν ἐτοιμίην ἀποκαλιφθῆναι ἐν καιρῷ ἐσχάτῳ

The key phrase relating to hope is εἰς ἐλπίδα ζωῶσαν [to a living hope] in 1 Peter 1:3. The qualification of a noun by ‘living’ (using various forms of the verb ζῶω) is found elsewhere in 1 Peter: 1:23, ‘the living word of God’; 2:4, ‘a living stone’; 2:5, ‘as living stones’. In each case, the qualification seems to indicate, ‘characterised by life’. Schreiner (2003:61) comments that, ‘A “living hope” is one that is genuine and vital, in contrast to a hope that is empty and vain’, reading hope as a way of speaking of the believers’ ‘sure confidence’ (Schreiner 2003:62; similarly Witherington 2007:79). However, I do not believe that this is sufficient. In 1 Peter 1:3; 2:4 and 2:5, the reason for life is highly Christological. In this case, it is because Christ has risen (δι’ ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐκ νεκρῶν) and is alive that there is a living hope.¹⁰ According to Karen Jobes (2005):

9.In these lists of references, some of the verses the authors cite, do not actually contain the vocabulary of hope. Hagner (2012:696) also recognises the significance of hope in the face of suffering: ‘Hope is presented as the antidote to suffering. ... The word “hope” (ἐλπίς) in the NT does not refer to wishful thinking. It has the connotation of “confident expectation” because of the knowledge that the future, like the present, is fully in God’s hands.’

10.Herman Bavinck (2008:49–50) comments, ‘Now inasmuch as this rebirth is to be attributed to God, who brought it about by the resurrection of Christ and by the

Christian hope is everliving because Christ, the ground of that hope, is everliving. The present reality of the Christian's life is defined and determined by the reality of the past – the resurrection of Jesus – and is guaranteed into the future because Christ lives forevermore. (p. 85)

In 1 Peter 1:23 there is repetition of the verb ἀναγεννάω as in 1:3 (see Watson & Callan 2012:39–40), thus bringing together again the notion of rebirth and life. So we see hope and Christology drawn closely together. Vouga (2001:182) comments, 'Pour la première épître de Pierre, la condition des croyants est donc tout d'abord espérance parce que la foi en Dieu résulte de la résurrection de Jésus (1 Pi 1,3; 1,21)' [For the first letter of Peter, the condition of believers is therefore first of all hope because faith in God results from the resurrection of Jesus]. Although I believe that Vouga errs in regarding hope primarily as a subjective 'existential experience', he is correct regarding the resurrection of Jesus as crucial to our understanding of hope (similarly Janse van Rensburg 2010:219). Feldmeier, in his recently translated commentary on 1 Peter (2008:63), claims 'the punctiliar *Aktionsart* means ... that the new siring is founded in a single historical event. This is the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is named in the text that follows'. While Feldmeier relies on a reading of the Greek verb, which is widely challenged today (see recent discussions of *Aktionsart* and verbal aspect in Campbell 2008; Decker 2014), he is correct to identify the contextual connection between God's act of bringing about new birth and the resurrection of Jesus.¹¹

Further help in making sense of the language of hope may be found in Greek syntax. Commentators have recognised that the three-fold use of the Greek word εἰς points to a three-fold outcome of the substantial use of the article and the aorist participle ἀναγεννήσας [who gave new birth], namely εἰς ἐλπίδα, εἰς κληρονομίαν, and εἰς σωτηρίαν. Goppelt (1993:83), for example, claims that the significance of the word ἐλπίς is 'that which is hoped for' since the terms 'κληρονομία' ('inheritance') and σωτηρία ('salvation') stand parallel to it'. Goppelt is correct to identify the parallel structure, although Jobes (2005) argues that, in fact, only the first two of these prepositional phrases stand parallel to each other:

This means that that the chosen are given a new birth into two things – hope and an inheritance – but they are also guarded by faith until salvation is fully realized at some future time. (p. 84)

Accepting Jobes' position, we have εἰς ἐλπίδα and εἰς κληρονομίαν standing parallel to each other. But do these two phrases really speak of 'two things'? It appears more likely that this parallel structure indicates that each phrase provides mutual interpretation of the other. This position is supported by Dubis (2010:7), who comments, 'This phrase, also beginning with εἰς, is in apposition to εἰς ἐλπίδα ζῶσαν in verse 3, further elaborating on the recipients' future hope'.

(footnote 10 continues...)

living word, it is a rebirth to a living hope. In Peter this train of thought is as it were a single concept. The content of the new life is hope. The life of believers is totally sustained and guided by hope. Hope characterizes their whole lifestyle.'

11. See Beale (2011:324, footnote 24) for further discussion of the syntax of this verse.

Thus, we can understand the phrase εἰς ἐλπίδα in light of εἰς κληρονομίαν.

The noun κληρονομία is used relatively infrequently in the New Testament. Bauer *et al.* [BDAG] (2000:548) suggests three meanings: 'inheritance', 'possession, property' and 'transcendent salvation,' and finally an unusual use equivalent to 'the heirs'. Wright (2003:465) notes that this term is 'the regular word for the promised land within the exodus-narrative' (see also references in Selwyn 1955:124). It is interesting to note that this term is found in both 1 Peter (1:4) and Colossians (3:24). Also worth noting is the occurrence in Colossians 1:12 of the cognate term κληρος, for which Bauer *et al.* [BDAG] (2000:548) offers either 'a specially marked object, such as a pebble, a piece of pottery, or a stick, used to decide something, lot', or 'that which is assigned by lot or simply given as a portion or share, portion, share'. Both the English Standard Version (ESV) and the NIV translate the relevant phrase as 'to share in the inheritance'. So these texts in both 1 Peter and Colossians suggest that 'hope' should be understood in terms of an inheritance, something which can be treasured and kept. As Piper (1980:215) says, 'The new birth secures for a person an objective, glorious, future hope'.

Although there is some difference between the terminology used in Colossians 1:5 and in 1 Peter 1:3, there are also striking similarities: Colossians 1:5: τὴν ἀποκειμένην ὑμῖν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς; 1 Peter 1:3: τὴν ἀποκειμένην ὑμῖν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

Selwyn (1955:124) sees a direct parallel when he comments that, 'St. Paul (Col. i.5) speaks of the hope, St. Peter of the inheritance, as laid up for Christians in heaven' (see also Kelly 1981:51 who makes the same connection). Selwyn further explains that 'When the Jew wished to designate something as predestined, he spoke of it as already existing in heaven'. The common theme of a reality kept in heaven suggests that a similar theological perspective is reflected in both texts. There are also similarities to the passage in Colossians 3. Wright (2003:465) comments that the language of eschatological revelation in 1 Peter 1:5 sounds 'like the picture in Colossians 3'.

Having looked in some detail at this key passage, I will touch briefly on several further texts in 1 Peter.

Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Pt 1:13–15)

¹³ Διὸ ἀναζωσάμενοι τὰς ὀσφύας τῆς διανοίας ὑμῶν νήφοντες τελείως ἐλπίζετε ἐπὶ τὴν φερομένην ὑμῖν χάριν ἐν ἀποκαλύψει Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

¹⁴ ὡς τέκνα ὑπακοῆς μὴ συσχηματιζόμενοι ταῖς πρότερον ἐν τῇ ἀγνοίᾳ ὑμῶν ἐπιθυμίαις

¹⁵ ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸν καλέσαντα ὑμᾶς ἄγιον

The imperative 'set your hope' (ἐλπίζετε) in 1 Peter 1:13, is read most naturally as a reference to the subjective attitude of

the believers. Schreiner (2003:77) comments that, 'It has often been observed that hope in 1 Peter is virtually equivalent to faith in Paul', which is a similar view to that of Cothenet (1981), quoted above, but I do not believe that this does justice to 1:3, although it is true that both faith and hope inevitably have both objective and subjective aspects. What is evident in this text is that hope is related closely to the eschatological appearing of Christ. Thus, although the hope that is mentioned is an attitude of believers, the object of this hope is the heavenly Christ who will appear in due time. In this respect, there is a strong similarity to the thought of Colossians 3:1–4.

Your faith and hope are in God (1 Pt 1:17–21)

In a lengthy section of the first chapter, Peter calls his readers to faithful living while bearing in mind significant theological truths. These verses provide a short account of the saving acts of God in Christ and function as a summary of the gospel.

¹⁷ Καὶ εἰ πατέρα ἐπικαλεῖσθε τὸν ἀπροσωπολήμπτως κρίνοντα κατὰ τὸ

ἐκάστου ἔργον ἐν φόβῳ τὸν τῆς παροικίας ὑμῶν χρόνον ἀναστράφητε

¹⁸ εἰδότες ὅτι οὐ φθαρτοῖς ἀργυρίῳ ἢ χρυσίῳ ἐλυτρώθητε ἐκ τῆς ματαίας ὑμῶν ἀναστροφῆς πατροπαραδότου

¹⁹ ἀλλὰ τιμῆ αἵματι ὡς ἀμύμου ἀμόμου καὶ ἀσπίλου Χριστοῦ

²⁰ προεγνωσμένου μὲν πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου φανερωθέντος δὲ ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν χρόνων δι' ὑμᾶς

²¹ τοῦς δι' αὐτοῦ πιστοῦς εἰς θεὸν τὸν ἐγείραντα αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν καὶ δόξαν αὐτῷ δόντα ὥστε τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν καὶ ἐλπίδα εἶναι εἰς θεόν.

Once again, although Peter's reference to hope seems to have a subjective connotation, particularly as it stands alongside 'faith' with the possessive genitive pronoun *your*, it is evident that the faith and hope of the Christians is bound up with Christology, and particularly the core elements of the gospel relating to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus, we recognise the variation in usage of the language of 'hope', which we find in 1 Peter, but it is important to note that the subjective usage we find here is related to hope 'in God' (1:21) and that God can be the object of the believer's hope because of what he has accomplished in the person of Christ, raising him from the dead.

The holy women who hoped in God (1 Pt 3:5)

⁵ οὕτως γάρ ποτε καὶ αἱ ἅγαι γυναῖκες αἱ ἐλπίζουσαι εἰς θεὸν ἐκόσμουσαν ἑαυτὰς ὑποτασσόμεναι τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν

This text quite clearly refers to the subjective attitude of the women in question and adds nothing of significance to our discussion, except perhaps to provide additional emphasis that the hope of the women was in a person rather than in any *thing* (see Michaels 1988:163 on the similarity between the language of hope 'in God' and hope 'in Christ'). The verse does not require further attention here.

The hope in you (1 Pt 3:15)

The final text for consideration speaks of the hope 'in or amongst you':

¹⁵ κύριον δὲ τὸν Χριστὸν ἀγιάσατε ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν ἔτοιμοι ἄει πρὸς ἀπολογίαν παντὶ τῷ αἰτοῦντι ὑμᾶς λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος

¹⁶ ἀλλὰ μετὰ πραύτητος καὶ φόβου

The reference to hope in 1 Peter 3:15 has often been understood to refer to the subjective hope of believers. For example, Michaels (1988) writes:

The readers of 1 Peter, now set free from their ancestral pagan ways, have put their faith and their hope in God (1:21) ... It is this hope that separates them from their pagan neighbors and invites the confrontations of which Peter speaks. (p. 188)

Jobes (2005) believes that:

the hope in you [τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος] should be understood not so much as the hope within an individual believer but as the hope that is among believers, namely, their shared belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ that defines and unites them as Christians. (p. 230; similarly Achtemeier 1996:234)

Kelly (1981:143), however, prefers the more personal reading. I am inclined to agree with Kelly in my discussion below.

I want to propose that it is possible that there is also a more objective notion of hope here, particularly when there is a significant Christological emphasis in the context, for example, 'set aside Christ as Lord' (1 Pt 3:15), and the narrative of Christ's activity in 3:18–22 in which he is described as having gone into heaven where he is at the right hand of God (3:22). Beale (2011:154) is perhaps close to this position when he notes the strong connection between 'inheritance' and 'hope', although he seems to accept that hope is an attitude here.

If we compare this verse with Colossians 1:27, there appears to be a measure of similarity: Colossians 1:27: *Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν ἢ ἐλπίς τῆς δόξης*; 1 Peter 3:15: *κύριον δὲ τὸν Χριστὸν ἀγιάσατε ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν; ἔτοιμοι ἄει πρὸς ἀπολογίαν παντὶ τῷ αἰτοῦντι ὑμᾶς λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος*.

On the basis of this similarity, I propose that 'Christ in you' is the hope of the believer in both Colossians 1:27 and 1 Peter 3:15.

Similarities and differences

As a brief summary of our investigation so far, we have seen that there are significant arguments which can be made that the three references to 'hope' in Colossians 1 refer to an objective reality which is proclaimed in the gospel. These texts, when read with Colossians 3:1–4, suggest that the reality, which is in heaven, is not so much eternal life or some such blessing, but Christ himself, 'who is your life' (Col 3:4), who is currently in heaven, but who will appear in the eschatological future.

In 1 Peter there is one passage (1:3–5) which, it can be argued, reflects a very similar emphasis on the objective nature of the 'living hope', because that phrase is placed in a parallel construction with the term *inheritance*. On the

other hand, several references to hope in 1 Peter suggest more of an emphasis on the subjective attitude of hope. In the case of 1 Peter 3:15, while the subjective interpretation is probably most likely, there may be a reference to an objective hope, namely the risen and exalted Jesus, who is in heaven.

Significance for biblical theology

Having examined various texts from both Colossians and 1 Peter, some implications of what we have seen will now be presented.

Hope has various aspects

We have seen that there are texts in both Colossians and 1 Peter where context indicates that the main emphasis of the language of hope is on an objective reality rather than on the personal experience of believers. However, there are other texts, which clearly do speak of the subjective experience of believers. There is no way to determine which significance should be applied to 'hope' terminology other than context and so the interpreter must be sensitive to contextual clues, which will enable her or him to identify the appropriate significance in any given case.

Hope has a Christological emphasis

In both letters, we have seen a clear Christological emphasis in certain texts. In particular, we have seen the close association of hope with the gospel, which should be understood primarily as the declaration of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Closely linked to this is the sense that hope is closely associated with the presence of Christ in heaven.

Hope has similar nuances in writing ascribed to both Paul and Peter (according to traditional ascriptions)

We have seen that there is a strong measure of agreement in the view of hope, which is presented in both Colossians and 1 Peter. If the traditional ascriptions of authorship are correct, this points to a strong similarity in the views of hope held by both Paul and Peter. If these traditional ascriptions are not accurate then, at the very least, our study shows a significant measure of common understanding of hope within the early Christian community.

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