

We expect

In time of war we are expected to do our duty for Queen and country. It does not matter if you are not on the front line. All are called to serve. To support those facing the heat of battle is vital.

Christians expect much. We often find them described as those who hope. That does not surprise us for God is the God of hope (*Romans 15.13*).

The words used in the Bible help us see what hope is. Take for example two used by Job. In Job 6 verse 8 he speaks of his request for help as his hope. The word conveys the idea that he *longs for* God to do

something for him in his time of need. A little later, in chapter 13 verse 15, Job tells us that, even though God kill him, he will *wait* for God to help him. The act of waiting is nothing less than an act of hope.

When we turn to Romans 15 verse 13 we find Paul telling us God enables us to *look forward with confidence*. He means that God's people can expect to enjoy good things from God.

The summer is all but over. Autumn is upon us. Soon it shall be winter. September sees the start of a new school and college year. Those going to university or returning to school will enter the next phase of their education. They will expect to progress. That their knowledge and skills will develop during the year is a *hope* and *longing* they will have.

It is not just scholars who expect good developments and results. Christians do as well. For what do they hope?

Growth in knowledge and love

The Holy Spirit is given by God to those who have faith in Jesus Christ.

This he promises (*see John 15.26; 16.7*). And this is what the apostle Peter encourages us to expect (*see Acts 2.38f*).

What is the work of the Holy Spirit? It is to lead the followers of Christ into all truth. He takes the things of Christ and shows them to us (*John 16.13ff*). In so doing he enables us to 'grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' (*2 Peter 3.18*).

Such growth is what a Christian is to long for and wait for with eager expectation. He or she does not sit back and merely wait for God to do something. Anticipating what God promises, believers order their lives according to the teaching of God's word. They do so not to gain or merit God's favour - no one can ever do that - but out of gratitude for what God has so freely provided in his beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Their obedience is a response to his grace. It is never a means to earn it.

But, having experienced God's favour and mercy, the believer finds God has created in him a longing for more. A longing that is grounded in a confidence that what is hoped for shall surely be given.

Hence Christians expect to see their faith supplemented with virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love (*see 2 Peter 1.5ff*). As they obediently heed God's call to 'make every effort to supplement' their faith with these graces (*2 Peter 1.5*), they expect to see God at work within them by his Spirit. Such hope is never in vain.

Growth of the Church

The apostles saw God do amazing things in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (*Acts 2*). On that day some 3000 souls were added to the church (*Acts 2.41*), 'awe came upon every soul, and many signs and wonders were done through the apostles' (*Acts 2.43*). When a man lame from birth was healed (*Acts 3.1ff*) the people 'were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him' (*Acts 3.10*). A great crowd of 'utterly astounded' people gathered. It was these to whom the apostle Peter spoke.

He explained to them who Christ is. He told them it was Christ and faith in him that made the man strong (*Acts 3.16*). He called them to repent and turn to God. And he did so citing

a promise. The promise was not his own. It was God's. It concerned 'times of refreshing' (*Acts 3.20*). Peter knew we can expect such from 'the presence of the Lord.' A careful reading of Luke's account of Peter's sermon shows Peter knew the purpose and plan of God. It is to bless his people in Christ. His blessing includes turning people from their wickedness (*Acts 3.26*).

Please note the extent of the promise of God. It did not just include the immediate descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It embraces 'all the families of the earth' (*Acts 3.25*). In other words we should expect to see in every age people come to a living faith in Jesus Christ; people, that is, from both a Jewish and a non-Jewish background.

God will give a season of refreshing to an individual. He will also give the same to many individuals at the same time. Such seasons are often called awakenings or revivals. The former term is usually used of a new work of God in a community. A number of people - sometimes a small group, on other occasions a large number - become convinced of their wickedness. They also come to

see who Jesus Christ is and what he has so lovingly provided for those who deserve eternal punishment in hell. And, having become convinced that he is the only one who can rescue them from their plight, they put their trust in him. Such a season of refreshing is needed in Britain today.

The term revival tends to be reserved for a season of refreshing from God amongst his people in the church. However such usage is not exclusive. The key point is that God promises to restore and revive his people. It is possible to backslide. Too often we can become complacent. This may happen for a variety of reasons. We become discouraged or weary. We fail to resist temptation or sin. We grow jealous of others. We fail to watch and pray.

The Christian life is not easy. The world and the devil ever seek to distract us from walking humbly with and for Christ. Our flesh is weak. Without Christ we can do nothing (*John 15.5*). The great need for believers is to 'let the word of God dwell in us richly' (*Colossians 3.16*). It is to strive to 'do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving

thanks to God the Father through him' (*Colossians 3.17*).

The Power of God

The need of the hour is for power. We need to see the power of God come down (*see Isaiah 64.1*). In days past God did great things. We can expect the same today. Sadly the problem that existed in Isaiah's day is to be seen too frequently today. There was none who called upon God, who roused themselves to take hold of him (*Isaiah 64.7*).

When the people of God fail to look to God, express their complete dependence upon him, and pray for him to act, the church withers into a 'wilderness' and 'desolation' (*Isaiah 64.10*). What God's people - all people - are never to forget is that God is 'ready to be sought' (*Isaiah 65.5*). His call is to seek him 'while he may be found.' It is to 'call upon him while he is hear' (*Isaiah 55.6*).

The questions that arise as we consider these things are essentially two.

First, for what do we look? Are we expectant people? Do we expect

to see God fulfil his promise and send a season of refreshing? If not, why is our hope found wanting?

Secondly, for what do we pray? Do we seek to lay hold on God and ask him to rend the heavens and come down? If not, why are such prayers missing?

Nobody pretends that prayer does not require discipline. We all need to develop godly practices and habits. Times of prayer are to be had in private. They are also to be held with others. That is why churches set aside time for prayer. Many do so in the middle of the week as well as on the Lord's Day.

Whenever the members of our church meet for prayer our aim is to be with them. Such times are to be a priority for us. Let us ensure - emergencies and the like excepting - we are with God's people when they meet to pray.