

## Response

by

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Michael Lodahl wants to begin with Wesley, which is not wrong; but, I'd rather start with the Scripture. Initially, I looked at how the word “hope” is used by Paul and his intended meaning. My understanding of Paul in relationship to the hope he mentions is that he primarily means us to understand our hope to be eternal life in heaven. But then, I'm a product of the Church of the Nazarene, who grew up singing about the “Sweet By and By,” for which we hoped. “What a Day That Will Be ...,” “When We All Get to Heaven” then “That Will Be Glory.” We are just pilgrims traveling through, looking for a city. That is the theology on which I was weaned. Naturally, when reading the Scriptures I interpret what I read based on my prejudices.

Actually, eschatology was not an important doctrine — only that one day we would see Jesus and we would be glorified. Sanctification or Christian perfection was important. And I do not remember ever hearing a sermon or lecture even suggesting that the two doctrines were interdependent. I assumed they were independent doctrines; sanctification, a major doctrine; eschatology, a minor one. I never found much point in the arguments or discussions regarding eschatology, so I repeated the jokes I'd heard, like, I'm a panmillennialist — it will all pan out in the end. But now I'm forced to be a bit more thoughtful. What do I hope for? What do we hope for? What should we hope for?

I considered the prophets of the Old Testament and their not infrequent message of a restored Israel. Before it was easy to dismiss most of that with a simple, “That doesn't really concern me and has no impact on my life (other than proof of God's love for Israel and his faithfulness), as interesting as it may be to consider.” Giving thought to Jonah — no mention of a restored Israel or of hope, but, a clear understanding of the power of God's great grace. He didn't want to go to Nineveh, because of his hatred for them. And he was confident, he knew, that if he preached the message given him to preach the people of Ninevah, a great city of some 250,000 people, they would accept God's message of repentance. Had Jonah wanted them to be spared, he would have hoped for that.

I considered Zechariah and Anna, who were looking for the hope of Israel and were rewarded by seeing the baby Jesus in the temple. Their hope was not disappointed. They weren't hoping for paradise, but for the kingdom of God come to earth.

And I considered the disciples who fully expected Jesus to become the next king of Israel and make a major change in their present socio-political scene. They were told their hope was misdirected. Indeed, the kingdom of heaven had come to earth, but, it was a kingdom of hearts full of love for God and neighbor that was established –

not a new earthly kingdom or another kingdom merely superior to the previous and present ones, and not just a road or road map to get to heaven, the heavenly kingdom we all hope to gain.

What have I been hoping for? A cataclysmic end! The tragedies read daily in the news elicit a “Maranatha” from my mouth. So I have to say, sadly, that I find myself wanting. I have downplayed literalistic or vivid eschatological scenarios, but I have not been seeking effective ways of communicating alternatives to the people who hear me preach or teach.

I currently live in Bangkok, a city of around 10 million people. I wish I had the hope that Jonah and Paul and Wesley had. I’ve looked across the city from one of the many skyscrapers and thought, “Lord only one percent know you and love you. Use me to save some of them (at least a few).” Oh, me of little hope.

And that’s where I had settled. Does a theology of an eschatological hope that means people really coming to love God and neighbor in our present world make a difference? Can it make a difference? Should it make a difference? The only answer I can give honestly is, “Yes, it must! The doctrine of Christian perfection must / should produce a realizable eschatology in this world.”

After I accepted the assignment to respond to Lodahl’s paper, I considered for weeks what he had proposed, moving from thinking, “This guy is not right!” to “This guy is very right!” I have tried to be honest with myself – What do we hope for, what do I hope for? What should we / I be hoping for? Does it make a difference? Now I ask myself, “How do we / I change?” We believe in Christian perfection. I’ve preached it and taught it. We believe in missions – the world must know salvation and sanctification through Christ. I’m even a missionary. But what do we hope for? In what or whom do we believe? I had hoped for too little. Heaven should not be enough, but, I have been living as though it were enough. My god has been too small.

I cannot argue with what Lodahl has written, instead, I stand accused and guilty of having too little hope. God forgive me. God forgive us.