**Assignment 8.**

What is the nature of the Christian Hope?

What do we mean by Christian Hope? Hopefully by the end of this essay this question will be answered!

The Christian gospel tells us first of hope, that is ‘salvation’, ‘resurrection’, ‘eternal life’ and other things that go with them. Then second, what is hope in our present world[[1]](#footnote-0). As long as we see ‘Christian Hope’ in terms of ‘going to heaven’, of a ‘salvation’ which is mainly *away from* this world, then these two statements are bound to appear unrelated. But if the ‘Christian Hope’ is for *God’s new creation,* for ‘*new heavens*’ and ‘*new earth*’- this hope has already come in Jesus, then there is every reason to put the two together.[[2]](#footnote-1)

Wider world beliefs about hope

Muslims believe they go straight to heaven, Hindus due to karma return in a different body, until they reach Nirvana. Orthodox Jews believe that all the righteous will be raised to a new individual body in the resurrection. Buddhist hope that life after death is like a drop in the ocean, losing one's identity in the great nameless, formless beyond. In Africa they are focused on their ancestral history. [[3]](#footnote-2)

Christians believe that when we die we go to heaven, but what does the Bible say about this?

Actually the Bible says very little about ‘going to heaven when you die’! And not alot about post-mortem hell. But heaven in the New Testament or ‘God’s kingdom’, does not refer to post-mortem destiny or our escape to another place, but to God’s sovereign rule coming ‘on earth as it is in heaven’.[[4]](#footnote-3) We have been taught through the ages to think that our lives exist on this earth so that we can look forward to the better place of heaven. In Revelation 4 and 5 which depicts heaven is often said to depict the last day, however it is a picture of *present* reality, the heavenly dimension of our present life (Platonism). Heaven when mentioned in the Bible is not a future destiny , but the hidden dimension of our ordinary life - God’s dimension….God made heaven and earth, at last he will remake both and join them together forever. Revelation 21 and 22 tells us that we are not in a separate place called ‘heaven’ but that the ‘new Jerusalem’ comes down to earth uniting both heaven and earth forever in a new way. So the Bible clearly tells us that our hope is in the new heaven and new earth that is to come when Jesus comes back for the second coming.[[5]](#footnote-4) Our hope is being resurrected with Christ at the second coming, with our new transformed bodies to live with Christ in the new heavens and new earth, here on earth![[6]](#footnote-5)

Our bodies here and now

Paul in 1 Cor 6.14 tells us, “By his power God raised the Lord for the dead, and he will raise us also”. Paul here is telling us that we should look after our bodies in this life and treat our bodies with respect. 1 Cor 15.58, “Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain”. What we do in this life will not be wasted and will benefit us and God in the new life to come. It is hard to imagine that everything we do for God in this present time will be part of God’s new world. Every act of kindness, love, art and music inspired by God, delighting in His beautiful world (and helping to look after it!), spreading the gospel, building up God’s church, dealing with injustices and honouring Jesus will be for God’s glory in the new world he will one day create. This is God’s mission, to recreate his wonderful world which had begun in the resurrection of Jesus. This continues in the believers in Christ through the empowering of the Holy Spirit. This reaffirms that what we do today is not wasted or in vain and will be enhanced in the new world. [[7]](#footnote-6)

Souls (Spirit)

Scripture uses Soul & Spirit interchangeably. Soul= Heb. *Nephesh*, Gk. *psyche* and Spirit= Heb ruach, Gk. pneuma. John 12.27, Jesus says, “Now is my soul troubled,” and John 13:21 says, Jesus was “troubled in spirit”.

So what happens to the soul and spirit when we die?? Scripture states that at death either our soul departs or our spirit departs. Acts 7:59, Stephen before dying stated, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit”. However nowhere in the Bible does it state that the soul or spirit goes to heaven or goes back to God (trichotomist view) when we die. Biblical authors at the time didn't seem to care whether it was a person’s spirit or soul, to them; they both meant the same. Matt. 10:28 tells us, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell”.

Scripture tells us that in our present life body & soul are one person, and that between the time of our death and when Christ returns our spirits will temporarily exit apart from our physical bodies.[[8]](#footnote-7) However Tom Wright in his book, ‘Surprised by Hope’, states that there is little in Scripture to support the fact that we have an immortal soul. He states that when Jesus mentioned soul (very rarely) it was not referring to a disembodied entity hidden within the outer shell of the disposable body, but rather the ‘person’ or ‘personality’ seen being confronted by God. 1 Tim. 6;16, declares that only God himself is immortal. God, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honour and might forever. Amen”.[[9]](#footnote-8) So although our bodies die which makes us mortal in that sense, do our souls/spirits go on to be with Jesus?. Paul in 2 Cor. 5:8 tells us, “*We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and be at home with the Lord”.* [[10]](#footnote-9) So Paul thought so. So therefore as Chrisitans we should not fear death.

When in the bible it mentions that when we die we go to sleep or fall asleep, this is a metaphorical expression used to indicate that death is temporary for Christians, just as sleep is temporary. [[11]](#footnote-10) The body being ‘asleep’ but the real person (soul/Spirit) continues with Christ. The dead are held firmly within the conscious love of God and conscious presence of Jesus Christ, while we wait for the day of resurrection. This ‘sleep’ or state could be called heaven! (although the Bible doesn’t use it in this way)[[12]](#footnote-11)

Glorification (Receiving a Resurrection Body)

When Christ redeemed us (saved us from our sin) he saved us a whole people, our bodies as well. So Christ’s work of redemption will not be complete until our bodies are set free from the effects of the fall and brought into perfection for which God created them. This will occur when Christ returns and raises our bodies from the dead. Rom. 8 23-24, “Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is not hope at all. Who hopes for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently”. Then we are raised after death; this is called *glorification.* The day we are glorified will be a great victory as the last enemy, death, will be destroyed. 1 Cor. 15:25-26,”For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death”.

So glorification can be defined as follows, “*Glorification is the final step in the application of redemption. It will happen when Christ returns and raises from the dead the bodies of all believers for all time who have died, and reunites them with their souls, and changes the bodies of all believers who remain alive, thereby giving all believers at the same time perfect resurrection bodies like his own”. [[13]](#footnote-12)*

What will our bodies look like?

Our new bodies will be imperishable! (1Cor. 15:42-44,49) We shall bear the image of the heavenly man. (1 Cor. 49). They will not wear out or grow old. There will be no evidence of disease or injury (Jesus' scars were to remind us the price he paid for our redemption). In these resurrection bodies we will clearly see humanity as God intended it to be. 1 John 3:2, “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is”.[[14]](#footnote-13)

But do we have to wait for Christ to come back for this new world? 1 Cor. 15:24 tells us, “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet''. So therefore from this piece of Scripture we must assume that Jesus is already reigning over his kingdom here on earth as in heaven. Why is this? The first century disciples saw that because of Jesus’ resurrection this was the start of the new world, new creation, inwhich Jesus was already reigning. Sins are forgiven for the whole of the cosmos. Sin is the root cause of death, if death has been defeated by Jesus on the cross, then sin has been dealt with.[[15]](#footnote-14)

Conclusion.

So to answer the question of ‘What is Christian hope?” I believe that Jesus came to reconcile God with man through His death on the cross. So that we are forgiven of our sins and can have a personal relationship with God. Also so we can bring God’s kingdom to earth by the Holy Spirit working in us to save the lost, bind up the broken hearted and heal those who need healing in Jesus name. The ultimate goal is to be resurrected with Christ in His second coming. To receive new resurrected bodies and live with Christ in the new heavens and new earth as God intended when he originally created us. Death is not to be feared as we, our souls/spirits, go to be with Christ until we are reunited with our earthly bodies to form our new bodies.

1. Wright, Tom. Surprised by Hope. SPCK. loc 85 of 5558 [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Wright, Tom. Surprised by Hope. SPCK. loc 171 of 5558 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Wright, Tom. Surprised by Hope. SPCK. loc 192 of 5558 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Wright, Tom. Surprised by Hope. SPCK. loc 592 of 5558 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Wright, Tom. Surprised by Hope. SPCK. loc 539 of 5558 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. Wright, Tom. Surprised by Hope. SPCK. loc 728 of 5558 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. Wright, Tom. Surprised by Hope. SPCK. loc 748 & 3412 of 5558 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. Grudem, Wayne. Systematic Theology. IVP. p473 & 483. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. Wright, Tom. Surprised by Hope. SPCK. loc 775 of 5558 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. Grudem, Wayne. Systematic Theology. IVP. p816 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. Grudem, Wayne. Systematic Theology. IVP. p819 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
12. Wright, Tom. Surprised by Hope. SPCK. loc 2901 of 5558 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. Grudem, Wayne. Systematic Theology. IVP. p828 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
14. Grudem, Wayne. Systematic Theology. IVP. p832 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
15. Wright, Tom. Surprised by Hope. SPCK. loc 4011 of 5558 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)