

First published in *The Guardian* (Charlottetown, PE), Jan. 20, 2007.

“Are You Satisfied?”

Rev. Jack C. Whytock

We often hear folks say they are not satisfied with their work or their living accommodations or their grades at school (or the parents imply they are not satisfied!) Rarely, however, do we find ourselves saying we are not satisfied with our spiritual state or with our spiritual progress; and if we do, we can quickly pass it off with, “Well, we’re all not perfect.” True, we all are not perfect. But before we quickly just cast off the question, let us be reminded of a tension Paul the Apostle and Missionary once wrote about to the Ephesians. Paul was delighted that these Christians, former pagans and idolaters, had clear convictions about faith in the Lord Jesus and love for all the saints (Ephesians 1:15). It was quite incredible. Paul, was “satisfied” and thrilled by knowing and seeing faith and love in the Christian community in Ephesus.

Yet, like so many things in life, there is often a “but”. Sure enough, there is with Paul here – he was satisfied...but not completely satisfied! He expressed four prayer requests for the believers in Ephesus: that they would know Christ better (Eph. 1:17), that they would know there was hope (Eph 1:18a), that they would know they were rich (Eph. 1:18b), and that they would know God’s power (Eph. 1:19). In other words, Paul was not satisfied that in each of these four areas these Christians had it completely together.

Allow me to select only one of these, the second, Paul’s prayer that these Christians know more of their hope. In part I want to focus upon this because this joins us with Paul’s great recurring theme in his writings in what is often called Paul’s trinity of Christian virtues – faith, love and hope. “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love...” (1 Corinthians 13:13). What does a “hopeful Christian” look like? They have an optimism that is rooted in the promises of the Bible. They are the opposite of a cynic or a cynical Christian. You know this kind – they doubt and despise everything in the world, in the church, and with virtually all Christians. No. We need hopeful Christians who have a biblically rooted optimism that does not despair, but says to oneself, “God has called me to hope; God has not called the Christian to despair. I hear the promises of my Lord, ‘I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it,’ and ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’” Friends, if you have fallen into the trap of being a cynically minded Christian, you must not be satisfied. Paul made a prayer for you, that the eyes of your heart would be changed, that you would know you have been called to be a “hopeful Christian”.

Dr. Jack C. Whytock is a theological missionary working as a visiting professor at theological colleges in the developing world.