

## **IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH**

### ***HOPE***

It may seem surprising that I have listed hope as the fifth characteristic of the spiritual condition of today's world. After all, what is there to be hopeful about in a world that is identified as fearful, angry, frustrated, and restless? Why hope? It's how we were made. It simply is there. The previous four (negative) characteristics are essentially reactions to conditions in which we live, responses to the collective stimuli our society has created. Hope springs from a different source. It is not a product of our basic stimulus-response cognitive workings. It is a human attribute designed and implanted by God—no doubt specifically for this purpose. You might say that God designed hope as a sort of insurance policy against free will run amuck. God knew that it was just a matter of time before our collective human intellect would allow us to work with the basic building blocks of physical existence (i.e., atoms, molecules, classical physics, molecular biology, etc.) to realize our dreams. If these dreams happened to coincide with the principles that create, promote, and sustain harmony and contentment, it would be a win-win for all, and God's kingdom would essentially be duplicated on earth. However, if on the other hand man chose to ignore God's guidance and pursue a path of superficial, selfish satisfaction at the expense of others, hope would be the antidote. As long as hope exists, man will continue to search for that elusive and ineffable state of existence that deep down inside we know that we were created for. This is where we are today.

### ***SUMMARY***

Humankind has awakened and, to a certain extent, grown up. We now understand our environment well enough to consciously alter aspects of it. This knowledge and power has allowed us to develop many products and systems to feed, clothe, house, transport, and entertain ourselves to unprecedented degrees. But all of this development has come at a price. Because we have also gotten more sophisticated in our ability to inflict harm on each other, we live with a great deal of fear. The discomfort of having to put up with this pervasive fear has contributed to a rising sense of anger—anger perhaps directed most of all, in the final analysis, at ourselves for having unleashed a power that has consistently failed to deliver the promised brave new utopian world. Seeing this promised land so close at hand (due to our intellectual and technological advancement), but yet so

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far away (due to our social immaturity) has given rise to frustration. We haven't found the answer yet, but with all of our capability, it must be out there somewhere, so we restlessly keep looking. While this cycle is a great way to fuel economic markets, it doesn't do much for spiritual contentment. But we won't give up. We can't. Something won't let us. Even now, in this fractured, alienated world that sits one computer keystroke away from nuclear annihilation, we remain hopeful.

I am convinced that our species, until the last one of us draws our last breath, will remain hopeful. But the strain of this deferred hope is not without consequences. These consequences must also be understood if the faith of Jesus is to have the same efficacy and relevance today as it did in the first century. Thus, while it is important to understand and appreciate the fear, anger, frustration, restlessness, and hope of our world today, it is equally important to understand the effect that these extraordinarily strong psychic forces have on our combined being. In particular, just as a corrosive chemical can threaten the structural integrity of an otherwise stable structure, the inherent volatility of these five characteristics has the potential to completely undermine the spiritual integrity and coherence of our being at a most fundamental and crucial level. Such is the spiritual condition of today's world: a world that, as we shall see in the next chapter, may be in danger of coming apart at the seams.