

The Faith, Love and Hope Found in Jesus Christ
Colossians 1:1-8

Introduction

Sitting at my desk two weeks after getting saved and realizing I had a genuine faith and real hope for the first time; it was REAL; yet, when I spoke with a priest he downplayed such simple faith and suggested I needed Catholicism

1. We learned in our introduction last week that Paul was writing to the believers at Colossae because he was concerned that they were being led astray thinking they needed more than Jesus Christ for their salvation
2. What can we learn from Paul's introduction?
 - a. The Gospel is the true source of faith, love and hope
 - b. The Gospel bears fruit wherever it is preached
 - c. The Gospel cannot be learned if it's not shared

A. The Gospel is the true source of faith, love and hope (READ 1:1-5)

1. Paul began this letter by expressing his thankfulness to God for three things he saw in the Colossians: faith, love, and hope
2. Combinations of these words are often found in the New Testament, sometimes with all three in the same verse or context:
 - a. 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3: **"We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; 3 constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father,"**
 - b. Galatians 5:5-6: **"For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love."**
 - c. Hebrews 10:22-24: **"let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,"**
3. The reason these three words are often found together in the Bible is because they exemplify the Christian life, and they exemplified the Christians in Colossae:
 - a. The first word that exemplifies the Christian life is faith:
 - 1) The simplest definition of faith is complete trust or confidence in someone or something
 - a) The first thing we have to understand about faith is that it goes beyond mere intellectual belief:
 - It involves trust and confidence
 - It impacts behavior and leads to action (in fact, James wrote that faith without works is dead); in other words, it's not actually faith if one doesn't act upon it

Trip to Lookout Mountain as a kid and having to muster up the faith to walk across the gorge on a ragged old rope suspension bridge

- b) The second thing we have to understand about faith is that it requires an object: something or someone to have faith in:
 - In my example of the rope bridge, I had faith that it wouldn't collapse and send me crashing to my death on the canyon floor hundreds of feet below
 - When it came to the Colossians, Paul was thankful because their faith was **"in Christ Jesus"** (4)
 - 2) This is important because as we'll see as we go through the letter, the Colossians were being tempted and challenged to place their faith in other things like man-made religion, mystical practices, religious rites and false wisdom and knowledge, all with the promise that such things would lead to a fuller, more spiritual understanding and relationship with God
 - 3) However, all of these things were distractions meant by the enemy to lead them AWAY from faith in Jesus Christ alone:
 - a) Everything we need for salvation has already been accomplished by Jesus Christ; there is nothing more we need to do; we don't need faith in Jesus plus something else
 - b) Paul wrote in Romans 5 that we **"have obtained our introduction BY FAITH into [God's] grace in which we stand"** because we **"have been saved THROUGH FAITH [in Jesus], and that not of [ourselves], it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."** (Romans 5:2-8)
 - c) I mentioned last week how the Bible Answer Man, Hank Hanegraaf, was led astray from the simplicity of the Gospel and faith in Jesus Christ alone to Jesus plus something else (traditions of the EO church, sacraments, theosis, his own works)
 - d) This is NOT Christian faith; it is NOT faith in Jesus, but faith in something else
 - b. The second word that exemplifies the Christian life is love:
 - 1) Paul not only thanked God for the faith of the Colossians, but their love for one another (REREAD 1:4)
 - 2) Jesus said the two greatest commandments are to love God and love others (READ Matthew 22:36-40)
 - 3) He also said that the world would know we are His disciples by our love (READ John 13:34-35)
 - 4) In fact, Paul wrote that when it comes to faith, hope, and love, love is the greatest of these (1 Corinthians 13:13): **"But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love"**
 - 5) John explained why love exemplifies the Christian life, and even issued a warning for those whose lives don't reflect love for one another (READ 1 John 1:7-21)
 - c. The third word that exemplifies the Christian life is hope:
 - 1) Go back to v. 5 (REREAD)
 - 2) Did you catch that? The faith and love we just discussed are because of the hope that is laid up for us in heaven
 - 3) So, what is this hope? It's the hope of salvation and eternal life (READ Romans 8:24-39)
 4. Takeaway: These first few verses of Paul's letter are a reminder that genuine faith, love, and hope are found in one source—Jesus Christ and Him alone:

- a. The Colossians had discovered and were experiencing these things as a result of hearing the **“word of Truth, the Gospel”** (5) and placing their trust in Jesus Christ
- b. Many try to find these things outside of a relationship with Jesus, but it’s an empty pursuit
- c. Others seem to think that Jesus is only the starting point (like Hank Hanegraaff), and that we need to add all sorts of man-made rules, rites, and regulations—or some special wisdom or knowledge gleaned through human observation or mystical practices—in order to truly or fully be saved or experience God
- d. The Bible declares something very different (READ 2 Peter 2-4)

<p>B. The Gospel bears fruit wherever it is preached (1:6)</p>
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1. In Isaiah 55:10-11 God said, **“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; 11 So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.”**
2. There is no greater demonstration of this than the Gospel (READ 1:6):
 - a. The Gospel had come to the Colossians in the same way that it had been doing in all the world: **“constantly bearing fruit and increasing”** wherever it went:
 - 1) Paul already described some of this fruit: it was the faith, love and hope demonstrated by the Colossians
 - 2) And, this wasn’t just a one-time thing—the Gospel continued to bear fruit and **“increase”** (multiply) among the Colossians (there were at least two other churches in the same general region)
 - 3) It had been doing this **“since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth”** (e.g. came to truly understand God’s grace and how it works)
 - b. Is this still true today?
 - 1) If we looked at just the United States, we might be tempted to think it’s not true
 - a) According to nearly every study by America’s leading Christian research institutes, Christianity is shrinking, not growing, in the U.S.
 - b) 50 years ago 90% of American’s identified as Christian; in 2020 that number dropped to 65%. And, within the next few decades all the indicators suggest that Christians will be the minority in the U.S. (this is at a time when many other religions are growing)
 - c) Church attendance also continues to decline rapidly, most significantly among the young; approximately only 30% of Americans attend church weekly
 - d) More churches close their doors every year than new opens open (on average 4500 close with only 3000 opening)
 - e) This is true not just in America, but most of the Western World
 - 2) However, if we look around the world, the Gospel is still bearing fruit and increasing:
 - a) We often hear that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world, but that is mainly due to birth rates
 - b) When it comes to conversions, Christianity is the fastest growing religion in the world with the bulk of the growth coming from evangelicals and charismatics
 - c) Latin America, Africa, and Asia have the fastest growing Christian populations, with Africa having more Christians than any other continent

- d) This is also seen in the printing of Bible: in 1900 an average of 5 million bibles were printed every year, but this year nearly 100 million will be printed, and this is just print bibles! (it's crazy that this many bibles are still be printed when electronic bibles have become so popular and available almost everywhere)
- 3. Takeaway: So, this begs the question: why is Christianity shrinking here and in the West, but growing expansively in other places?
 - a) Consider what the Bible says about the power of the Gospel:
 - 1) Romans 1:16: **"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."**
 - 2) 1 Thessalonians 1:5: **"for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake."**
 - 3) 2 Timothy 1:8: **"Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God,"**
 - 4) 1 Corinthians 1:18: **"For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."**
 - 5) 1 Corinthians 2:1-4 (READ)
 - b) With this in mind, if we are not seeing the Gospel—which is the power of God—bearing fruit and increasing here in the U.S., then I propose the reason is the Word of God is not being preached by most American churches and the Gospel is not being shared by most of American body of Christ:
 - 1) A couple years back, the Center for Faith & Culture published an article revealing how the Gospel of the Bible has been replaced by 3 false gospels: the Prosperity Gospel, the Personal Gospel and the Political Gospel
 - 2) Must of this can be blamed on the growth of the seeker sensitive philosophy and multi-site mega church movement which now dominates and heavily influences much of American Christianity

****This leads to the final thing we learn from our passage this morning**

C. The Gospel can't be learned if it's not shared (READ 1:7)

- 1. This is one of those "duh" moments where you say something that really shouldn't have to be said—it's like the dude who went to the doctor and said, "Doctor, it hurts when I do this" as he stuck his finger in his eye. So, the doctor responded, "Well, don't do that!"
- 2. Sometimes we overlook the obvious, and one of the obvious things about the Gospel is that it needs to be shared before it can be learned and accepted (READ ROMANS 10:14)
- 3. The Colossians learned about the Gospel from Epaphras whom Paul describes as **"a beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf."** – in this context, Epaphras' faithfulness is tied to his sharing of the Gospel with the Colossians
- 4. I know I am going to ruffle some feathers with this statement, and will probably even make some of you uncomfortable, but sharing our faith is not an option:
 - a. The mission of the Church and the body of Christ is to make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20): **"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the**

- Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."**
- b. As individuals we are called upon to share the hope we have in Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:15): **"but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;"**
 - c. As individuals, we are also called upon to contend earnest for the faith (Jude 1:3: **"Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints."**
 - d. We can't do any of this without sharing the Gospel, a the Church or as individuals
5. Takeaway:
- a. This doesn't mean that we've all been giving the gift of evangelism, or are called to start preaching on street corners
 - b. It's not up to us to save anyone—that's God's job—but we have an obligation as faithful servants of Jesus Christ to share our faith through our actions and through our words
 - c. Consider what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:6-7: **"I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. 7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth."**