

98-06-12b Colossians

Let's resume now our study in Colossians. We have begun this evening in verse 3, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have an idea now why Paul says that.

He's not just kind of generating filler so that he can collect his thoughts and launch into the letter. Every word of scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for doctrine. It's profitable for reproof.

It's profitable for correction. And it's profitable for instruction and righteousness. And all of that has a purpose.

It's so that we as believers can be mature, can be complete, and be thoroughly equipped for every good work. And that includes the greetings, the genealogies, the lists of ancestors, the strange goings-on when you read 2 Kings, and the almost indecipherable utterances that you find in some of the minor prophets. All of it is profitable, and we want to pay close attention.

So we've seen why Paul says, at least have an idea of why he says, Grace to you and peace. We know what the source of that is, and that's a real thing. It's not just a little flowery phrase.

That really is the only source of grace and the only source of peace. Then he says, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And he identifies God the Father as the Father of Jesus Christ specifically because as we were talking about during the break, there are many different ways that you can view God.

There are many different angles that you can take as you look at God's plan and the unfolding of it in history. But the particular thing that Paul wants to bring to mind is that God the Father here is the Father of Jesus Christ. Our immediate point of contact with God is Jesus Christ.

But he is, what does John 14.6 say? What does Jesus say to the disciples in the upper room? I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man goes where? No man goes to heaven except by me? Everybody thinks, well, get saved and we'll all go to heaven. The idea is, what Jesus says is, you get saved through faith in him and you go to the Father.

It's not a place, it's a person that we look forward to in the eternal future. Big misunderstandings about heaven in general. A little mental quiz for you.

See if you can remember any verse in the Bible that says you're going to go to heaven when you die or that you're going to live in heaven in the eternal future. Just a little exercise you can work on in your spare time. If you find one, let me know.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ. Oh, well, there it is right there. He's blessed us.

Well, are we in the heavenlies? He says has blessed. He doesn't say will bless. The spiritual

blessings reside in the heavenlies.

He doesn't say we're going to go up there and get them. But again, I'll leave that to your investigations. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We think of Him in terms of Christ. If you've seen Christ, you've seen the Father. And this, of course, I'm actually looking at Ephesians.

It would be helpful if I looked at Colossians. We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ praying always for you. The always here, if you look at it in the New King James, it says we're always praying for you.

The always belongs with we give thanks. Seems like a small difference, but you get the idea. Well, Paul says I'm just praying for you all the time.

He's not saying that. He says when we pray for you, every time we pray for you, we always give thanks. So the idea is the prayers are always characterized by thankfulness, not that Paul is in constant prayer for them.

Paul's got a lot of other things to pray for. And if you look at it in Greek, it's general agreement that the always goes up there with thanks. We give thanks always when we pray for you because... And in verse 4 and 5, he tells us why he's thankful.

And we've seen in some of these other letters of Paul that Paul always finds something to be thankful for. If it's not the believers, then he can always go back and be thankful to God Himself for His grace and His mercy and comfort and so on. But here, this is a great group.

And Paul has three things to be thankful for. He says we thank always God for you since we heard of your faith. So they've got that faith going, which we're going to see in a little bit more detail.

And then your love for all the saints in verse 4 because of the hope that is laid up for you in heaven. So the triad of Christian virtues, faith, hope, and love, all three of them are present in the lives of these individual believers. And this is not always the case.

We've seen the letter to the Galatians. They didn't have any of them. We've seen in the Corinthians, they had the faith, but they needed the... And same thing in Romans.

They had faith, but the love and the hope didn't really seem to be hitting on all eight cylinders. And if you look back at Romans, Paul starts out and he builds on what they've got. He says, well, the thing you've got going for you is your faith.

I thank God for you because your faith is known throughout the area. You've got faith nailed. You're functioning in faith.

You're living by faith. And that's a wonderful thing. But he's going to move on and build on that in the letter.

Look at Romans chapter 5. He says, the great thing about faith... What does he talk about in the first four chapters of Romans? Essentially, righteousness. The thing that pleases God and fulfills His plan is righteousness. Being pleasing in God's sight.

He doesn't look at you and see sin. He looks at you and sees righteousness. He doesn't look at you and see apathy, indifference.

He doesn't look at you and see a big negative. He looks at you and sees righteousness. It's the best thing that could happen to us in the universe is to be declared righteous by God.

How do you get that standing? You trust God. God says something and you believe it and you act on it. God says, this is the way I need you to live your life.

You say, okay, fine, that's what I'm going to do. Circumstances, people, everything else starts trying to lead you in a different direction. You say, you know, this isn't what God says.

Everybody says it's fine. Disregard morality. Go for what feels good.

It can't be wrong if it feels so right. Debbie Boone. You say, no, God says this is the way you've got to be.

You've got to function in integrity. You've got to honor your commitments. You've got to keep your promises.

You've got to live in the light of what God evaluates. And Paul says, therefore, having been justified by faith. The big misconception about Romans is that everything in Romans is about salvation.

He's not talking about that at all. He has just spent the entire chapter in chapter 4 talking about Abraham. When Abraham believed God and it was counted as righteousness for him.

But if you read it, it's not when Abraham got saved. If Romans is the big salvation book, why doesn't he go back to when Abraham was living in Ur and God said, hi there, Abraham, I'm God. Walk before me and be blameless.

And Abraham said, ooh, there's a God I believe I'll trust in him. And then he got saved. That's when he was saved before he got up from Ur of the Chaldees and went to the land of promise.

He wouldn't go up as an unbeliever and claim a promise of God. God wouldn't reveal himself and say this is my will for your life when he's an unbeliever. He's a believer in Ur when he's 20, 30 years old or younger.

The illustration in Romans chapter 4 is when Abraham is old and when he's going to have a son and he doesn't worry about the age of his wife and the science and the public opinion that all says, oh, it's never going to happen. He trusts in God and it's counted to him for righteousness. This is the trust that a believer has in God.

This is the kind of trust that you and I are supposed to have in God. And when we do trust him, in the face of everything, you know, oh, if you eat that food, it's going to kill you. God says if you're thankful for it, it's good.

Well, you've got a clear cut choice there. You're going to believe the Bible or you're going to believe science. And if it does kill you, maybe that's God's wonderful way of taking you out in grace and a nice quick heart attack, that last 10% of the artery chokes up and you just blink off and the next thing you see is the face of Christ.

As opposed to living on bird seed and seaweed and stuff and agonizing on into old age and being miserable. Who knows? All I know is that given a choice, I'm going to trust the promise of God. God says in everything give thanks.

God says don't let anyone judge you in matters of food. Jesus says don't worry about what you eat or what you're going to wear. And that's not just where it comes from, but also what it is.

Paul says everything is good for food if it's accepted with prayer and thanksgiving. He doesn't say most things. He doesn't say clean things.

He doesn't say low cholesterol things. He says all things. Obviously, if you have a medical condition, you've got to exercise the better part of wisdom.

I'm talking about people who for no reason other than fear decide that what God has made is not good. Things that we've eaten ever since Adam and Eve are no longer acceptable. Things that we've eaten ever since Noah are no longer acceptable.

This is the point. That's an illustration. Eat whatever you want to.

Refrain from whatever you want to. Just don't do it because you think that this is going to make you righteous before God or that you think it's going to extend your life. Remember what Jesus said? Which of you by worrying can add anything to your stature, add any length to your life? Well, worrying about your food isn't going to add anything.

You're going to die on the exact day, the exact hour, the exact minute that God wants you to. And if you torture yourself and abstain from all this wonderful good food and all that great stuff that God made, then you'll just have to get hit by a bus instead of dying of a heart attack. But you're going to die just when God wants you to.

You're not going to extend your life by abstention. And that's what the Bible says. Science doesn't

say that.

Culture doesn't say that. That's what the Bible says. So you have a choice.

That's living by faith. Faith is practical. It's not sort of a holy, abstract, fuzzy kind of a trusting, that any unbeliever can believe that somewhere over the rainbow birds sing and the sun shines and all that.

That's not reality. Reality is that what God has said, He will do. And He has said a lot of specific things.

How can you live the life of faith? You have to know what God says. That's why we study the Word of God. You can have no faith if you don't know anything about what God has said.

If you don't know the conditions of His promises, you can't claim them. So Paul says in Romans chapter 5, Therefore, he's made his point here, you're justified, you're good in God's eyes when you trust Him. By faith.

You're righteous. You have achieved what 99.5% of the world's population cannot achieve, has never achieved, and never will achieve. And that is well done in God's eyes.

Just because you trust Him, that's all you have to do. No works, no labor, no self-torture, none of the things that we saw that are distractions in Colossae, asceticism, religion, any of those things, you just trust God and you're righteous. Having been justified by faith, what do you get? You get the greeting that Paul gives in each one of his letters.

Peace. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. That's what Paul says in most of his letters.

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Through whom also we have access by faith. Into what? This grace in which we stand.

That's the door of grace. Grace to you and peace. How do you lay hold of grace? How do you lay hold of peace? It's by faith.

Faith is the first. When you think about faith, hope, and love, a lot of the church today, you go and listen to a sermon, or get a book, or watch a video, or go down to the stadium and cheer, and when somebody starts talking, what are they going to say? You're going to get there. You're going to please God and achieve your goal as a believer with love.

Love is the key that unlocks the pearly gates. Look at the Bible. Jesus, the great commandment, love one another, and so forth.

You think, well, I've got to have love. I've got to generate that love. So people will try to manufacture love.

They'll smile when they don't feel like smiling. They'll glad hand and shake your hand and say, Hi, how are you doing, and so forth. And inside there's all these sinful attitudes floating around, thinking, oh, you really did something awful last week, and I haven't forgotten about it, but hi.

We try to manufacture love, and we think that love is the entry point. Boy, look how loving I was. I didn't bite that person's head off.

I didn't say, get thee hence, so God must be pleased. We think love is the entry point. Or we think hope is the entry point.

We think, oh, yeah, we'll understand it all better by and by. Well, it's all rotten and decaying and bad down here, but over in glory land it'll all be great. And if that's all you do, if you think, well, I'm trusting God for heaven, or I'm loving everybody even when I don't feel like it, that's not the entry point.

The entry point is faith. When you look at faith, hope, and love, faith is the first step. Without faith, it is impossible to please God.

You can have all the love you want. You can have all the hope you want. You can be thinking about the pearly gates, dreaming dreams of heaven and Jesus and angels.

It doesn't matter. Faith is the first thing. And if you think about it, that's the first step in salvation.

You hear the gospel, and you trust it. It's before you know anything about heaven and the pearly gates. God doesn't entice you in with a sales pitch on how great eternity is going to be, or even how great life with Him is going to be.

Now, people try to do that and say, God has answered all your problems. That's not what the Bible does. The Bible says, look, there's a God.

He has an absolute standard of righteousness. You don't meet it, and there's a judgment coming, unless you take hold of His provision for release, His provision for deliverance. And that's His Son, Jesus Christ, who died for you.

That's what we trust. We say, you know, I know there's a God. I believe that, and I have come to an understanding of Jesus Christ and what He has done, and I'm trusting in His work for me.

I know that I can't earn it or deserve it, and I know that God has made this offer, and I accept it. I seize on it by faith. Faith is the first step.

And this is a big distortion of the gospel today. People try to paint what a lovely thing Christianity is, and what lovely people Christians are, and how lovely God is, and how beautiful Jesus is, and He's walking through the field of daisies, holding your hand, He's your friend, and so forth. And

not to belittle the love of God, but love is not the entry point, and loving God is not the way to bring people to Christ and to the kingdom.

It's faith. It's faith in God's provision for salvation. And that's what Paul points out here.

We, having been justified by faith, and this is our living faith, once we've seized on to the promises of God, the principles of God, the doctrines of God in His Word, and we say, that's the ordering principle of my life. God says, don't worry about what people think, don't try to get in good with the in crowd, or the clique, or the, you know, don't get all upset when people misunderstand, or when people misjudge, or when people have a bad opinion. Don't let that condition your happiness.

Base your estimate of where you are on what God thinks. If God's pleased, let the rest of it go. We make that decision, and that's faith.

Once we exercise that faith, we have peace. Through whom we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, we glory in tribulations.

All of this is after faith, not before. You can't glory in your tribulations if you don't have faith. People try to glory in their tribulations, but it's an empty exercise.

Any unbeliever can say, boy, look at how I survived three days on the freezing mountain. I got my nose and my feet all frostbitten off. Here I was ten days under the rubble, and they finally dug me out.

There's no faith, there's no glory to God involved there. People just survived. They just hung on through... I mean, what else are you going to do? There's no glory to God in that.

But with faith, you know that there's a reason. You know that there's a purpose. You know that God has orchestrated this into his plan, and God is using this circumstance to make an eternal difference in you and in others around you.

It counts. It's not just what a great person you are. You survived.

Any unbeliever can survive a disaster. It takes a believer oriented to the grace of God who has faith to turn a disaster or a bad circumstance into something that has eternal value, something that stands and reflects the glory of God for eternity. And once you have trusted God, once you have exercised faith, you're declared righteous.

That's the first thing that happens. God says, that is a good thing you just did. You finally woke up and trusted me instead of basing your life on the world.

I'm going to give you the gift of peace. I am going to fill your soul with things that nobody can

even comprehend that hasn't been there. And once you have that, your circumstances no longer influence your happiness.

You're aware of them. You feel them. You're not shot up with spiritual novocaine.

But it doesn't deflect you. You're not all floating up in the clouds. But now your life is a detail instead of spiritual things being a detail in your life.

The priorities are reversed. You're no longer a victim of circumstances. You're not deflected and dragged hither and yon and blown here and there.

And you stand in that grace and you rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. People say, I know I'm supposed to rejoice, rejoice evermore in everything, give thanks. How can I be thankful? How can I have joy when these awful things are happening to me? Well, as long as you're looking at the awful things, you never are going to be able to.

And anything you manufacture is going to be fake. We have to start with faith. If you look at yourself, if we look at ourselves and say, you know, I don't have the joy I'm supposed to have.

All this fruit of the Spirit, joy, peace, patience, all that, I don't really have that. How do I get it? And we think, well, you know, I'll confess my sins, the Spirit will come and give me all that. The point of entry into the power of God, the way of accessing peace and joy is faith.

Faith has to have an object. You have to start thinking about what God has said. You have to know what He said, you have to believe it, and you have to start cycling it through your mind.

God says this all happens for a reason. God says I will never stumble so as to fall. God says He will never leave me nor forsake me.

God says I have an eternal standing before Him in Christ. God has made a way, no matter how badly I have soiled myself, He can cleanse me. He can make me pure.

He can make me whiter than snow. It doesn't matter how badly I failed or how many times I failed. God says if I come to Him and pray the prayer that David prayed, purge me with hyssop, I shall be clean.

Wash me, I shall be whiter than snow. That's what God says. Don't let anybody tell you that you're going to carry around guilt.

Don't let anybody tell you that well, you've got to make amends, you've got to add something, that you don't have the fullness of God's promise that there's some other thing. You've got to sort of torture yourself for a while and you've got to grovel and you've got to feel miserable. You have to depend on God.

What God has said, He will do. That's faith. You have to know those things and you have to make

them real in your mind because they are real.

They're not always real to us, but they're real. That faith is where grace enters. That faith is where righteousness enters.

That faith is where joy and peace come into the life. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy and peace. And we say, well, I need those things in my life.

How do I get them? And we start pursuing the Spirit. What we need to pursue is faith because the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. The object of faith is the Word of God.

Everything depends on what proceeds out of the mouth of God. That's the divine power. The Word of God is alive and powerful.

When it is the object of our faith, that is the electrical connection that transfers the power of God into our life. Latching onto and making real in our thinking what God has said. That's where joy comes from.

If you lack joy, don't waste your time trying to get more of the Spirit. Don't waste your time trying to do more. Spend your time concentrating on what is the object of faith.

Because faith is the point of entry. Then you can truly know what it means to glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation... Notice that in verse 3 of Romans 5. You can glory in tribulations because you know something. Something is real to you.

It's not an abstract. It's not what somebody said. It's not something you read in the pages of Scripture.

You know in your innermost being that this trial is a good thing. It is a part of God's plan. It's something God has equipped you for.

That God is going to sustain you through. It is a necessary thing or God would never have put it in your path because He loves you. Knowing that that tribulation is going to produce perseverance.

And that perseverance produces character and character produces hope. Hope as a result, not the entry point into these things. Faith is the beginning point.

Turn to the next book that we want to look at after Galatians and Ephesians. Let's take a look at Philippians and see what Paul is thankful for. What Paul has to say about grace and peace in Philippians.

If you know anything about the Philippian church, you know that there was a large community of retired Roman soldiers there. It was a more mature, settled community. The church there was

strong and had a good grip on what Paul had taught, had a lot of contact with Paul.

Chapter 1, verse 2, he says what he always says. Grace to you and peace. It doesn't matter if you're the most backward church like the Corinthians or the most advanced like the Philippians and the Thessalonians.

The same opportunity is there. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Then look at verse 3. What is Paul thankful for? I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making requests for you all with joy for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.

They understand the plan. They understand how the plan of God works. They know where the threshold of grace is.

They know that we walk by faith and not by sight. They know that walking by faith enables the love of God to be shed abroad in our hearts. That's what you find in Romans 5.5. That hope that comes through perseverance and character and so forth in Romans 5.3 and 4 eventuates in the love of God being shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

So, hope and love follow hard on the heels of our faith. That's what they have figured out in Philippi. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.

Confident that the one who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus. People like to take this and universalize it and say, you know, God began a good work in every single believer and he's going to complete every single believer in the day of Christ Jesus. Not so.

Look at the context. These are the Philippian believers. This is one of the most mature, one of the best growing churches in Paul's whole arena of ministry.

And in their case, Paul says, I'm confident that God has not only been able to begin a work in you but that he's going to finish it. He's going to crown you with glory when Jesus Christ returns because you all have latched on. You understand faith.

You understand hope. And you understand love. People rip this out and say, look, God's at work in everybody.

There's most of us as believers. God is not at work in us at all because we don't care enough. We don't make his word the object of our faith.

We're not interested in his plan. We get distracted. We hear a little bit in church and so forth and we go on our merry way and we put that box back on the shelf.

The things of God have to be the most important thing before God can begin that work in us and get anywhere near finishing it by the time Christ returns. But Paul says, notice he doesn't say this, I'm confident that God's going to finish that work. He doesn't say that to the Corinthians, does he? He doesn't say it to the Galatians.

Well, you poor Galatians, you're being led down the legalism path, getting all caught up in circumcision and Judaism, but I know that God's begun a good work in you and he's going to complete it anyway. Paul doesn't say that. He says you're foolish, you're bewitched, you've fallen from grace, you're separated from Christ.

He tells them terrible things. He doesn't say anything about being confident that God's going to complete a good work in them because he's not. But he says it to the Philippians and that is so often overlooked.

Don't let anybody drag this verse out and tell you perseverance of the saints. Where does perseverance come from? Look in Romans 5. It comes from faith. It comes from hope.

It comes from walking in the light. And most of us as believers don't ever wake up and do that. So that's Philippians.

We've already been in Colossians. Let's look at Thessalonians right quick to complete our survey of Paul's thankfulness in the greetings of his letters. He always finds a way when he prays for believers to be thankful.

Grace to you and peace, oddly enough, in 1 Thessalonians 1. Verse 1. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 2. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing what? Your work of faith, your labor of love, and your patience of hope. Faith, hope, and love.

Here's in the Thessalonian church, another congregation, another group of individuals that have latched on to the teaching of the Word of God and started with faith, moved into hope and love. And I've got that. It reminds me.

This is probably a really terrible illustration. Remember when Mazda first came out with the Wankel engine? Did you ever see those commercials on TV? Where you had that triangular thing going around in circles in the engine? It's a Wankel. It doesn't have pistons and rods and a crankshaft.

It's got this triangle-shaped thing with a toothed exterior and it's in a toothed ring. And as something fires on the outside and this funny triangle thing rotates and makes the car go. But it's a three-cornered thing.

And faith, hope, and love often occurs to me that's like a Wankel engine. Those three things get

your motor going. They get your car down the road.

And they have all three of those in Thessalonica. We give thanks to God for you all remembering your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope. Knowing, in verse 4, your election by God.

There's been so much spilled ink on election and predestination and all that stuff. Why is it Paul doesn't mention election when he talks to the Corinthians or to the Galatians? He only talks about that when he's talking to believers that are on the road. He talks about it in Romans.

He talks about it here. He says, I know your election, your choosing by God, because God chooses those who choose Him. These people have obviously chosen God.

And they're walking the walk of faith. And Paul says, I'm confident of your election. God has chosen you because you have chosen Christ.

God has chosen you because you've chosen to walk the worthy walk. He says in verse 6, when the gospel came to you, you became followers of us and of the Lord. And this is all explaining why he's confident.

You became examples to everyone in the area there. Word of the Lord has sounded forth from you. And we go visit places and we're going to start to tell them about the Lord.

And they say, we already know about that. We heard about those people over in Thessalonica and how on fire they are. They're waiting for Christ to return from heaven.

That's how strong their hope is. Same thing in 2 Thessalonians. Chapter 1, verse 2, the usual greeting.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 3, We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly. And the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other.

You begin to see a little bit of a theme here, a common thread. When Paul thinks about believers to pray for them, he evaluates them in his mind. Where are they in the plan of God? Have they latched on to faith, the first step? Have they moved into love and hope that are the expressions and the outworkings and the result of that faith? If they have, he gives thanks to God for it.

If not, he gives thanks to God for His grace that that opportunity is available to them and he prays for all of them. And if you'll notice in his requests, he always prays that their faith will increase because through that faith, these other things are going to increase. And it's a sad thing if you just look around in the Christian world today where is the emphasis on faith? The emphasis is on activities.

The emphasis is on fellowship. You can translate that into love. Let's all get together and love

each other.

Let's disciple one another. I'll manifest my love and I'll set an example for you. That's not faith.

That's getting eyes on people. That's subjectivity. It's human energy.

I'll model the Christian life for you and then you'll know how to live it. Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength. Faith directs itself toward God.

And we have to start with faith and the Christian church today has gotten away from that and therefore away from the power of God. And that's why it's floundering and miserable and ineffective. But they've got faith.

They've got love. And look down at verse 5. Manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God. That's their hope.

They're going to be counted worthy. They're looking ahead. They know that this is the way to be pleasing in God's sight on judgment day.

So anywhere you look, you can go on into the letters to Timothy and so forth. The point here is don't overlook the greetings. Don't overlook the little introductory remarks in these epistles because they mean something.

They count for something. And the key to your life and the key to my life is right here in the introduction to these letters. Like Paul was pointing out during the break, a letter was much more of an event in those days than it is now.

We mail off letters. Email has really trivialized communication today. You can email anything.

You can forward anything. Somebody sends you a little anecdote and you just forward it to your entire mailing list. But in those days, it was a lot of effort.

It didn't necessarily have a postal system. Somebody had to hand carry. They had to wait for somebody that was going that direction and say, hey, could you give this to Paul? Could you give this to Timothy? Give this to Philemon? And so when a letter arrived, people had to subsist on this for a good long while.

So letters were written with care. Every word counts. Every thought.

They were written thoughtfully. They were written with care. People didn't just dash them off and say, well, you know, I'll send you another note here shortly.

This might be the only word they would get for a year or two. And so when he says, grace to you and peace. When he says, I thank God for these things.

They can read something into this. He doesn't have to say, you know, I really think you're deficient in love there, Romans. I really think you need to work more on your hope.

You're just not hopeful enough. But you can see that he commends them where they've latched on and then he encourages them through his teaching and through his prayers for what they need. He says, I pray that your love will abound.

Why does he need to pray that? Well, it hasn't fully come to fruit there yet. Okay, back to Colossians. We want to get into verse 4. We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ always when we pray for you.

Ever since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints, notice it's not the other way around. Your faith in the saints and your love for Jesus. Faith is directed toward Christ.

Love is directed toward the saints. And hope is directed toward the future, the promises of God, what's laid up for them in heaven. They know what that is.

And their faith and their love are motivated by that hope. You start with faith. Your faith gives you confidence.

And you realize that you have a hope. And that hope is motivation for greater faith. And with that faith and that hope, love can function.

You can be tolerant. What is love, by the way? We're going to have to spend a little time on faith, hope, and love. I'm not going to bog down on those.

But let's talk about the hardest one to get a grip on because we just bandied about so much. Love. Let's go to the love chapter.

Everybody knows where the love chapter is in the New Testament, right? 1 Corinthians 13. Sounding brass, tinkling cymbal. Let's go to 1 Corinthians 13.

Because we want to stop and think, what is love? People say, well, the great commandment, by this shall all men know that you are my disciples, that you love one another. What does that mean to everybody today? How do we demonstrate love to one another? Well, somebody's down, they're sick, they're incapacitated in some way. Well, we'll go help them.

We'll make them a meal. We'll pitch in and help them move, carry those heavy boxes. This will be a manifestation of love.

We'll do the hard things. We'll perform some task. All of these things can be expressions of love, but what is at the center of love? Is just doing something for someone love? Has someone ever done something for you and you knew that it was grudgingly and out of necessity? Well, I know

this is the right thing to do and I'm going to do this, but I'm not happy about it.

I don't have to be motivated on the inside. I'm just doing this because it's good for them. People are going to talk if I don't, and so forth.

What is love? If you're going to have that genuine love that Paul's talking about here, what is it? Is it what you do or is it what you think? Well, look at 1 Corinthians 13 because Paul describes love. We're familiar with this, but I just want you to watch for one thing. We've said a lot about faith.

Faith is the entry point. Hope is generated when you have faith and you persevere in circumstances and perseverance produces hope. Hope does not disappoint because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts.

That's Romans 5, 1-5. If you want to get the relationship between faith, hope and love, look at Romans 5, 1-5. We start with faith.

Faith under trial. Like Jesus said, you get the seed planted in the soil. When the sun shines, does your plant wilt? Well, that wasn't really very much faith, was it? You persevere.

That's where your hope comes from. You say, you know, I'm sticking with the promise of God. I have confidence.

That's my hope. It comes from faith. When you get those two things working pretty soon, you can have love.

Why? Because what is love? Look at 1 Corinthians 13, verse 4. Love goes to work. Love meets the needs of the sick and afflicted round about us. Love goes out and ministers in the inner city.

Love goes out and does this, that and the other. It might, but what's at the core of it? Love suffers for a long time. Love bears up under abuse and doesn't quit.

That's the first attribute. That's a mental attitude. That means I'm not going to be deflected from my faith and my hope because this person is a rotten, uncaring, insensitive, boorish, sinning individual.

Or whatever other adjective comes into your mind. Love suffers along with the unlovely and doesn't quit. It's kind.

It returns good for evil. It sticks with it. Why? Not because it knows this is the right thing to do and I can't suck you in the face even though that's what I really feel like doing.

Love has to be generated in us. Love has to be poured out in us by the Holy Spirit. We don't say, well, I'm going to do the loving thing now.

It has to be a part of our nature and it's something God has to put there. You have to have

already had faith. You have to have already developed hope before any love is going to be there.

You can't make love. In my very eclectic taste in music, one of the former Eagles, if I can remember his name, the drummer, Don Henley, has a song that says you can't make love. You can do all these different things.

You can plant sloppy kisses all over her hands and do this and the other, but you can't make love. He's making fun of this whole phrase where people say, well, we're going to make love. He says, you can't make love.

And you can't. God makes love. God creates love in us.

He pours it out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. We qualify for that gift through faith and by generating hope. So don't think you're going to make yourself love someone because you're not.

God can generate love in your soul because you're looking at Him and you're trusting His promises and you realize what's at stake. Eternity future is a reality to you. The evaluation of God and the presence of God within you is real to you.

And when that's more real to you than that ugly person and their ugly deeds, there's going to be love there and you're going to just be kind. You're not going to have the urge. You're not going to have the desire.

You're not going to have to fight your instincts because your instinct is going to be, I really feel sorry for this miserable person. Look how miserable they are that they run around inflicting damage on themselves and others because they don't know God. They don't have peace.

They're not standing on that grace threshold that God has stood me on. They don't have access to the peace that passes understanding that I've got. What a pitiful status.

What a pitiful state to be in that this person is in. They hurt and they want to make others hurt because that's all they know. They have no inkling of what's available in God.

I pity them. I'm going to do something kind for them. Maybe they'll see that there's hope in God, that faith in God is the only way to find peace.

It's the threshold of grace. Where are they going to see it if they don't see it in me? But that's an attitude that God creates in us. That's where love comes from.

That's where joy and peace comes from in the face of adversity because your perspective is so radically different than the rest of the world. But it starts with faith and it leads to hope and that results in love. That's why love suffers long.

When it's present, this is not how to have love. Suffer long and you will have love. It's the other way around.

When love is present, you'll be able to suffer long and you won't have to work at it. You'll suffer long because your mind is on God. You will not envy.

You won't say, Why me? Why have I got this circumstance? What did I ever do? These other people are far more deserving of abuse and I'm having to suffer through this thing. You're not going to feel that way. Why? Because your perspective is entirely different.

God in eternity past knew that this was the best way for me to learn, the best way for me to grow, the best way for me to get a grip on the reality of Himself, His purpose and His plan and His Son Jesus Christ. I'm going to make the most of this. God went to a lot of trouble to arrange this terrible circumstance and I'm not going to have it all be for naught.

So you're not going to envy. You're not going to parade yourself. You're not going to try to prove yourself and show, I really am just as good a Christian as you.

I really am. I'm not as bad as you think, and so forth. You're not going to have that attitude because you're not trying to prove yourself to people.

You're trying to live the life that God respects and that God approves. You're not going to behave rudely. You're not going to be selfish and seek your own.

You're not going to be provoked when people, after the 50th time, do the same thing. They know you hate it. They know it hurts you.

They know it bothers you. And they do it again just because they're spiteful. And why me? Why them? Why do I have to put up with this? It's not going to be able to penetrate your armor.

What is the shield that quenches the darts of the wicked one? And anybody that's working for the wicked one? It's faith. You're latched on to what God says. You're oriented to His plan and His purpose.

The fact that somebody fires something at you, how does that fit into God's plan? That's something God can work together for good. Love is something that God's going to generate. But if you want that love, if you want that joy and you want that peace, you've got to start with faith.

And that means you've got to stop and think in the middle of these. And this is where we all fall down because we get so caught up in the movie, we forget where the reality is. And the reality is, God is there.

God's watching. There's an arena of angels. We're in the center of the court there.

And it's up to us to remember who we are and why we're here and to not get caught up in the circumstances and play that game instead of remembering the reality of faith and hope and love.

And once we start thinking, Who am I? Why am I here? What has God said? How does this fit into God's plan? What is God looking for out of me? The old thing, my daughter now has got one of these little wristbands. It's got the WWJD or whatever.

What would Jesus do? Listen, if that helps you remember who you are and why you're here, get one and wear it. Stick it on your refrigerator or whatever because that's why we're here. If you really know what Jesus would do, a lot of people think, Oh, well, Jesus would just roll over and turn the other way.

There are times when Jesus would just obliterate them. You have to know Jesus and know when and where and what he would do. And that goes back to faith.

But love does not rejoice in iniquity but rejoices in the truth. We have to know the truth if you're going to rejoice in it. Love bears some things.

It doesn't bear the easy things. Some of us are perverse. The really big, terrible tests, we do great.

Oh, I can tell this is a test. It's these little mosquito things that trip us up. I can get tripped up and messed up worse on a small thing than on a big catastrophe.

Big catastrophes have neon signs all over them. Test, test. You say, Oh, a test.

Well, let's have faith. Let's have peace. You can function.

But these little needling things just slip under your guard. You weren't really looking. You're kind of blindsided.

And you can tumble and fall just worse on a little thing than a big thing. But love bears all things. The big things and the little things.

Love believes all things. And we say, Well, you mean it believes the lie? No. It means it believes under all circumstances.

It bears up under all circumstances. It hopes under all circumstances. Whatever things get thrown at you, your hope is intact.

You know that Christ is coming. You know the eternal future is there. And you know, because of your faith and the promises of God, that you have an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled waiting for you in heaven.

And you're not going to fritter it away. You're not going to let this petty, insignificant person, this insignificant detail of life rob you of your eternal inheritance. It's not worth it.

Why trade eternal things for a mess of pottage? Your momentary gratification at telling somebody

off or responding in anger, don't do it. Don't trade away eternal things for ashes in the mouth, temporary things. Love hopes all things.

Love endures all things. Every single one of these is a mental attitude. You haven't gotten around to doing anything yet in this picture of love.

Because when this attitude is in your heart, you're going to know exactly what to do and you're going to be doing it for exactly the right reasons. And you will make the meal and visit and encourage and do all of these things that we've talked about. People try to do the deeds and work backward to love rather than operating in faith, letting God generate the love.

And that love that's in your heart because God put it there is going to reflect the glory of God. You can't start with love. You don't even start with hope.

You start with faith. Faith is the means of living the Christian life. I'm going to give you three statements and we're going to see these throughout Colossians.

Faith is the means of living the Christian life. Hope is the motivation for living the Christian life. Love is the result of living the Christian life.

Faith is the means. Hope is the motivation. Love is the result.

Love is not the means. Faith is not the motivation. Faith is the means.

Hope is the motivation. Love is the result. Love is the expression that that divine engine is functioning in your soul.

I'll leave that to you to meditate on in the coming week. I would encourage you to go back and just look at each of these introductory sections of Paul's Epistles. Look at where you see and where you don't see faith and hope and love.

It will give you a good frame of reference as we go forward in Colossians chapter 1. And concentrate, all of us, need to concentrate on faith. We've got to do like Psalm 11 says, meditate in the law of the Lord day and night. That's where your faith, that's the starting point, that's the threshold of grace on which we all stand.

Let's close in prayer. We thank you Father for the grace that we do enjoy because of our Savior Jesus Christ. We pray that you will, through the Spirit, enable us to see that as a reality in our lives to live the life.