

Faith hope
love

Colossians 1:3–5

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people – 5 the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel

Reflection

Yesterday we met the apostle Paul, formerly Saul, who terrorized the young Christian church before Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus and gave him the special commission of being an apostle to the gentiles, that is, non-Jews, from every nation on earth. In verse one Paul introduced himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus. Through his vision of the risen Lord on the road to Damascus he had been appointed to an office which, like the other twelve disciples (now apostles), gave him special authority not only in the churches that he had founded himself but in every Christian church, including the church in Colossae. It is this same apostolic authority that would see his writings become Scripture and make up the greater part of the New Testament (by book number at

least).

We were also briefly introduced yesterday to the Colossian church. It was the smallest and least significant church that Paul wrote to, but this precious letter is saturated with some of the loftiest teachings about Jesus Christ in Scripture. Every verse draws lines back to him. Their view of Jesus was too small, and their fledging faith was at risk of blending in with Judaism and other religions of the time. And so Paul's greatest desire in writing to the Colossians was to raise up Christ, that they should grow into full Christian maturity. Which makes Colossians the perfect book for us as well, to see out the year.

In today's passage, Paul begins his great prayer of thanksgiving for the Colossian

church. Shortly he will enlighten them, then he will exhort them, but first he lifts them up to God in prayer, demonstrating as he does the great love he holds for a people he has never met. Reading from today's passage, Colossians 1:3–5, the beginning of Paul's great prayer of thanksgiving for the Colossian church,

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people – 5 the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel

What is worked for, must first be prayed for. And Paul is a pray-er, as we'll see over the coming days. Our passage begins 'we always thank God ... when we pray for you', later, verse 9, 'we have not stopped praying for you' then 'we continually ask God'. Paul prays a lot. Not just for his converts, but for Christians he has never met, rejoicing from afar in the work that God has done in their lives. In his prayer of thanksgiving which is more a description of what Paul is thankful for and how he prays for the Colossians Paul begins in today's passage by bringing before them what he is so thankful to God for.

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus

and of the love you have for all God's people – 5 the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel

Faith. Hope. And love. Some of Paul's favourite terms. 1 Cor 13:13,

13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

1 Thess 1:3,

3 We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in

our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thess 5:8,

8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.

But I think I like their expression in Colossians the best,

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people – 5 the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which

you have already heard in the true message of the gospel

Paul thanks God for their faith – their personal trust and commitment to Jesus and their belief that the gospel, the good news about him is true. Paul thanks God for their love, the sign that grace is at work in their community, the sign that their faith is genuine, resulting as it is in the love that they have for all God's people. And Paul thanks God for the source, wellspring and anchor of their faith and love; the sure and certain hope stored up for them in heaven which infuses their every moment. And how does it all tie together? The gospel is sown, the Holy Spirit plants the seed of faith in their hearts, and as their faith grows so does its fruit: a love for all God's people that basks in the joyous light of the hope stored up

for them in heaven. And Paul rejoices in prayer.

Think & Pray

And so already in Colossians we're left with several rich strands of application: prayer, faith, love, hope and the transforming power of the gospel. Where to start? Perhaps you should answer that question? As a starting point, consider today Paul's prayer life. What is worked for, must be prayed for. And we have so much to give thanks for. Be spurred on and encouraged today by Paul's prayer life. Why not read a little further on in Colossians, down to say, verse 14 and model your prayers on the way Paul prays for the Colossians? It's so easy to pray shallow and repetitive prayers. What might happen if we all

prayed like the apostle Paul is modelling for us here?

Then there's Paul's favourite triad: faith, hope and love. How is our 'love life' going? Are others giving thanks to God for you for the love you so regularly display for all of God's people? Is your faith in God overflowing in love for all of God's people? Is the hope of eternity your constant joy and an ever-present factor in the decisions you make? Meditate this morning over questions like these.

Our devotion is a little shorter today to give you some extra time to pray. Again, why not use this time to model your prayers on Paul's pattern of thanksgiving and intercession in verses 3–14? Take the time now if you can.