

These Three  
September 16, 2018

I don't want to shake you up this morning, but... there may come a day that you need to find a new church. Your job may transfer you to another state. You may retire and move away. You may go to college out of the area. You may finish college and take a job in another state. And there are other reasons you may need to find a new church family to be a part of. Something could happen here that would lead you to leave this church. You would not be the first to get angry at me or disillusioned with us.

So what would you look for in a new church? Some would limit themselves to Southern Baptist churches. Others might choose among any of various varieties of Baptists. There are other groups of Christians whose theology would agree with what we teach, though they do not call themselves Baptist.

Of course, just because a church calls itself Baptist, even southern Baptist, doesn't mean those Christians are living faithfully to Jesus. It may not be a people that clearly live out the key Christian qualities held up in the New testament as most important.

We are going to look at those qualities this morning. There are three qualities that are most often mentioned in the New Testament. All three are mentioned together ten times. Two of the three are mentioned together five times. And another two of the three are mentioned together sixteen times. You can find all of those references at the end of the outline. I encourage you to spend time reading through them this week.

I believe these three are what Jesus is most looking for in us as His followers and his church. We need to purposely keep them front and center in our prayers.

This morning, we are beginning a series of sermons from the book of Colossians. We call this a book of the Bible. It is actually a letter. This is a typical letter of that period of time in the Roman empire. **Letters at that time normally started in this way:**

- **The sender first introduces himself.**
- **Then the recipient of the letter is named.**
- **The sender then asks a blessing upon the receiver.** In the Colossians letter, this is a short statement, like the common, "God bless America," that politicians often use.
- **Fourth, the sender typically mentions something about the recipient that he is thankful for.**

You will see all four of these elements as we begin reading this letter.

**Colossians 1:1-6 (NIV) Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse: Grace and peace to you from God our Father. We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints-- the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel (good news) that has come to you.**

Our focus this morning is on the three key qualities of Christians that Paul was glad were true of them. **The first key quality is a strong faith in all the good news of Jesus (The Gospel).**

**Colossians 1:3-4 (NIV) We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus...**

The gathered Christians in the city of Colossae held fast to the good news of Jesus. They believed Jesus died for their sins, was raised from the dead, ascended up into heaven, and would return to establish his rule on earth. They believed they were forgiven of their sins in Jesus Christ and would inherit eternal life upon death or Jesus' return.

Don't take their faith lightly. Paul did not. He wrote in hopes of preventing them from being led astray. Even in that early period of church history there were counter gospels. There were those who preached a different good news. We will get into specifics further into this series.

Today, there are also those who preach a different good news than that which is presented in the Bible. It saddens me to say that there are some groups in our community who call themselves Christians who do not preach the good news of Jesus Christ. The pastors of these churches are not Christians and do not preach the good news of Jesus Christ.

Instead of preaching that we are sinners in need of saving, they preach a different message. Instead of preaching that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, in our place, they preach a different message. Mostly they ignore Jesus' death and resurrection. They don't preach much about sin or the need for a savior. And they do not preach that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

But listen, anything short of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone is not the good news of Jesus Christ. It may sound like good news, but it is a different good news. It is an alternative gospel. Paul warns in his letter to the church at Galatia that...

**Galatians 1:8 (NIV) ... even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!**

Paul wrote that because the church in Galatia was facing a serious attempt by some to lead them into an alternative good news. We face the same temptation today.

Some today are voicing alternative teachings about what Jesus' life, death, and resurrection mean for us. Listen, the atonement of Jesus is a huge event. It has a tremendous impact on our lives. It is many faceted. There is no way to describe how wonderful and full it is for us with just one word picture.

One such word picture is ransom. We were held captive by sin and Jesus paid a ransom to free us. The ransom price was his life. This is an example of a word picture for our atonement. But it is not enough. What he accomplished is fuller than that in

meaning. And so the apostles of Jesus write of it in other terms too. There are multiple word pictures in the NT for our atonement. And we must embrace them all.

These alternative gospel preachers alter some aspect of God's character. They limit God to only some of his attributes. They focus on God's love, grace, and mercy while ignoring Him as holy and just. They ignore the glory due Him as God. They downplay the seriousness of sin. They dumb down the need for forgiveness.

God is looking for a strong faith, a full faith from us. He wants us to trust all that the NT teaches. We are not to ignore aspects of it, not to water it down by adding on or plugging in extras to feel better about themselves. Paul is writing to warn them against such additions to the good news. We will see specifics in the weeks to come.

The first key quality is a strong faith in all the good news of Jesus.

**The second key quality is a strong commitment to other Christians.**

**Colossians 1:3-4 (NIV) We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints--**

- **This was commanded by Jesus in John 13:34.** This was a special concern and commitment to each Christian, not to the community of non-Christians.

**John 13:34 (NIV) "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.**

- **This was initiated by the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:44-45.** From the start, Jesus led his followers to do this by the Holy Spirit who now resided in them.

**Acts 2:44-45 (NIV) All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.**

We see them meeting the needs of the members of the church, especially food for the widows.

- **This was an acceptance of each other in Christ. (Ephesians 2:11-22)**

No matter what previously divided or separated them from each other, they now came together as one body of believers. In his letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul writes of Jew Christians and non-Jew Christians coming together as one church.

**Ephesians 2:14-15 (NIV) For he (Jesus) himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace...**

There are many things that divide people from each other today. But Christians are to come together for the good news of Jesus. The church of Jesus Christ is to be a group whose primary characteristic is our common, united faith in Him. We are Christians first and everything else second.

We are Christians first and Americans second. We are Christians first and sports fans second. We are Christians first and republicans, democrats, or other second. We are Christians first and skin color second. We are Christians first and ethnic or national origin second. We are Christians first and socio-economic level second.

We are Christians and our commitment to each other, our acceptance of each other is based on who we are in Christ Jesus. **The good news unites us and in His love we let nothing divide us.**

We are to accept each other as equals. **We are equally sinful.** None of our good moral behavior, good deeds, law-abiding, etc. counts one point in our favor towards salvation. We are all equally saved by grace. Before God we are the same. And we all continue to sin. Therefore there is no reason to look down on any other Christian. If we think, talk, or act like we are better than each other, we are disobeying Christ's command to love each other.

**The third key quality is a strong hope for the rest of our salvation.**

I am not hoping to win the lottery. I don't gamble in the lottery. I am not hoping to live pain free the rest of my life, as I already have some steady pains that I expect will grow worse as I age.

I AM hoping to remain in the service of Jesus the rest of my life. I hope to one day see the Grand Canyon. I hope to ride my bike next year around the airport loop and from Glen Burnie to Annapolis and back. I hope to take wife on a long vacation in three years for our 40th anniversary. I hope to see our nieces and nephews and sons all become followers of Jesus Christ. I hope that the large trees behind my house never fall on my house, or my neighbors' houses.

I have various and sundry hopes for the future. I am sure you have similar kinds of hopes for your future. Some may match my hopes and some may not.

But there is one hope that is common to all Christians to some extent. And that is the hope of the fulfillment of God's promises to us concerning our future in Christ Jesus. There is the hope of Jesus' return to earth. Then he will receive the recognition and glory he deserves. With His coming we will share in His glory and be transformed into our resurrection bodies in which we will enjoy eternal life.

This is the Christian hope. It is from this hope that our faith and love come. And the degree of our hope determines the degree of our faith and love.

**Colossians 1:3-5 (NIV) We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints-- the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven...**

Our hope is for the completion of our salvation. We have already experienced some parts of that salvation. But there is more to come.

And based on this hope we put our faith in Jesus. Based on this hope we accept each other as equals. Based on this hope we are committed to each other. Based on this

hope we persevere in the Christian life. Based on this hope we withstand any persecution or suffering.

No matter what you are living through right now, persevere because of your hope. Some of us are having a hard time of it. Some in our church are facing relationship problems. Some are facing health problems. Some have financial concerns. Some are living through a period of doubt. Maintain your hope in God's promised future and your endurance will grow.

With hope I can meet the problems of today for I know that tomorrow will be glory with Jesus. Therefore, hope makes it possible for me to persevere, endure, even rejoice... in my sufferings.

If you ever need to find a new church, make sure it is a church of such faith, love, and hope. And let your prayers be shaped today by these same three qualities.

Such a life is available to you today too. Jesus died for you too. Receive him today as your savior and lord and you too can join us in the hope, faith, and love of the Christian life.

[]

**Faith, Hope, and Love** - 1 Cor. 13:13; Gal. 5:5-6; Eph. 1:15-19; 4:2-6; Col. 1:5; 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8; Heb. 6:10-12; 10:19-24; 1 Peter 1:21-22

**Faith and Hope** - Romans 5:2; Col. 1:23; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 11:1; 1 Peter 1:3-5;

**Faith and Love** - 2 Cor. 8:7; Ephes. 3:17; 1 Thess. 3:6; 2 Thess. 1:3; 1 Tim. 1:5, 14; 2:15; 4:12; 6:11; 2 Tim. 1:13; 2:22; 3:10; Titus 2:2; Philemon 1:5; 2 Peter 1:5-7; Rev. 2:19