

“Faith in Christ”
Colossians 1:4
(Preached at Trinity, October 22, 2017)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we’ve seen, **Verses 3-8** has Paul’s prayer of thanksgiving as its focus – “We give thanks to God . . .”
An expression of thanksgiving was common in first century letters, but for Paul it was in no way just a formality. Paul’s words were rich in substance.
2. Much of **Chapter 1** is in the form of prayer.
Verses 3-8 are in the form of thanksgiving as Paul raises his heart to God in gratitude for His blessings upon the Church of Colossae.
In **Verses 9-20** Paul turns his prayer to that of supplication for God’s continued working in the life of the Colossian Christians, as well as continued expressions of gratitude.
3. As we turn to **Verse 4** we begin to see the substance of those things that have filled Paul with thanksgiving. He speaks of the same triad of graces that he speaks of in other letters – the graces of faith, hope and love.
1 Corinthians 13:13 NAU - "But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love."
Galatians 5:5-6 NAU - "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."
1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 NAU - "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,"
1 Thessalonians 5:8 NAU - "But since we are of *the* day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation."
4. Paul begins by expressing his gratitude for the faith being displayed by the Colossians. Faith always comes first in this triad. Without faith there can be no Christian love and no hope of eternity. This morning I want us to consider this faith. We’ll look at it under three heads.
A Divine Origin - "We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"
A Designated Object – “since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus”
A Deliberate Owner – “since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus”

- I. A Divine Origin - "We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"
- A. It's important to understand the economy of the Trinity or the function of the Godhead.
1. God is one without parts. But He is three persons.
 2. Each person of the Godhead is equal in every way—one God. And yet, each person functions differently in God's eternal purpose to save His people.
 3. Paul is maintaining the proper theological focus
"We give thanks to God, the Father . . . since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus"
- B. It began in eternity – the Father was sovereign over election
1. God the Father looked down upon humanity – all were corrupted.
Psalm 14:2-3 NAU - "The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men To see if there are any who understand, Who seek after God. ³ They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one."
 2. Actually, this is described for our benefit. God doesn't acquire knowledge. He knows. Things don't just happen. He has decreed them.
 3. God is infinitely holy and all of humanity has fallen into corruption. God could have left us, eternally forsaken into the eternal fires of hell.
 5. But God showed mercy upon a multitude – His elect. It was according to His Sovereign discretion.
Ephesians 1:5 NAU - "according to the kind intention of His will,"
 6. In the Old Covenant God chose Israel from among all the other nations of the world. This serves as a type or example of God's election of individuals unto salvation. Why did God choose Israel as a nation?
Deuteronomy 7:7-8 – "The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye *were* the fewest of all But because the LORD loved you"
(In other words, God chose them because He chose to choose them)
- C. The eternal Covenant of Redemption was a council involving the entire Godhead
1. The Father chose a multitude from among the fallen race of humanity, fixing his infinite love upon them and determining to deliver them from their guilt and condemnation and reconcile them to Himself.
 2. The Father pledged to give these chosen people to His Son as His inheritance. They would be His beloved bride but since they were terribly defiled He would enter the world as a man and redeem them from their sin by suffering in their place.
LBC, Chapter 8:1 – *Of Christ the Mediator – "It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, according to the covenant made between them both, to be the mediator between them both, to be the mediator between God and man, the prophet, priest, and king, Head and Savior of His Church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world; unto whom He did from all eternity give a people to be His seed and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified."*

1 John 4:9-10 NAU - "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins."

a. Jesus came in obedience to His Father that He might deliver His people from their sin.

John 6:38-39 NAU - "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day."

b. It was an infinite display of the love of His Bridegroom for His bride.

Ephesians 5:25-27 NAU - "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, ²⁶ so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless."

3. The Holy Spirit was involved in this eternal covenant as well. It is a work that has been going on since the fall of man. It is the Holy Spirit that breathes life into men wallowing in the decay of death. It is through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit that men are given the grace of repentance. And it is through the Holy Spirit that faith is imparted.

LBC 14:1 – "The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts. . ."

4. Fallen sinners are enabled by the almighty power of God to trust in the accomplished work of the Savior and this faith has become the instrument of their being justified before God.

D. Paul is thanking God for the faith working in the hearts of the Colossians
"We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"

1. While the fullness of the triune being of God was active in our salvation, Paul is recognizing the Father as the executive of the Godhead.

2. The Covenant of Redemption was initiated by the Father.

3. Paul is praising God for the faith of the Colossians. It is His doing and He alone receives all the glory – Soli Deo Gloria

4. Our hearts should rise in praise and adoration to the Father for the richness of His electing love.

II. A Designated Object – “since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus”

A. Faith has a solitary object as its focus

Acts 4:12 NAU - "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

1. Christian faith is very particular, very focused – it has a solitary focus
2. It is not just a general belief in God.

James 2:19 KJV - "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble."

There are no real atheists. All of humanity has the mark of the Creator upon them. They know God but deny Him.

3. It is not just joining a particular church or joining a particular religion
 - a. Human beings are naturally religious – but they also naturally hate God.
 - b. The world is full of Christless religions, even those who call themselves Christian
4. Faith is not a resolve to begin living a better life
5. Faith is not a resolute belief that we are saved—“I think I am and therefore must be.” Most people believe they are right with God.
6. Faith demands seeing our hopeless corruption in sin and our helplessness to do anything about it.
7. Saving faith has our eyes upon Christ – alone – Solus Christus
 - a. You must believe that Jesus Christ came into the world to save His people from their sins—that He lived a perfect life fulfilling the Law’s demands, and that He died on the cross as our substitute.
 - b. You confess your own wicked rebellion against God and you must trust Christ’s death upon the cross as the full payment for your sin.
 - c. You must confess that there is nothing you can do to merit God’s favor.
 - d. You must confess your desire for Christ’s rule over every area of your life

B. The issue is the work of Christ

1. Jesus Christ is the only Savior of His people
2. LBC 8:4 = *Jesus Christ the Mediator* – “He was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfill it, and underwent the punishment due to us, which we should have born and suffered, being made sin and a curse for us; enduring most grievous sorrows in His soul, and most painful sufferings in His body; was crucified, died, and remained in the state of the dead, yet saw no corruption; on the third day He arise from the dead with the same body in which He suffered, with which He also ascended into heaven, and there sits at the right hand of His Father, making intercession, and shall return to judge men and angels at the end of the world.”
3. Our faith, our trust, our final rest must be in Christ alone.
Paul is expressing gratitude to the Father for His glorious work in Christ Jesus. For Paul, the center of His life, ministry, and hope was Christ. The work of Jesus Christ was the full sum of his preaching.
1 Corinthians 2:2 NAU - "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."

III. Finally, Paul has in mind here not only the Divine origin of faith, and the designated object of faith, there is a deliberate owner – “since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus”

A. Faith is not a general concept without substance

1. Faith isn't the common possession of all men in general. All are not in possession of faith.
2. Faith isn't something that we receive as a group. It is very particular. It is very personal. Saving faith is personally finding Christ all sufficient and all glorious and personally resting upon His alone.

1 Peter 1:8-9 NAU - "and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹ obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls."

3. Paul is speaking here of a particular faith – “since I heard of YOUR faith” – Faith is something demanded of all, without which we will be forever forsaken.

Mark 16:15-16 NAU - "And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. ¹⁶ "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned."

John 3:36 NAU - "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

B. Faith is always presented as a command, something required of all men:

Acts 16:31 NAU - "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved"

1. In other words, unbelief is sin. God commands men to turn from their sinful disobedience and trust in Christ.
2. Faith and repentance are presented in Scripture as commands
The Gospel commands men to believe and turn from their sins.

Acts 17:30 NAU – “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent,"

1 John 3:23 NAU - "And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us."

3. Paul always presented the Gospel as that which must be obeyed.

Romans 6:17 NAU - " But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed,"

4. Lloyd-Jones – “Why should I believe the gospel? The first reason that we all should have for believing the gospel is not that it is going to do this, that or the other for me; I should never preach it in that form. I preach this because it is the record that God gave concerning His Son, and I tell you that if you do not believe it you are making God a liar; you are rejecting the Word of the holy, eternal God, and that is the most terrible sin. We are to preach this gospel and then tell men that, if they do not believe it, they are refusing God, and nothing remains for them but perdition and punishment.”¹
- C. Saving faith is a personal faith – Paul is speaking to the Colossians regarding their faith.
1. Lost person, God commands you to turn from your sin and believe the Gospel. You must obey the demands of the Gospel to turn from your sin and trust Christ.
 2. Every human being has the duty to trust Christ. The Gospel is a call to faith—faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, our only Mediator is able to deliver us from our sin; who is ready to make intercession for us if we trust in Him.
 3. By refusing the Gospel you are refusing Christ. You are declaring Him to be of no value to you.
- D. This saving faith always demonstrates itself in a life committed to Christ
1. The Colossians were bearing the fruit that accompanies genuine faith. In **Verse 4** Jesus Christ is not only the object of their faith but also the sphere of their faith.
Those who trust Christ trust their entire life to Him. The Colossians were bearing witness to this truth
 2. James Dunn writes: “What Paul and Timothy commend here is the way in which the Colossians received the message about Christ and committed themselves in trust to the one so proclaimed, making Christ the focus and determinant of their lives from then on.”²
 3. Notice Paul’s words in **Verse 3**
Colossians 1:3 NAU - "We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"
 - a. Saving faith puts us in submission to Christ – He is our Lord
 - b. The only way to receive Jesus as Savior is to receive Him as Lord
 - c. Paul often described lordship as an essential element of the Gospel.
Romans 10:9 NAU – “that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved;”
2 Corinthians 4:5 NAU – “For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake.”

¹ Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn, *Romans, Exposition of Chapter 10, Saving Faith*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997).

² James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 57.

- d. Many people want to cling to the hope of salvation without Lordship. Parents hold to this hope for their children, spouses for their mates, and on and on – even when there is no submission to Christ. The truth is no Lordship, no salvation.

Conclusion:

1. Paul never got over his own conversion experience. How the Father chosen him before the world began; how Christ arrested him and how the Holy Spirit granted him faith and repentance. His life was radically changed and he was never the same.
2. He was always filled with thanksgiving as he saw God at work in others. This is what drove his ministry. He wanted to see God's work of redemption in the hearts of men. Nothing gave him greater pleasure than to see Christians demonstrating their salvation through the works of saving faith.
3. It is sad when saving faith is so diminished that we don't expect to see God's transforming grace. It is wonderful to see the reality of saving faith.
4. What are the things that fill your heart with thanksgiving. Too often we are thankful only for the physical blessings of life? How much more glorious are the spiritual blessings of saving faith.

Ephesians 1:3 NAU - "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ"