

“Christian Love”  
Colossians 1:4, 8  
(Preached at Trinity, October 29, 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. After greeting the Colossian Christians whom he describes as holy and faithful, Paul reveals his heart for them. Paul would have never met most of them, yet he loved them as brothers and sisters in Christ. He prayed for them and praised God for His marvelous work in them.  
**Colossians 1:3 NAU** - "We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you"
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. In **Verse 4** Paul begins to share the substance of those things that have filled his heart with thanksgiving. As I stated last time, Paul often linked together the triad graces of faith, hope, and love.  
**Colossians 1:4-5 NAU** - "since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; <sup>5</sup> because of the hope laid up for you in heaven"  
**1 Corinthians 13:13 NAU** - "But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love."
4. Last time our focus was upon the first of these graces, the grace of faith. We saw that saving faith is a sovereign work of God’s grace. It is the means by which He applies the redeeming work of Christ to the objects of His love. He enables them to trust in Christ alone.
5. But saving faith is always an active faith. One of the clearest demonstrations of genuine faith is the love it produces. It is natural for Paul to mention their love in the context of their faith - "and the love which you have for all the saints"
6. Notice how closely Paul ties their faith with their love.  
**Colossians 1:4 NAU** - "since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints"
7. Everyone knows the word love, but few can actually define it. In the 1960’s the words “Peace and Love” became the symbol of the times. But peace was basically a statement against the Vietnam war, and love was a statement of the exploding sexual revolution. No one understood the true meaning of love.  
We continue to throw the word around much today, but we’re no closer to understanding the true meaning. For many love means tolerance. If you don’t accept the current correctness you are promoting hate.  
For most people the idea of love finds its focus upon self. We love those things and those people who satisfy us and meet our needs. But this still doesn’t describe Christian love.

- I. Christian love is a work of God's transforming grace – But how do we describe it? We've looked at this many times, but it can still be difficult to comprehend.
- A. The word here in the Greek is the familiar ἀγάπη
1. As I've pointed out in the past, there are two primary words in the original that is translated love: ἀγαπάω, ἀγάπη, φιλέω or φιλία
    - a. ἀγάπη is often described as a sacrificial, Divine love. It is only possible for a Christian to manifest this high love
    - b. φιλέω or φιλία – This word often refers to common human affection or friendship.  
**James 4:4 NAS** - "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship (φιλία) with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."
  2. These are traditional definitions but are a bit simplistic. The two words are different and distinct, and yet they are sometimes used almost interchangeably  
**1 Corinthians 16:22-24 NAU** - "If anyone does not love (φιλέω) the Lord, he is to be accursed. Maranatha. <sup>23</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. <sup>24</sup> My love (ἀγάπη) be with you all in Christ Jesus."
  3. Sometimes they are used in ways we don't expect  
**John 5:20 NAU** - "For the Father loves (φιλέω) the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and *the Father* will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel."
  4. While we have to be careful as we distinguish ἀγάπη and φιλέω we can't deny that Paul gave the word ἀγάπη a particular Christian character. It wasn't often used outside the NT. For Paul the word described an affection that sacrifices self and serves others.  
**Galatians 5:13 NAU** - "through love serve one another."
- B. Just knowing the lexical meaning of these Greek words doesn't tell us how love is expressed in the Christian life. How do we actually define Christian love?
1. Love is both an affection and an action. It is both inward and outward. We are emotionally involved in the lives of one another, but we serve one another even when our feelings are wanting.
  2. Notice in **Verse 8** that Christian love is empowered by the Holy Spirit "he also informed us of your love in the Spirit."
  3. Christian love works through faith. It validates our faith. It is fueled by the love of Christ. He loves us with infinite, boundless love. We now love Him and love those whom he loves.
  4. Love is the work of the Holy Spirit within us. In **Verses 7-8** Paul tells of the word he received from Epaphras concerning the Colossians.  
**Colossians 1:8 NAU** - "he also informed us of your love in the Spirit."
  5. In Galatians 5:22 Paul described Christian fruits activated by the indwelling Spirit, love being the chief. The Spirit-filled life is a life of love.

6. Love is a principle working within us that brings us to look upon others with pity, compassion and mercy. It is the heart that ceases to focus only on our own needs but upon the needs of others. It is the reflection of our union with Christ and with one another.

II. Love is the chief distinguishing mark of Christianity.

A. We are not justified by love, but love is the fruit of true saving faith.

1. 17<sup>th</sup> Century Pastor John Davenant wrote: "Justifying faith sanctifies and purifies the heart; but a heart void of love is not sanctified or purified. Everyone who believes with true and justifying faith, has a right to eternal life. But these things are united in no one who is void of love."<sup>1</sup>
2. Our lives testify of our love. This was the word Epaphras brought to Paul. He shared with Paul how the Colossians were displaying their love.  
**Colossians 1:8 NAU** - "he also informed us of your love in the Spirit."
3. Faith is the fruit of God's transforming grace. Love is the fruit of faith. Love is at the heart of Christianity. Islam is characterized by the sword, by conquest, by force. Christianity is characterized by love.
4. Christians love one another. This is the consistent teaching of the New Testament
  - a. Jesus said:  
**John 13:35 NAU** - "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."
  - b. John wrote:  
**1 John 2:9-11 NAU** - "The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. <sup>10</sup> The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. <sup>11</sup> But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes."  
**1 John 3:14 NAU** - "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death."
  - c. This was Paul's continual teaching. No other NT author wrote more on this topic of love. Of the 116 times we find the word ἀγάπη in the New Testament, 75 are from Paul.  
**Romans 13:10 NAU** - "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of *the* law."  
**Galatians 5:14 NAU** - "For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the *statement*, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."  
**Galatians 5:6 NAU** - "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love."

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<sup>1</sup> Davenant, John, *Colossians, Geneva Series of Commentaries*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009) page 67.

**Galatians 5:22 NAU** - "But the fruit of the Spirit is love"

**1 Thessalonians 4:9 NAU** – "Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for *anyone* to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another;"

5. In other words, love is what we are. It marks us, defines us. We love one another. We like being with one another. We enjoy the same things. We love the same Lord. We are adopted into the same family.

B. Faith and love are inseparable.

1. Love is impossible without faith. Faith cannot exist in the absence of love.  
**1 Corinthians 13:2 NAU** - "if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing."
2. Without love our religion is empty and without substance
  - a. Sadly, this is too often an indictment upon the modern church where strife and division often exposes religion void of love.
  - b. Loveless Christianity is an abomination. It is fleshly, selfish, and Christless.
  - c. Outward actions of piety without love are nothing
  - d. Every religious act becomes worthless without love. Paul says you could give away all of your possessions for the care of the poor. You could offer yourself as a martyr. Without love it is nothing!  
**1 Corinthians 13:3 NAU** - "And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing."

III. There's a universal element in Christian love

**Colossians 1:4 NAU** - "since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints"

A. We have a unique love for all of our Christian brothers and sisters.

**Galatians 6:10 NAU** – "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith."

1. On one hand Paul has in mind the love they had for all of their fellow members of the Church of Colossae.
  - a. They were in a covenant relationship with one another. They were a loving community.
  - b. There is always a danger of a segmented love – love for some while neglecting others. In such an atmosphere division is inevitable. Love results in the sweet fragrance of harmony.  
**Colossians 3:12-14 NAU** - "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. <sup>14</sup> Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity."

2. On the other hand, they also loved their fellow believers throughout the world. In Christ, all division is removed—male, female. Jew, Greek. Wealthy, poor. Educated, uneducated. Paul was demonstrating this. He had never met most of these Colossian Christians, yet he prayed for them constantly, was thankful for them, and he loved them.
  3. This love is made possible by our unique union with Christ.  
**Romans 12:5 NAU** - "so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."  
**1 John 4:20 NAU** - "If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen."
  4. We have earthly families but these relationships are not as great as our relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ.
- B. Christian love leads us to love fallen humanity
1. Jesus taught we are to love our neighbor, even those who are our enemies.  
**Matthew 5:43-45 NAU** - "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' <sup>44</sup> "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous."
  2. This love drives us to carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Love cannot stand by and watch forsaken men fall into the eternal fires of hell. We possess the Good News that can rescue sinners.
  3. Amazingly, our very display of love towards sinners is often labeled as hate because we must rightly call out sin. Sinful men do not like having their sins exposed. They don't like having their idols attacked. The Gospel, however, demands that men clearly understand their sin and condemnation. Only then will the Gospel of Christ appear as glorious good news.
  4. Paul saw loving our neighbor and sharing the Gospel as a debt – something we owe that must be paid. They don't deserve it but we owe it to them as an act of grace and mercy. It reflects God's love towards us. They don't deserve it but we show pity upon them and love them. They don't deserve it – but neither did we. We are now under obligation to bring it to them.  
**Romans 13:8 NAU** - "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled *the* law."  
**Romans 1:14-15 NAU** - "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. <sup>15</sup> So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome."  
(The word for "obligation" refers to a debtor)

**Conclusion:**

1. Our love for one another is a display of our faith to the world. It should shine brightly that all may see. And we should love fallen humanity, living righteously before them and holding Christ before them in the Gospel. Jesus said, "Let your light shine before men."
2. Since love is the grand work of the Holy Spirit in us we should pray for it. We should guard against those things that are poisonous to it – things like anger, bitterness and envy, slander and gossip, unforgiveness and selfishness.
3. Peter says that love is the cure for many of the situations that divide and hinder our unity. **1 Peter 4:8 NAU** - "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins."