

Colossians 1:3-14 — What Are The Basics Of Saving Faith?

October 15, 2017

Welcome to CrossWinds. This morning, we continue our study of the book of Colossians. Last week we learned a little on the background to the book. This book is a letter written by the apostle Paul while he was in prison at Rome.

We also met Epaphras. He was a man that heard the apostle Paul telling people about the good news of Jesus in the city of Ephesus. He returned to his hometown of Colossae and told people in his city about Jesus. People came to Christ and a church was birthed in his hometown.

Unfortunately, the people of Colossae were beginning to undermine the new faith of the Christians in Colossae. They were telling them that simple faith in Jesus wasn't enough. Jesus wasn't that big of a deal. Those from a Greek background told them there must be hidden truths about God Epaphras hadn't told them. Those from a Jewish background wanted to add circumcision to simple faith in Christ when it came to knowing God.

This young church's confidence in the sufficiency of Jesus and what God had done for them through him began to erode. What was young pastor Epaphras to do? He traveled 1,300 miles to Rome to tell Paul what was happening and get his words of wisdom. To address this problem, Paul wrote this letter to tell that small church why Jesus is more than enough.

Last week, we covered just the first two verses. This morning, we are picking up the pace and covering 11 verses. We have a lot to cover.

In letter writing of the day, it was customary to open a letter with a few sentences telling the recipient why you are thankful for them. It was the way they

had small talk before the real talk. We do the same thing today. We talk about sports and the weather before we get into the real conversation. Paul was doing something similar in these verses before he jumped into the meat of the letter.

This doesn't mean this portion of the letter is unimportant. Paul carefully crafted these paragraphs to explain the basics of saving faith in Christ to the Christians in Colossae and to show them why simple faith in Jesus is more than enough. In these verses, Paul answered these questions.

1. How do we recognize saving faith?
2. How does someone come to saving faith?
3. How does someone grow in saving faith?
4. How does saving faith change the problem of sin?

How do we recognize saving faith?

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven... Colossians 1:3–5a (ESV)

Epaphras told Paul about three important qualities in the life of these young Christians. Paul said the existence of these three qualities was proof they were genuine Christians and that God was at work in their lives. These three qualities are faith, hope and love.

Paul talked about faith, hope and love many times in the Bible. These three things are shorthand for the defining qualities of a Christian life. Sometimes we breeze right through them and miss their significance. I want to explain them. The key thing to remember is these qualities cannot exist in someone's life unless he or she is a genuine Christian.

Faith in Christ Jesus

As soon as we talk about needing faith, most of us hear the song by George Michael, "You gotta have faith." While the tune of the song is catchy, the words of the song are not true. Faith in itself has no intrinsic value. It is what we have faith in that has value.

For example, some of you will remember the Tylenol murders in the 1980s. This is the reason every bottle you buy today has a seal over the top. A woman in Chicago was taking Tylenol bottles home, emptying capsules of their Tylenol and filling them with cyanide, then putting the bottle with cyanide capsules in it back on the store shelf. People in Chicago were buying Tylenol, taking one for a headache and dying. Every single person who took those Tylenols had faith he was taking medicine to take away his headache but his faith was misplaced. The pill took away his life.

You see, having faith is useless. It is what you have faith in that matters. Is what you have faith in worth being trusted?

People all over the world have faith in different gods. They have faith in Mohammed. They have faith in Buddha. They have faith in themselves. Are Mohammed and Buddha worth of our faith? They are not. They are like cyanide Tylenol capsules. Millions of people sincerely trust them but they will let you down. Faith in Christ is the only thing that is worthy of our trust. Jesus tells us he is the only one we can trust to take care of our sin.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:6 (ESV)

When Jesus makes this exclusive claim, we wonder if we can trust him. What makes his claims different from the claims of Mohammed or Buddha? There is a difference between blind faith and healthy faith. When Jesus said he is the only way to know God, if he didn't back up those claims, our trust in him would be considered blind faith. The claims made by Mohammed and Buddha are blind faith claims. Jesus rose from the dead to prove he is worthy of our trust. Jesus is the only one who died on the cross and rose from the grave, and secular history proves it. That is why faith in Jesus isn't a blind leap of faith but it is healthy faith, reasonable faith.

Here is what is what makes this interesting. Even though faith in Jesus is not a blind leap but it is healthy and reasonable, your decision to follow Christ didn't come from you. Today, if you believe Jesus died on the cross to pay for your sin, if you desire to follow Christ with your life, it is because the eyes of your heart have been supernaturally opened so you can clearly see Jesus is worthy of your trust. God supernaturally worked in your life to open the eyes of your heart so you can clearly see Jesus for who he is and trust Jesus because of what he has done. Saving faith in Christ is ultimately a supernatural gift from God.

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. John 6:44 (ESV)

Love for the saints.

The second way you can recognize a genuine Christian is he or she possesses love for the saints. That means they genuinely love other Christians. The reason true Christians love one another is because God gives us a supernatural love for one another.

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. John 13:35 (ESV)

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. 1 John 3:14 (ESV)

The kind of love Paul was talking about is not mushy romantic love. It is a love where we genuinely care for one another in spite of age differences, racial differences, political differences or economic differences. If we look at the news, we see division. We see fighting. It is republicans versus democrats. It is Black Lives Matter. It is not standing for the playing of the national anthem. In the church, those kind of divisions should never exist because God gives us a supernatural love for our brothers and sisters, no matter their skin color.

Another way this gets distorted in churches is people in the church sometimes only hang out with people just like them. There is a group for the young marrieds and a group for the retired people, and no mixing is allowed. While there is a place for affinity groups, a genuine Christian is careful to not let affinity groups cut them off from the rest of the body because they love all Christians. God gives us a supernatural love for one another that the world can not understand. The reason we love one another so deeply is because it is a supernatural work of God in our hearts.

Sometimes people ask me if you have to go to church to be a Christian. Of course we don't have to go to church to be a Christian, but if you are a Christian, you will want to go to church because you genuinely love other believers and want to be with them, even if other believers in the church are of a different age or race. It doesn't matter. God gives us love for them.

The way this love shows up is in not simply in our willingness to talk with other believers after church but in our willingness to sacrifice for other believers. We spend our money and time on the things we love. If we genuinely love other Christians, we will be glad to make time for them and be glad to sacrifice some of our money to help them.

Our hope is in heaven.

As Christians, we are not living simply for this life. We have our eyes fixed on the day we will be with Jesus so we want to please him. The evidence of a genuine Christian faith is we don't have to buy everything in this life because this life is not all there is. Eternity with Jesus and the new heavens and earth is what we are looking toward.

This completely changes the way we face suffering. For example, when Paul faced times of suffering, he didn't moan, saying he only had approximately 50 years of life before he died, so time in a Roman jail was cutting into his retirement years, which he planned on spending at a Corinthian golf resort. Look what Paul said about facing suffering.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. Romans 8:18 (ESV)

Paul said, "I can suffer now because this life isn't all there is to life. The next life is what really matters. In the next life I will be most blessed being in all creation, not because I deserve it but all because of what Jesus has done for me and who I am because I am in him."

If I told you there was a million dollars on the other side of Big Spirit Lake in a cooler and all you had to do was row a boat across the lake to get it, would

you be able to endure the pain to get there? Of course! We live in Iowa. That means the weather changes when we least expect it. Imagine that halfway across the lake wind, rain and waves began. They made the trip difficult. How would you get through? You would keep straining on the oars because your eyes were fixed on the treasure on the opposite shore.

The same is true about suffering today. The blessings that await us in heaven because of who we are in Jesus are beyond our wildest dreams. When we face hard times in this life, we can make it through by remembering what awaits us on the shore of heaven.

That ability to think about your life beyond this life and to live for the next life is a supernatural gift from God. It is evidence of genuine faith.

Paul said, "Do you want to know if you are a genuine Christian?" Don't look inside of yourself for some kind of mystical experience. Don't look for visions or out-of-body experiences. Don't even look back on a Bible conference where you were so emotionally touched that you came forward in an altar call with tears in your eyes. None of those emotional moments or supernatural moments are proof of a real saving faith. The tests of real saving faith are very ordinary.

1. **Do you honestly believe Jesus is the Son of God. Do you see Jesus as the only way to be forgiven?** Has God opened the eyes of your heart? If so, that is evidence of God's supernatural work in your life.
2. **Do you honestly love other Christians, especially Christians that are not like you?** Genuine love for other Christians can only come as a supernatural work of God and is evidence of genuine faith.

3. **Are you living for your hope in heaven and not just for this life?** Only genuine saving faith will give the desire to make sacrificial choices in this world that will be honored by Christ on the day we see him face to face. That is evidence of genuine faith.

How does someone come to saving faith?

...Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing — as it also does among you... Colossians 1:5b-6a (ESV)

Notice how they came to genuine saving faith in Jesus. It happened when they simply heard the word of truth. Epaphras came to Colossae and told the Colossians the truth about their sin and the truth about how much God loves them to solve the problem of sin through Jesus.

God didn't strike them with a bolt of lightning to change their lives. All that happened is Epaphras simply told the truth. Before Epaphras came, everything the people in Colossae knew about God was a lie. All other religious truth outside of Jesus is a lie.

We need to understand this simple message of the bad news of our sin and the good news of God's love for us through Jesus on the cross that was spoken by Epaphras is not simply words. These words are the truth of God, and God promises to infuse them with power in people's lives when we speak them. Telling the truth about Jesus with words is what God uses to supernaturally change people's lives. God uses the verbal message of sin and our savior to move people from an eternity in hell to an eternity in heaven.

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? Romans 10:14 (ESV)

Some people will tell you we need concerts or explosions or a big band or special music to lead people to Jesus. We need to get them worked up so they are emotionally pliable. Did Paul lead people to Jesus with a band and pyrotechnics show? In all honesty, music doesn't lead anyone to Jesus. It is ordinary people speaking the simply words of truth about who Jesus is and what God has done for us through him that God promises to infuse with power and change lives. The way Paul spread the gospel was ordinary people, like Epaphras, telling other ordinary people with ordinary words. That is God's preferred method to change lives.

My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power. 1 Corinthians 2:4–5 (NIV)

Paul said, "When I told you about Jesus, I was intentionally boring. I didn't want anyone to think I emotionally manipulated you. I simply told you the truth and let God's Spirit take the message of Jesus into your life and activate it. When you were born again you realized the power for a transformed life came from God and not me manipulating you."

Paul also said the proof that the simply unadorned speaking of the truth about Jesus is enough to change lives is no matter where this simple message goes in the world, no matter what the soil, no matter how harsh the climate, people hear about their sin and Jesus as our savior, they place their faith in Jesus and are born again. It doesn't matter if it is in Iran, Pakistan, India, your college dorm or The Family Diner.

Paul said:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. Romans 1:16 (ESV)

The simple gospel message is the power of God to change lives for everyone. Remember how this church in Colossae began. An ordinary person named Epaphras, who never went to Bible school, used ordinary words to tell people about Jesus, and they were born again. The result was the birth of a church.

I hope you find this encouraging. Epaphras was just like you and me. I challenge you this week to do what Epaphras did. I challenge each of us to be ordinary people that use ordinary words to tell ordinary people about Jesus and to trust in God so that the message will take root in someone's heart.

Right now, I am going to stop and ask God to give each one of us at least one opportunity to tell somebody about Jesus this week. I am going to ask God to have his spirit prompt us and whisper in our hearts, that now is the time to speak these ordinary words to the best of our ability.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we confess that for too long we have kept our mouths shut because we thought it was up to us to convince someone to trust in you. As we look at ordinary Epaphras, who shared the ordinary truth of Jesus but you used those words to save life, we ask that what happened in Colossae would happen again in our region. Give us windows of opportunity to speak about you. We look forward to seeing how you use the truth about your son to change lives. Amen.

After Paul told us the marks of a Christian and genuine Christians are made, he instructed us how Christians grow. Remember, the culture of Colossae said spiritual maturity was moving beyond Jesus. Paul said spiritual maturity is growing further into Jesus.

How does someone grow in saving faith?

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy... Colossians 1:9–11 (ESV)

These are some great verses. We often wonder how to pray for people.

Paul gave us a window into how he prayed for the Christians in Colossae.

There is a lot here, almost too much. Let me take a moment to break it down. Paul asked God for these young Christians to be *filled with the knowledge of God's will*. The word *filled* means to be completely controlled by something. Just as we say somebody is filled with wine, which means they are controlled by alcohol, Paul prayed these young Christians would be completely controlled by the knowledge of God's will for their lives.

The word *will* is referring to God's desire for them through Jesus, God's heart of goodness to them through Jesus, kindness and blessing to them through Jesus.

Paul defined spiritual maturity as not moving beyond Christ but as becoming more completely captivated by a greater understanding of how incredibly good God has been to us in Christ. *Spiritual maturity is falling more in love with Jesus as we grow in better understanding of how incredibly good God has been to us through Jesus.*

The Bible tells us in Ephesians that we deserve eternal punishment in the lake of fire, but through Jesus we are now the most blessed beings in the

universe. Do you get that or are those words hitting you like a bullet off a rock?
Let who we are in Jesus sink into your mind.

The biggest problem Christians have in this world is as we mature we move away from Jesus, we don't become increasingly captivated by what God has done for us through Jesus.

Paul coupled with knowledge of God's will, spiritual wisdom and understanding. *Spiritual wisdom* means making wise decisions in life based on our new-found understanding of who we are in Jesus. That is spiritual wisdom. *Understanding* means the ability to understand concepts and the relationships between them.

To summarize, Paul said spiritual maturity is growing in our understanding of Jesus and how much God loves us through Jesus and how much God has done for us through Jesus. Then Paul prayed we have the wisdom to see how our new identity in Jesus connects with everyday living so we live wisely in life, knowing who we are.

Paul then gave us three examples of how understanding more about who we are in Christ changes our everyday lives.

1. **Bearing fruit in every good work.** Just as God has gone out of his way to save us, our natural response will be to go out of our way to care for others. The more we understand how much we are loved by Jesus, the more we want to go out of our way to love others.

2. **Increasing in knowledge of God.** Knowing Christ and knowing God go hand-in-hand. The more we know about how much God has done for us in Jesus, the more we know about God.
3. **Being strengthened with all power by God's glorious might.** This is something many people misunderstand. What does it mean to be strengthened with God's power? Many people think the strengthening with God's power is some kind of funky supernatural gift. It is not speaking in tongues. It is not the gift of healing. It just isn't. Read this in context. Paul told us three evidences of God's power that displays in our lives as we mature in knowing Christ.
 - 3.1. **God's power gives us endurance.** Endurance is the strength to make it through tough circumstances that go on and on and never seem to end. Has anyone faced a health situation or tough job situation that required endurance? As we focus on Jesus and who we are in him, God will give us supernatural endurance to handle tough situations.
 - 3.2. **God's power gives us patience.** While endurance is supernatural strength to put up with tough circumstances, patience is supernatural strength to put up with tough people. Focus on who we are in Jesus and God will give us supernatural levels of patience to work with tough people.
 - 3.3. **God's power gives us joy.** As we focus on who we are in Jesus, God gives us joy that is not found in our circumstances but is supernaturally given to us through Jesus.

This is how Paul prayed for the Colossians to grow in Christ. It is a template for us to guide us in praying for others we love.

How does saving faith change our struggle with sin?

...giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Colossians 1:12–14 (ESV)

Paul taught us how genuine saving faith changes our problem with sin.

He qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints.

This is a term which originally came from the Old Testament. Only God's people were allowed to possess the Promised Land. Everyone else was either driven out or destroyed. Through Jesus' death on the cross, Gentiles are now qualified to be God's chosen people. We will share in the inheritance of the saints which is not just being with Jesus the moment we die but it ultimately is the new heaven and earth for all of eternity. The point is we are completely unqualified for God's inheritance. We are not saints. We are sinners. Jesus qualified us because there was no way we could qualify ourselves. We are now saints in God's eyes because Jesus is now our identity.

Jesus delivered us from the power of sin in our lives.

The word deliver is a word used in the Greek to describe a king coming to a land and picking up an entire people group and moving them to a new place. This is what God did for us through Jesus. He took us from the domain of darkness, where we have no choice but to sin because we were controlled by the power of sin, and he transferred us to the kingdom of his own son, where we no longer have to sin. Our love for Jesus controls us. If you are a Christian, none of

us have to sin. We may struggle with wanting to sin and giving in to sin but we don't have to sin. The power of sin is broken in our lives. We can live holy lives. Our identity is as a saint, not a sinner because our identity is now in Christ.

We have redemption, the forgiveness of our sin.

Jesus has paid for all of our sin so when God looks at us he doesn't see the filth of our lives, he only sees the purity of his own son. My friends, even after someone has forgiven us, they have a hard time not seeing what we did in our past. Not so with God. Our sin is forgiven! God the Father sees the purity of his son when he looks at us, not the filth of our pasts.

Conclusion

My friends, do you see why Jesus is more than enough? Do you see why moving beyond Jesus is a twisted demonic doctrine?

It isn't just the Colossians who lost sight of the greatness of Jesus and all God has done for us through him, it is us.

Many of us subtly think spiritual maturity is moving beyond Jesus because saving faith in Jesus is just the beginning of the Christian life, when in reality it is all of the Christian life.

This week, we have a challenge, to speak the truth about Jesus in our own words at least one time this week. We are going to trust God to quicken those ordinary words in the hearts of our friends and neighbors and give them new life, just like God has given to us.



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