

Faith, Hope, and Love

But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13.13).

Introduction

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul taught that the supernatural communication gifts which God gave the early Church, i.e., the gift of prophecy, the gift of tongues, and the gift of knowledge, would vanish once the Scriptures were complete. After this, the Church would operate on the basis of the Word of God through faith, hope, and love, the greatest of these being love.

The Scriptures Complete

Paul's commission included completing the Scriptures (Colossians 1.25 DARBY).¹ Thus, the supernatural gifts of 1 Corinthians 13 ceased by the time he wrote 2 Timothy. Today, no one in the Church legitimately exercises the gifts of prophecy, knowledge, or tongues. They have been replaced by things far superior: the completed word of God, faith, hope, and love.

God saved Paul and appointed him to be the apostle of the Gentiles (Romans 11.13). Included in this commission was that Paul would found a new creation, the Church, the body of Christ (Ephesians 3.1-7). A new creation requires new truths. New wine cannot abide old wineskins (Matthew 9.17). The Lord revealed to Paul these new truths of the Church to guide and administer His new creation. Paul called these truths "secrets."² To reveal holy living and obedience to these truths, God established Paul to be the pattern for believers to copy for living the Christian life.³ Thus, Paul's letters provide all Church doctrine and his life reveals the pattern

to follow to live holy lives before our Redeemer.

The Magnificent Trinity

In addition to the blessing of the complete Word of God, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13 of the blessings of faith, hope, and love. We are to live by these blessings. Two other passages, both found in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, contain this magnificent trinity.⁴ They are the following:

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 1.3)

Paul's language "work of faith," "labor of love," and "steadfastness of hope" was the language of his prayer for the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 1.2). This prayer reveals how believers should pray today. Part of copying Paul's life is that we learn how we should pray.

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 (1 Thessalonians 5.8).

In this second iteration of faith, hope, and love to the Thessalonians, Paul regarded faith and love as our breastplate. A breastplate defends the heart, the source of faith and love. Hope is a helmet, armor which protects the head. Hope of salvation is the intellectual core of our redemption—God's promise of what we will be. Heart and head, faith, love, and hope. These are the Church's guiding and protecting virtues.

Why These Three?

The noun, "faith" is [πίστις](#) and the verb is [πιστεύω](#). It means to trust or believe what God has said. A believer has the assurance of salvation and eternal life because He believes

God will do what He has said. It is really that simple. Christ has done all the work of salvation. Our part is simply to believe God. We do nothing. We believe. Indeed, God will not accept “help” or “work” in regard to salvation. If we wish to go that way, He will not accept us (Romans 4.4-5). The only path is the one God has declared.

The word πίστις also means fidelity or faithfulness. For example, in Romans 3.22, Paul wrote of the “faith of Jesus Christ.” This is better translated, the “faithfulness of Jesus Christ.” Through the Lord’s faithfulness to His Father, God’s plan of salvation was accomplished.

The word, “hope” is ἐλπίς. This word is used for the Christian’s joyful, sure, and confident expectation of what God has promised. As such, it is a cousin to faith. It does not mean “hope” in the sense of “I hope to win the lottery,” or “I hope our football team will go undefeated.” The Biblical meaning of “hope” is a confident assurance in God and His word. Thus, a believer’s hope of resurrection and eternal life is a confident and sure expectation God will keep His promise.

The word, “love” is ἀγάπη. Its verb is ἀγαπάω. Two Greek words for love are used in the New Testament. The other is φίλος and its verb, φιλέω. The noun is usually used of a “friend” and the verb is used of love in the sense of friendship. Love has a variety of meanings. Unfortunately, ἀγάπη has been taught to mean “God’s love” with John 3.16, which uses the verb ἀγαπάω, as its most famous example. While ἀγαπάω is most often used of God’s love, to state it is God’s love goes too far. For example, in John 5.20, we read, “The Father loves the Son.” The word used for “love” is φιλέω, not ἀγαπάω. Other examples include John 11.3, 36, 20.2 and Revelation 3.19.

The primary difference between ἀγαπάω and φιλέω is that ἀγαπάω relates to mental attitude and will while φιλέω relates to emotion. Φιλέω is friendship love, based upon having things in common with another, liking what another likes. The

word ἀγαπάω may include feelings, but need not. It is love based upon will and mental attitude. I may not like another believer. I may find his company unpleasant and disagreeable. However, through ἀγαπάω I love him. I can't change my feelings; I can change my mental attitude. I can think of him in terms of one for whom Christ died, a son of God, a joint-heir of Christ, a fellow believer. I can control what I *think*, even if I cannot control how I *feel*.⁵

The Great Duos

In addition to the trinity of faith, hope, and love, one frequently encounters combinations of faith, hope, and love, throughout Paul's writings. The following passages demonstrate how frequently these words flowed from the great apostle's pen regarding our salvation and life in Christ.

Faith and Hope

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God (Romans 5.1-2).

For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith (Galatians 5.5).

If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister; (Colossians 1.23)

Faith and Love

But flee from these things, man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness (1 Timothy 6.11).

But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also (2 Corinthians 8.7).

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love (Galatians 5.6).

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness (Galatians 5.22),

For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, (Ephesians 1.15),

that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love (Ephesians 3:16-17),

Peace to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 6.23).

Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love to all the saints (Colossians 1.4),

And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 1.14).

Hold fast the form of sound words, which you heard from me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 1.13).

All that are with me salute you. Greet them that love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Amen (Titus 3.15).

Hearing of your love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints (Philemon 1.5);

Hope and Love

and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us (Romans 5.5).

The Greatest

Paul wrote love was greatest among the noble trinity of faith, hope, and love. The reason is twofold.

1. Love encapsulates the moral law. The Decalogue, which God gave the Jews, summed God's moral law. Paul included the Decalogue (except the Sabbath) in his letters. Believers are to have no other gods, represent them, or use God's name worthlessly. We are to honor father and mother, not murder, not commit adultery, not lie, steal, or covet. Love keeps these moral laws. A person who loves God will have Him alone as God. He will not make representations of other gods. A person who loves God will not use His name carelessly. A person who loves God and man will honor father and mother. A person who loves God and man will not murder, commit adultery, lie, steal, or covet. Love fulfills the moral law of God.⁶

2. Love endures forever. Faith and hope are virtues of our present age but are unrealized. The great faith and hope of believers is the realization of salvation. We have God's declaration of justification: He has declared us righteous (Romans 3.21-26). We have His word we are being saved through the process of sanctification, being conformed into the image of Christ (Romans 8.29). We have the hope of the final phase of salvation: glorification. It will be completed when we receive our resurrection bodies. For members of the Church, the body of Christ, this will occur at the Rapture. The Rapture is the great hope, the "blessed hope" (Titus 2.13), of the Lord's return. At that time, He will transform ([μετασχηματίζω](#), Philippians 3.21) and change ([ἀλλάσσω](#), 1

Corinthians 15.51-52) our mortal bodies into a body like His own. Until the Rapture occurs, we operate in the realm of faith and hope. After it occurs, faith and hope will vanish for they will have been realized. But love will continue forever. We will always love God and our neighbor as ourself. That is why love is the greatest of the three.

Conclusion

The Church today does not enjoy the gifts of prophecy, knowledge, and tongues that were present in the early, newly begun Church, the Body of Christ. While these gifts provided necessary insight into God's will for those early believers, these gifts were temporary and ended when the Scriptures were completed. Some today view these gifts as manifestations of God's power and a way to a closer relationship with Him. But this is wrong. God's power is in the gospel and in the resurrection (Romans 1.4, 16-17). Paul's life serves as our pattern for holy living. One only need read Paul's letters to the Corinthians to recognize that the gifts of prophecy, knowledge, and tongues, did nothing for the Corinthians in terms of power or holy living. They were Paul's most troubled and troublesome congregation. Our gifts are far greater. We have the complete Word of God, especially Paul's letters, which provide all doctrine specifically to the Church, the body of Christ. We have a record of Paul's life as a pattern for holy living. Paul provided the premier example of living life based upon faith, hope, and love. These are the keys to a victorious, holy, Christian life.

¹ The vast majority in Christendom teach Revelation was the last book written and that the apostle John wrote it about 95-96 A.D. Such teaching denies the plain words of Scripture (Colossians 1.25 DARBY). The canon was completed with Paul's last letter, 2 Timothy. See the author's article, [Understanding the Book of Revelation](#) regarding when and why Revelation was written.

² See the author's article, [Paul's "Mystery"](#), for an explanation of these new, previously hidden truths.

³ See the author's articles, [Paul: Chief of Sinners?](#), [Follow Paul?](#) and [Paul's "Mystery"](#).

⁴ See the author's commentary on [1 and 2 Thessalonians](#). 1 and 2 Thessalonians were written about 51-52 A.D. and constitute the first Christian writings. 1 Corinthians was written about 57 A.D. This means Paul was thinking in terms of faith, hope, and love as operational elements of the Christian life *before* he wrote 1 Corinthians 13. Faith, hope, and love were premier Christian virtues from the beginning of the Church.

⁵ Greek has two other words for love, ἔρως and στοργή, not found in the New Testament. ἔρως means romantic, sexual love, being "in love," and στοργή is a love of natural affection, e.g., parental love, love for pets, a favorite bathrobe, etc. C. S. Lewis addressed the subject of love in his book, *The Four Loves* and fictionally, in *Till We Have Faces*.

⁶ See the author's article, [Paul and the Law](#), for Paul's teachings about the Mosaic Law and the believer's relation to it.

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