

“Faithful Brethren”
Colossians 1:2
(Preached at Trinity, October 1, 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, in many ways Paul’s letters follow the standard format that was common in his day. It included the name of the sender followed by the person addressed. This was then followed by a thanksgiving and/or prayer, the body of the letter, and then concluding items.
2. But as I’ve pointed out, Paul’s salutation shouldn’t be passed over as mere formality. His salutations had a particularly Christian tone and were rich in meaning. It was typical for first century letters to include a blessing or benediction at the beginning of the letter so the phrase, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father" should not sound unusual. But Paul gives it a particular Christian tone.
 - A. Paul uses this expression in every one of his epistles except 1 & 2 Timothy but, again, for Paul it was more than just a formality; it was a great apostolic blessing delivered to the church. When Paul speaks of grace he is speaking of the very heart of God’s action towards fallen humanity.
 1. Every tear shed because of our remaining sin is accompanied by the comforting assurance, “God’s grace is sufficient.”
 2. Every weakness in the church, every trial, every struggle is a reminder of our great need of God’s grace.
 3. We reply to every discouraging lie of Satan with “But Jesus” – His grace is sufficient.
 4. How dependent we are upon the grace of God. We are nothing without Him, we can do nothing without Him.
 - B. Paul also prays God’s blessing of peace upon the Colossian saints
 1. Peace involves the reconciliation with God resulting in sweet fellowship – it is the result of **Verse 14** - "In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."
 2. Our union with Christ brings us to peace with our brethren
 3. Our peace is a peace that only God can give. It is peace “from God.” It is the peace “of God.”
3. In **Verses 1-2** Paul turns our attention to the element of identity.
 - Paul opens by identifying himself as an Apostle chosen by the authority of Christ to be His spokesman. This letter was being delivered with Divine authority—it was the Word of Christ.
 - Second, Paul identifies Timothy as “Our brother.” By referring to Timothy as “our brother” Paul is recognizing the reality of our union with one another into a unique family.
 - Now, as we begin **Verse 2** Paul identifies the recipients of the letter: "To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ *who are* at Colossae"

3. We've already looked at their location, the city of Colossae in Western Asia Minor. Paul is writing to the Church of Colossae, although ultimately Paul's words would resonate with all of our Lord's churches.
We need to give closer attention to the two labels Paul gives to the members of the church: "saints" and "faithful brethren"
Paul uses two adjectives to describe them: ἅγιος and πιστός
4. It has been four years since I preached through the Book of Ephesians. Paul used these same adjectives to describe the believers at Ephesus and I held them before you as being at the heart of Biblical Christianity: holy and faithful. This is so critical, I want to hold it before you again.
As much as we hear it we are always at risk of failing to apply it to ourselves and excuse our lack of faithfulness.
5. Paul wasn't writing to a particular class of Christians. He wasn't writing to pastors or theologians. He wasn't writing to a higher spiritually mature class. He was writing to Christians, ordinary church members. Paul wasn't giving a prescription of what they hoped to become but what they were. And he uses these two terms to describe them. These two terms describe what it means to be a Christian.
As Paul opens this letter he describes them in a unique but simple manner. They are holy and they are faithful.
6. I could focus upon the first aspect. Christians are holy. They are distinct and set apart. God enables them to reflect His holy character. This will be displayed in many ways as we go through the Book of Colossians.
7. This morning, however, I want us to focus only upon the second – The Christian is characterized as faithful.
 - a. Paul uses it to describe Epaphras in **Verse 7** - "just as you learned *it* from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf"
 - b. He uses it to describe Tychicus in **Chapter 4**
Colossians 4:7 NAU - "As to all my affairs, Tychicus, *our* beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information."
 - c. He also uses it to describe Onesimus:
Colossians 4:9 NAU - "and with him Onesimus, *our* faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your *number*. They will inform you about the whole situation here."
7. This is one of the great problems facing the modern church. We don't really know what a Christian look like? Is it enough to call yourself a Christian? Is it enough to join a church, to align yourself with God's people?
As Paul opens this letter he describes them in a unique but simple manner. They are holy and they are faithful.

I. How is Paul applying this word πιστός to Christians?

A. This word is translated and applied in two different ways in the NT.

1. It can refer to those who believe—those exercising faith.

1 Timothy 4:12 NAU - "Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but *rather* in speech, conduct, love, faith *and* purity, show yourself an example of those who believe."

Galatians 3:9 NAU - "So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer."

2. It can also be translated "faithful." In this way it refers to reliability, steadfastness, dependability, loyalty. It is used of both God and men.

1 Corinthians 1:9 NAU - "God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

1 Corinthians 4:17 NAU - "For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord"

1 Corinthians 4:2 KJV - "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."

3. Sometimes the ambiguity of meaning of the word causes confusion. For example, regarding the children of pastors:

Titus 1:6 KJV - "If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly."

Titus 1:6 NAU - "*namely*, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion."

B. So, which one is the proper translation here? Actually, as applied to Biblical Christianity, both are correct. The Christian is both a believer and is faithful. Paul is describing the nature of Biblical Christianity – what it means to be a Christian.

- A Christian is one who believes. He rests upon the claims of the Gospel.
- But a Christian, the one who believes, is also one who is faithful. True belief has an active component. This is the aspect I want us to focus on this morning. The Christian will be faithful.

1. This word πιστός as applied to Christianity is at the heart of saving faith.

2. Faithfulness is a work of the Spirit in the heart of a believer. It demands a transformed heart. It flows forth from regeneration. It is at the heart of being a believer.

II. Christian faith has a profound effect upon the believer. Paul is describing the Christian as one living out his faith. The Christian life is rich in metaphors—each describing the faithfulness of the believer.

A. One of the Christian metaphors is that of the bride and bridegroom.

1. The marital relationship is a picture of faithfulness. The husband and wife are committed to one another in a love relationship of loyalty and commitment. There is communion, sacrifice, harmony.

And great effort is put into making a strong marriage.

2. In a committed faithful marriage, neither would consider looking to another to give their love and affection. Adultery is an unspeakable assault upon the relationship.

3. Union with Christ describes such a relationship. Notice how Paul states it:

Colossians 1:2 NAU - "faithful brethren in Christ"

 - a. These Colossian Christians lived in the context of a pagan culture filled with idolatry, prostitution, corruption. But Christians are described as "faithful in Christ Jesus."
 - b. This is the nature of Biblical Christianity. Those who are "in Christ Jesus" are faithful to Him. Christian faithfulness is a full commitment to Christ.
 4. We have to be continually reminded of the reality of our life in Christ.

Colossians 3:1-3 NAU - "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³ For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

Colossians 3:8-10 NAU - "But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, *and* abusive speech from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices, ¹⁰ and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him"
- B. Another Christian metaphor is that of a master/servant relationship
1. To believe upon Christ is to declare His lordship in every area of life. The Christian is Christ-Centered.
 2. Jesus is Lord" is regarded as one of the oldest and most basic statements of Christian faith. It is one of the earliest Christian creeds.

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 will 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."
 3. If Jesus is your Lord then it will have a profound effect upon every aspect of your life. You see your life in terms of service to Christ. If Jesus is not your Lord you are not a Christian. Faithfulness is at the heart of lordship.
 4. Believing in Christ means dying to self

Mark 8:34-37 NAU - "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. ³⁵ "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. ³⁶ "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ "For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"
 5. Previously we served sin and Satan - Now we serve Christ with all our heart. The Christian life is no longer consumed by a desire to satisfy self
 6. Faithful Christians have given their full loyalty and allegiance to Christ. Jesus has captivated their affections. They love Him. Your highest faithfulness will always be directed towards those things that are the highest delight of your affections. If Jesus has become your greatest treasure all attention will be upon Him.

7. This will affect everything—how you conduct your relationship with your wife, your husband, and your children. How you order your home. How you work, how you play, how you treat your neighbors. What is your attitude towards your church? What is your attitude towards this world?
Colossians 1:9-10 NAU - "For this reason also, since the day we heard *of it*, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God"

II. The greatest hindrance to faithfulness is unbelief

- A. It is unbelief that leads a person to embrace the lies of Satan
 1. Satan takes mud bricks and paints them gold and tells you they are valuable. People spend their lives gathering these bricks. Satan is a liar! Are you gathering these mud bricks?
Matthew 13:22 NAS - "And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful."
 2. Jesus is infinitely more glorious than these mud bricks. A life in Christ far exceeds all that this world has to offer. But unbelief leads you to seek the mud bricks.
- B. If Christ is glorious in your sight He will dominate everything
 1. You will be consumed with knowing Him more
 2. If your faith is tentative. If it is merely knowing some truths *about* Jesus without actually *knowing* Him, then you will have no passion for Him
 3. You will not serve a God you don't really believe in. If you don't really believe that living for Christ is greater than anything else you will not be faithful. You will not be spending yourself in seeking to know Him more.
 4. It is disturbing how little energy some give to knowing Christ. They find it easy to dismiss Him. He isn't an all-consuming part of their life.
 5. What place does God have in your life? Paul is writing to the "faithful in Christ Jesus." Does this describe you?
- C. As we begin this letter we are told that Paul is writing to the holy ones, the believing ones, the faithful.
 1. Paul isn't speaking of those who have merely joined a church. He isn't speaking of those who merely call themselves Christians. He is describing those who have trusted Christ; those who have believed the Gospel and it has had a profound effect upon their lives.
 2. These are the faithful ones. They follow Christ absolutely. They have an unreserved commitment to Christ. Does this describe you?

- D. Does it disturb you if you are not faithful?
What will you do about it?
1. You must repent of your unfaithfulness
 2. You must pray. Pray that God will forgive you of your unbelief.
Pray that the Holy Spirit might make Christ more glorious in your sight.
The Holy Spirit always directs our attention to Christ. He most often does it through His Word.
 3. Surround yourselves with others who are faithful
Fill your life with those things that will help you to know Him more.
And spend yourself in service to Him.

Conclusion:

1. God is glorious. A life lived for Him is glorious. Do you believe this?
2. Is there anything that can compare with Him?