
Faith: Our Belief Together

Philippians 1:27-30; Colossians 1:21-23; 2 Timothy 1:13-14

What holds a community of people together?

A common geography... they live near one another

A common enemy... they feel threatened or hate another group of people

A common experience... they were part of a great event or catastrophe

A common bond... they served together in a military or a fire department

A common politics... they hold to a shared stance on politics

What holds together a Christian community?

Sometimes not much more than the world's sense of community...

Sometimes a shared religious experience...

Sometimes a charismatic leader who they love and follow...

Sometimes a shared view of worship or service or the place of the church in the world...

But in the New Testament, what is supposed to hold a community of people together is *The Faith*. It is a body of doctrines, a shared belief and practice from the Scriptures that causes harmony in the midst of natural and spiritual differences.

We believe this is important in the formation of Clearcreek Chapel. Our belief and practice is embodied in our organizing documents. We have a Book of Faith and Order. We have Mission, Vision, Values and strategies statements. We have Ministry Organizing Documents for most ministries and the ones we don't are being worked on. The beliefs and practices codified in all those documents constitute our distinctives, our direction, our doing.

We also recognize the difference between the unchangeable but developing beliefs that come directly from the Scriptures and our working out the commands, principles and patterns of the New Testament in wisdom. So we believe in the Trinity and the bodily incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These are two of the unchanging fundamentals of faith. To deny them is deny the Bible and to deny the faith. We believe in baptism by immersion of those who can and do profess belief in and obedience to, Christ. To adopt another mode (sprinkling) of a believer is not a denial of the Faith. We believe Christians are to gather together regularly for the ordinances, singing, giving, teaching, preaching and fellowshiping. But how often, at what times, in what ways are wisdom choices along the trajectory of helping believers to stability in faith and maturity in Christ.

In this day and age when what one believes as a church is often minimized or masked, we take our cue from the Scriptures. Paul made it clear that *the Faith* given in the Scriptures is to be accepted, guarded, defended and passed on.

The Faith to Follow In

2 Timothy 1:13-14

At the center of what we believe is the Apostolic deposit of truth and pattern of sound words in the Scriptures.

¹³ Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴ By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

The Pattern of the Apostles (v. 13)

Timothy was to follow the pattern of the sound words that he had learned from Paul. Following Timothy, we do as well. We have the pattern of sound words in the Scriptures. What does this mean?

We are to be able to articulate the same truths in our own language and somewhat within our own culture. It is not enough to simply say exactly the same thing the Bible does. We have to read, hear, understand and articulate. This is a guide for preaching and teaching. It must conform to the truths of the Bible.

There is a pattern of speaking, of saying truths that we are to be following. In other words, we are constrained by the Apostolic example in how we say the truths they taught us. We must be careful inventing new ways of saying the old truths. We may no longer actually be saying what they said.

That pattern we are to follow is from the Scriptures. For Timothy, it is what he heard from Paul. For us, it is all that Apostles wrote and left for us in the Scriptures. You will hear us refer to "the Apostolic deposit of truth". This is the Word of God.

We are to follow the template for living those words set out for us. There is an outline for Christian belief and practice that must be followed. If it is not followed, it may be religion, but it is not Christian.

We are to hold to and speak the truths in a Christ-centered faith and love. We are not being taught a philosophy of life or a religion or a system of belief that is not anchored in Christ. Our faith is first and foremost about Jesus Christ.

Our love is first and foremost for Jesus Christ. While this will lead us to truths and love for one another, understanding our world and loving people are secondary and corollary in our faith. A church that says it is first about people is not saying what Paul is saying. However, to be a church that has no love for people is simply reflecting that it has no love for Christ.

The Power of the Spirit (v. 14)

All that we are commanded to do in regards to the truth is to be done in the power of the Spirit. It is not a pursuit that can be done spiritually by unbelievers, even wise, thoughtful, trained-in-the-Bible unbelievers. To rightly read, hear understand and live out the Scriptures requires the presence and power of the Spirit.

The Defense of the Truth (v. 14)

We are responsible to guard what has been entrusted to us in the Scriptures. Paul's wording to Timothy here has us in view. God will ensure that His truth remains. But the primary way God does that is through the gathered communities, through the local

churches, He has established. Down through time and all over the world, God has preserved the Biblical and right understanding of the Word of God. During the Dark Ages in Europe it was a fluttering candle of people and churches whose history has largely been lost to us. Now, to the glory of Christ, it is a much more brightly sustained network of people and churches from most people groups all over the world.

What God has given us must be guarded against error and heresy. It must be defended from wrong application and practice. We must be willing to stand even when standing is not popular. We must be clear when clarity is not thought of as a virtue. We do so as a community of believers in partnership with other believers and churches.

We are a community of believers, a confessing church bound to the Apostles and to other believing churches by the truths of the Scriptures and the presence and power of the Spirit.

The Faith to Continue In

Colossians 1:21-23

At the center of what we believe is our hope in the Gospel and personal call to continue to hold fast to the faith.

²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

That Declares your Sinfulness (v. 21)

The gospel faith tells us that we were sinners. We were born separated from God. We were hostile to God. We were not neutral. We were not seeking God. We were sinners in our inner persons, our minds. We were alienated and hostile to God in our nature and in our nurture. We were anti-God in our beliefs and desires. This is what the Bible declares. This is what we teach. This is what you were.

This is man's essential problem. It is not his social standing, his cultural struggles, his psychological or psychiatric issues, his poverty, his skin color, his geography, his people group, his language. Any "gospel" that is not first about our sin and rebellion against God, our alienation from and hostility to God, is false and damning.

What binds us together with each other as a church and with all Biblical churches like the one at Colossae is that we were once sinners. This is our history. We had a bad heart. We had bad record. This is your past. This what you once were.

That Reveals your Savior (v. 22)

The gospel faith tells us that we are saints. It reveals our Lord Jesus Christ who has redeemed us. Our redemption is about God and His redeeming purposes. Here is a summary of some aspects of the purposes of God in redeeming His people. It is what Jesus Christ has done for us in His death and resurrection. So the faith we believe is about the gospel, the good news of our savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

It tells us that His purpose in our salvation is to reconcile us, to bring us back to God. This deals with our alienation and hostility against God. We are brought back to God. We are reconciled because Jesus satisfied all that God demanded. Since He has been satisfied, we can be brought back to God.

It tells us that His purpose in our salvation is to sanctify us, to make us holy. We were sinners, unholy, unrighteous in our nature and in our whole being. But God's saving purpose is to conform us to His own character and virtue. His purpose to change us, first our standing with Him and in our inward character. He has erased our bad record, from beginning to end. He has given us a new heart. Now in this sinful world we deal with the remnants of sin in our bodies, in our flesh. But I declare to you that God has made us and is making us holy because He has set us apart from our sin and sins and has set us apart unto Himself. He has made us holy. He is making us holy.

It tells us that His purpose in our salvation is present us blameless before God. One day we will be holy and blameless before Him. Until then we are living in struggle, in the interaction between this world and world to come. Our salvation will affect our minds, emotions, our thoughts and our desires. We may still struggle with disease, hardships, pain, suffering - in fact, it through these things that the transforming work of God is being done.

Therefore, we confess, we believe that we are now a community of saints, of saved and sanctified people. We are no longer sinners; we are now saints. Yes, we still sin. But we do so contrary to who we are, not because of who we are. As God's redeemed people we are to experience and express the holiness of God as the people of God.

To deny any facet of Biblical redemption is to destroy the church. Remember, the church is the sum total of all God's redeemed people. There is both an individual and a corporate aspect of our redemption. But Jesus has died and been raised for His people, for us. So each one of us is saved and all of us are saved, and only God's people are saved.

That Requires your Steadfastness (v. 23)

The gospel faith tells us that we must and we will persevere in believing and submitting to God. We are warned what that we must persevere. Those warnings cause us to persevere. Those who do not remain steadfast and faithful in the faith were never a part of the people of God. You will remain steadfast and faithful if you are the redeemed people of God.

So, we are commanded to *keep on believing and bowing to God*. Those who have been redeemed will *keep on believing and bowing to God*. There are those who are not redeemed but who may profess faith. Eventually their faith will be shown to be false. We are *not* saying that those who are saved can lose their salvation. But we believe that God's redeemed people will continue to place their trust and hope in the gospel.

That Fills our Sermons (v. 23)

The gospel faith was proclaimed in all the world in Paul's day. We are to continue to proclaim the gospel and the faith in all the world in our day. We begin with our preaching here among this community of people. We take and send that preaching into all the world. Your giving and praying makes it possible. So the gospel proclamation not only creates and sustains as the people of God, it is what we as the people of God proclaim.

This is primarily what the church is about. It is about the proclamation of the gospel faith. It proclaims God's redemption of His people through Jesus Christ. It proclaims that God is making His people holy. Anything else is at best, subordinate and at worst, suborning.

That Frames our Service (v. 23)

...the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

The faith is what we serve in. We are serving the Lord. We are serving one another. But Paul says that the gospel proclaimed in all the world was what he was a servant of. The word “minister” here does not mean a pastor. It simply means, a bond-slave, a servant. All of our service under the Lord and for one another is as a servant of the gospel. This gospel bond holds us together as a people, as a community. We serve one another in the gospel.

God has not sent us into the world to transform the world. God has sent us into the world to proclaim the gospel. We preach the faith. We proclaim it to the lost. We preach and apply it to believers. This does not mean we are only evangelizing in preaching. We are edified, challenged, exhorted and comforted by the principles, patterns and promises of the gospel.

This bond together in the gospel means that we will care for one another. We will take care of the orphan and the widow. We will provide when financial hardships come. We will see peace and justice in our relationships in the church. There are privileges in belonging. As a community our engagement with the world is a gospel based, gospel proclaiming one.

There are many substitutes that vie for our time and money. Social justice, feed the poor, change the government... any of these that are not gospel centric are a distraction and may be a danger. Through the gospel faith we are a transformed church community joined by the Spirit to all other transformed people and churches. So in this carnal, corrupt, condemned world there is a growing gospel people who live out the faith for the glory of God.

The Faith to Strive For

Philippians 1:27-30

At the center of what we believe are the truths of the Gospel...

²⁷ Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸ and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. ²⁹ For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, ³⁰ engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Through a Worthy Life (v. 27)

We are bound together to live a lifestyle that measures up to the gospel. This means we live in holy wisdom and liberty by grace, not by law. Legalism is not a life worthy of the gospel. Holy freedom is. So we seek to obey Christ in all the commands of the New Testament. And we welcome one another in our differences. We promote our gospel liberty. We live the grace life together. That common belief binds us together.

Brothers and sisters, I travel enough to see the dreadful effects of denying liberty and holding to law. Yes, being legalistic can be its own bond. But it only creates a community of people *who mostly alike*. The lifestyle of grace and gospel binds together people who are

different and diverse. So the church community gathered here on earth more and more looks like the people of God gathered in heaven.

By a United Stand (v. 27)

Paul then is thrilled to see the church standing united and firm in the faith of the gospel and the life of grace. This is something God does. He makes us one and unites us in the faith of the gospel. But we also are to maintain that united stand.

Why is a united stand needed? Because there are many lies, errors and heresies that would destroy the faith. Because there are *opponents*. They may try to imbalance the gospel so that people go downslope from the high road of the gospel. They may try to reword the faith so that it is no longer about the Christ and the gospel. They may try to replace the faith with elements that are foreign to the truth of the gospel. They may try to turn THE FAITH into just a faith. They may ignore the faith as though it is not real and make the Christian life and community about other things than Christ and the gospel.

With an Unmoved Courage (v. 28)

So we need to be a church, a Christian community who stands in the truth and faces the opponents with an unmoved courage. Frankly, now for us here in our place and time, this is not hard. We may be a little embarrassed... We may be subject to ridicule... We may be dismissed. But we have not had to stand as a community of faith and say with courage, "This is true. This is what we believe. This how we live. It does not matter what the world says. It does not matter whether it is politically or socially incorrect but we will continue to proclaim what the Bible says."

In an Accepted Suffering (v. 29-30)

So standing as one for the faith of the gospel may well bring us suffering.

²⁹ For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, ³⁰ engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

God has granted to us the faith that we believe, that we live out, that we stand united for. In this we rise up with confidence and courage. But God has also ordained that we should suffer for His sake. These two things are connected. We will suffer because we believe. It is my prayer and my hope that when that day comes, this gathered community of God's people will stand and will suffer well.

Reflect and Respond

We are committed to the faith, the truths of the Word of God.

At the center of what we believe is the Apostolic deposit of truth and pattern of sound words in the Scriptures.

At the center of what we believe is our hope in the Gospel and personal call to continue to hold fast to the faith.

At the center of what we believe are the truths of the Gospel...

We are committed to building the church on the teaching of the Word of God.

Proclaiming and preaching the Word is how God creates His church.

Teaching and preaching the Word is how we build community.

Learning and living the Word is at the heart of community life.

May the faith of the gospel bind us together as the people of God.