

FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE IN THE BELOVED SON

Studies in Colossians

Study 10

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Faith and hope in the context of love are the foundations for all that Paul expounds in his letter to the Colossians . . . And are the essence of our existence as human beings. What we hope in shapes our lives and is the substance of our faith, and what we *believe in* informs and empowers our actions, particularly where there is real hope for real faith. Sure faith and hope are the fruit of love which in turn produces fruit of a like kind!

THE SURENESS OF FAITH in the Beloved Son

Faith according to the Scriptural model is not a *leap* of any kind, let alone into the darkness, but faith in someone or something that you are sure is trustworthy and faithful. *You trust the chair you are sitting on because it won't let you down. But, you probably wouldn't trust a politician. Unfortunately politicians often find themselves in the unenviable position of being forced or fooled into making promises that they have no control or authority over—not if they want to stay 'in power', unlike the Son of God whose 'power' is not subject to the whims of Man, rather his authority comes from the highest source—God the Father.*

What is faith? Paul writes to the Colossian church:

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints—5 the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel 6 that has come to you (Col.1:3-6a).

The writer to the Hebrews says: '*Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see*' (Heb. 11:1). Faith is grounded totally upon the revelation of God in Christ and according to Paul, this revelation comes through the preaching of the Gospel and is for faith:

Rom.10:17 . . . Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ (NIV).

'*The word of Christ*', and not *about* Christ. Preaching is that of the living and present Lord Jesus who bears witness through a messenger. The 'true word' of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is Jesus himself meeting us and speaking to us, in order that faith might be more than afforded to us, but actually to evoke faith in us through God's grace and truth in the beloved Son.

All over the world, says Paul, this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth (Col. 1:6b).

It is the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus the beloved Son of God, who suffered the shame of the cross for the glory that was set before him (Heb. 12:2), in order to manifest the love of God by its almighty reconciling power. So that **all** the saints (Jew, Gentile, slave and free etc.) might participate in a new humanity (Eph. 2), a community that reflects the very nature of God as they have loving fellowship within the Triune Godhead and are indeed the family of God. **All** are included or reconciled

by faith alone, therefore none are excluded on any other grounds than unbelief in the grace of God, **Col. 1:21–23** (a good gospel).

Paul writes to the Colossians as '*faith-full*' *brothers* (Col. 1:2), so that their *faith-fullness* to each other is in the context of God's faithfulness to them. God's faithfulness is exemplified through the completed work of **salvation** in the cross and is possible only because of the *fullness of Christ*, his full Deity and humanity in whom they have believed, therefore they should be sure of God's faithfulness and in Him have their faith (**1 Peter 1:3–5**).

HOPE AND SUFFERING . . . in the Beloved Son

Our present life is largely characterised by suffering. It seems unavoidable to most and to Christians a necessity! (Rom. 8:17), but surely suffering is a deterrent to faith, hope and love?

In love, God has both entered into the world of sinful and rebellious humanity, who are hopelessly enslaved in sin because of guilt and he has made our response of faithful obedience in the *beloved Son* that we should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). Jesus was vindicated as the beloved Son by his resurrection from the dead (1 Tim. 3:16) and God has done this so that all who are of the *faith* might live in *hope* through him—This hope is apparently to take place not merely despite our present sufferings, but because of them. Suffering makes our sure faith more hopeful, producing perseverance and character says Rom. 5:3–5—*a hopeful person in all circumstances is a great person to have around, they have the uncanny knack of doing amazing things with very little!*

Paul's hope certainly led him to rejoice in his sufferings as he participated fully in the beloved Son: in **Col. 1:24–27**, he said:

Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. 25 I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness—26 the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. 27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

His suffering in this case was his struggle to make known 'the hope of glory' to the Colossians in all its fullness (and he continued to suffer for their sake—Col. 2:1–3).

Some other good reasons for suffering

Heb. 12:1–11 sheds some light on suffering as discipline—Keep in mind that the Hebrews were being tempted to abandon their faith in the gospel. The *sin* mentioned is unbelief in the sufficiency of Christ: **Read**.

If we were honest we would have to say, 'who then doesn't need discipline?' (not because of apostasy). Probably we should understand God's discipline as coming in the many forms, *suffering* being but one form and for the purpose of *correction, training* and *teaching*. This kind of discipline helps to keep the sinful nature in check, it causes us to find our sure 'Rock' of hope and security in order to *produce a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it* (v. 11b). If nothing else suffering keeps us humble and dependent upon our gracious Father! All of this takes place within the security of God's covenant in the beloved Son. This is the way that Paul addresses the Colossian church, '*Grace and peace to you from God our Father*' **Col. 1:2b** based solely upon their faith in Jesus. (Also, John 15:1–17, *I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*)

Or, Rom. 8 informs us that our present suffering and that of the whole creation is *in hope*—like a woman in labour (read **Rom. 8:18–25**).

As we wait we participate in the *birth pangs* of creation in the present age and we wait for the glorious liberation of humanity as children of God in the beloved Son.

Thus in both cases, whether as *discipline* or *birth pangs*, suffering is cause for faith in hope of what is being achieved by God in the reconciling and renewing work of the beloved Son that was concealed in his suffering, and the glory that *will be revealed in us—is the glorious freedom of the children of God!* The goal of faith and hope comes through suffering and frustration as the old creation and humanity is put off to make room for the new—the completion of the cross.

Because we know that we are not yet as we should be, suffering as discipline achieves something miraculous in us, it produces *holiness* of character says Paul (Heb. 12:10), the character of Christ and of God. We are being trained and fitted for our eternal destiny, as the '*Spirit groans inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies*' (Rom. 8:23)—the hope of glory.

THE ACTION OF LOVE . . . in the Beloved Son

Love is, of course, always seen in the action of one person or group towards another without thought of cost or repayment. Love is not subject to the response of another, but seeks the *good* of another out of *one's own goodness*, i.e. from the fullness of 'God who is good'. He is *good* to us in the fullness of His love in Christ. Therefore, '*goodness*' or '*love*' is not merely static observation of a person's appearance, but of the action of that person in relationship with others. To claim that 'I am good' would not be to point to myself, but to the action of my goodness. That is why 'God alone is good' as Jesus said pointing to the source of his love (Mark 10:17–19), and why the Father says of the Son, 'this is my beloved Son in him I am well pleased'. He was revealing the entirety of His goodness by pointing to the Son! God's '*goodness*', His eternal nature as Father, Creator and King is always revealed through the work and person of Jesus the preeminent Word and Son of God.

He is . . . (Col. 1:15–18):

- The image of the invisible God
- The first born over all creation
- For by him all things were created
- All things were created by him and for him
- He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.
- He is the head of the body, the church; [because] he is the beginning and the first born from among the dead (so that even in death he has the supremacy—nothing is outside the dominion and power of Jesus—to the glory of the 'Goodness' of God the Father!).

Therefore it is in this Jesus, the Beloved Son, that our faith, hope and love are perfected. Firstly, his perfect love for God and secondly in his love for us and the completion of this love is that we love one another (1 John 4:11ff.).

Really, our love is 'in' God's love action for us in Christ, through whom He (the Father) has cancelled our debt, because in him 'we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins' (Col. 1:14) and he has raised us up with him (*see Col. 3:1–4!*) The pouring of the Father's love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5) is not merely a feeling of love, but the *conviction* of love in what God has done for us in Christ by bringing about our justification and reconciliation (*see Col. 1:19–23*).

It is the action of the Father's love in reconciling all things to Himself that 'faith and hope in love' become inseparable from one another and inseparable from our lives in union with Christ; never separate and never not shining forth the reality of our lives in Christ however much we might suffering (1 Cor. 13:13).

Even if our faith and hope are imperfect of themselves, '*because we do not yet see fully—but only dimly as in a mirror*' (1 Cor. 13:8ff.), nonetheless the power of these three at work in our lives is never to our detriment because of the '*grace in which we stand*' (Rom. 5:1–2). That is they always work positively in our lives—because we dwell in grace—God's full and unmerited love for us in the fullness of the beloved Son is working in us faith, hope and love by the Holy Spirit! A paraphrase of **John 16:7–15** tells us that, *all that belongs to the Father is given to the Son who gives it to us*—the 'all' demonstrates no restrictions as in full access to the Father and must be primarily relational love rather than possessions. **God has made us beloved sons in the Beloved Son by grace—a gift—that is what I am trying to say, we are face to face with the Father in the Son, we are as Christ is!** (3:1–4)

Note however that our relationships must always take place within the realm of the physical—therefore, our physical bodies are important to our relational inheritance in Christ who is a man forever. *To be a human being, is to have a body and a body that has been prepared for love action as God's children—it is our sanctified vehicle for all of our acts of love!* (not so with Gnosticism?)

CONCLUSION

Thus the source of our *faith*—the Gospel of the grace of God—is the power of sure *hope* that '*springs*' forth in *love* and holiness affecting our spiritual and bodily living. This is spelled out for us in Col. 3:5ff.—and is due to the fact that some actions no longer fit with the life of love lived in Christ, but other actions do (Col. 2:20–23; 3:18–24)! We are to reject those things that are now not of our 'nature' or that of the kingdom of the beloved Son's, as those who are '*hidden with Christ in God*' (Read **Col. 3:5–12**):

3:5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

And do those things *that are fitting in the Lord* (Read **Col. 3:12–4:6**).

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

- The Apostle Paul writes in Galatians 2:20* *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

This effectively means that 'we the sinner have died' and that the life of the Son is at work in us, 'powering us' *by the knowledge that God has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light* (Col. 1:9–12).

The Gospel therefore, not only affords us peace through justification, but the joy of the obedience of faith. Which is love, with and in our physical bodies (strength) as well as our hearts and minds even now as we are being conformed to the image of God as his children in Christ (secure in the Beloved Son).