

**Grace Evangelical Church
Pastor Paul R. Bawden
Sunday, June 1, 2008
Communion Sunday
"Is Knowing Christ Just A Psychological Experience?"
Colossians 1:1-6**

The popular thinking in our day stands in direct opposition to the verses in our text in Colossians 1.

What is the popular thinking in our day?

Any belief is as good as another. You can believe what you want and I can believe what I want, and each of us has truth. Yes, my behavior is my own business, I can live my life the way I want to. This all means that one can believe in Jesus as one's Savior and that is okay for that individual, but another person's experience is just as valid as that. Life is based upon how I feel and how I want to interpret life.

Now our text says just the opposite.

Note again what Paul wrote to the Colossian believers in Jesus Christ.

'We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel, which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth.'

As in some of his other letters, Paul writes about three things in these verses.

**The Colossians faith in Christ Jesus.
The Colossians love for all the saints.
The Colossians hope laid up in heaven for them.**

Faith, love, and hope, Paul's trilogy, and as Paul writes in I Corinthians 13 - - now abides faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of these is love.

Nice words, faith, love, hope. Faith is used by political candidates today, trying to appear as a person of faith so people who have some idea of what faith may vote for them. Love is talked about by those who want to change what marriage is all about. Hope is now a popular word in political speeches as well.

But do the words, faith, love, and hope mean anything?

Are they just words that can be used by anyone to describe how they feel about life, to describe some sort of a psychological experience that you and I may have with Christ, or who someone else may have with some other belief or idea of man.

The example has been given of the man who comes into the room with a fried egg hanging from his ear and says that this really turns me on, this is the real thing, it makes me feel so good, I want to love everyone, and it gives me great hope.

We smile at such an example, but it demonstrates how far afield one can get with one's feelings if a person relies upon himself or herself in trying to discover what life is all about.

So, here is the question today?

Is one's experience with Jesus Christ any different from any other experience that a person may have? Is it just a psychological experience, based on one's feelings, as other experiences and ideas of men tend to be?

The answer is that the experience with Jesus Christ is entirely different from any other experience that a person may have on planet earth. And then we must ask, "WHY?"

Note again our text in Colossians 1.

1. One's experience with Christ is based upon the unchanging word of God (That involves faith) – Colossians 1:4a

Note what Paul says, "in the word of truth, the gospel." (Colossians 1:5). In Colossians 1:6, Paul uses the words, "The grace of God in truth."

(1) Truth is ultimate objective unchanging reality, the written word of God.

- That's why Jesus said in John 17:17 in His high priestly prayer, "Sanctify them with your truth, for your word is truth."
- That's why Peter, quoting from Isaiah 40:6, pens that "All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers and the flower falls off, But the word of the LORD endures forever."
- We have had some beautiful tulips this year in our rock garden behind our house. They are almost gone now. Their season is over. The season of God's word is never over. The word of God abides forever, meaning it is eternal, contemporary for all time.
- And faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

That's why in this series, "Why Do We Believe What We Believe?" (which we will conclude today) that we started with the validity of the Word of God. If it isn't true and reliable, we have no lasting foundation for our lives.

It's why the Grace Statement Of Faith has as its first statement adherence to the Old and New Testaments as being the Word of God without error in the original writings while being sufficient and efficient for faith and practice.

(2) Truth is the eternal gospel brought by the living Word, Jesus Christ.

The gospel from I Corinthians 15:1-8 is that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve and to 500 brethren at once – meaning that there was no doubt that the Christ who died and was buried rose bodily from the grave.

Here, Paul reminds the Colossian believers and us today, that it is Christ's death for us to pay the penalty for our sin, His burial, and bodily resurrection that provide for the one who accepts Christ as personal Savior an experience that is entirely different from any other experience available today among men.

It is the experience of being born from above, of being born again by the Spirit of God by believing the gospel of Jesus Christ. It has been called conversion. It has been called repentance.

When a person believes the gospel, he is supernaturally changed by the power of the Holy Spirit. He receives the new life of God, and is taken out of the kingdom of darkness and placed in the kingdom of His Son. Paul told the Corinthians in his second letter, that the believer in **Christ is a new creation**, the old things have passed away and the new has come.

It's only the death, burial, and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ that provide the believer in Him the life changing experience that lasts forever. Only Christ can do that!!

(3) Truth in God's Word gives the believer in Christ assurance that he is Christ's forever.

- Jesus said that no one can pluck a follower of His out of His hand (**John 10:28**).
- John wrote these words in **I John 5:11-13** – "And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life."
- Paul told **Timothy 1:12**, "For I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day."

The believer in Christ is given the assurance in his or her heart by the Word of God that he or she belongs to the Lord forever. In fact, through the Word of God the Spirit of God living in the believer's life gives him the reassurance that he belongs to the Lord forever (Romans 8:16).

For the experience with Christ, that is unique above all other experiences, which are here today and gone tomorrow, an individual must by faith believe the gospel.

Faith to be real and lasting must have the right and lasting object.

Only Jesus Christ has proven through His death, burial and bodily resurrection that He is the only lasting object for our faith.

J.G. Machen has said, "The more we know of God, the more unreservedly we will trust Him; the greater our progress in theology, the simpler and more childlike will be our faith."

2. One's experience with Christ is a living and lasting relationship regardless of how the believer may feel (that involves love) – Colossians 1:4b.

Paul penned to the Colossians, **"and your love which you have for all the saints."**

This is agape love, Calvary love, love Christ demonstrated for us as He suffered awfully before His crucifixion, and was made sin for us on the old rugged cross. It is sacrificial, unconditional, forgiving, holy love.

It's the love that Christ had for us to give His life in our place to satisfy the righteous demands of the holy God, pay the penalty for our sin which is death, and then to conquer the grave to give us the opportunity to no longer be the enemies of God but His friends.

"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His son to be the propitiation (satisfaction) for our sins" (I John 4:10).

- (1) **God (the biblical God) is the source of lasting love.** – But God commends His love toward us (Romans 5:8).
- (2) **God's Lasting Love is demonstrated ultimately** to us in Christ's death, burial, and bodily resurrection for us - while we were yet sinners Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).
- (3) **God's Lasting love is eternally committed** to the believer regardless of what he or she is experiencing and how he or she responds at times (Romans 8:38-39). Nothing or no one can separate the believer from God's love.

That is a reminder that each believer needs. For when we are down emotionally, when we are experiencing physical challenges, when we are experiencing spiritual challenges, when we are experiencing family challenges, when we are experiencing challenges at school and at work, whatever our circumstances God loves the believer because He is committed to each follower of His. Yes, even in death, God loves the individuals. Look at Christ and His sympathy with Mary and Martha at the passing of Lazarus. Psalm 23 tells us that even though I walk through the shadow of death I will fear no evil for You (The LORD) are with me.

No matter what we are going through, no matter how we feel, God loves us with an everlasting love. He is totally committed to us. That is God's kind of love

- (4) **God's lasting love is given to the believer in Christ** (Romans 5:5).

"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."

What a thought is that!! God gives us His nature when we accept Christ as personal Savior, and that nature includes His lasting love – Sacrificial, unconditional, and forgiving love." Yes Christ lives in the believer (Colossians 1:27).

- (5) **God's lasting love is to be shown to others – the evidence of knowing Christ personally.**

"the love which you have for all the saints" (Colossians 1:4b) "bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also" (Colossians 1:6).

Acceptance, respect, encouragement, no partiality, support, commitment, forgiveness, praying for one another, serving one another. All words that describe the love the Colossian believers had for one another.

This love is not based upon one's feelings, or some kind of psychological experience. It is love that wills to be committed to another person sacrificially and unconditionally and to seek the highest good in that person.

The world's love is completely opposite of this. This letter I'm told was sent to Jimmy. "Dearest Jimmy, No words could ever express the great unhappiness I've felt since breaking our engagement. Please say you'll take me back. No one could ever take your place in my heart, so please forgive me. I love you, I love you! Yours forever, Marie. P.S. And congratulations on winning the state lottery.

Obviously this is not God's kind of love. God's love is an eternal commitment. It is not based upon His feelings. That's how God is committed to us as followers of Jesus Christ – an eternal unconditional commitment.

May we demonstrate that kind of love to others individually, in our families, in our church family, and to others that we are friends with in Christ, while showing Christ's love to those who know not the Savior personally. Christ-likeness is the evidence that we have experienced the new birth in Jesus Christ through faith in Him.

3. One's experience with Christ always has a future for time and eternity (that involves hope) – Colossians 1:5 – "because of the hope laid up for you in heaven."

The hope in the Scripture is not the kind of hope politicians talk about today, which has a lot of wind but little substance, and if there is anything to it, it is based upon man's limited thinking.

Rather hope in the Bible is the anticipation, the expectation, the confidence, that something good is going to take place, because that hope is based upon the bodily resurrected and ascended Christ who has paid the penalty for our sin and conquered the grave to prove it.

That is why Peter calls it a **living hope** that is based upon the bodily resurrected Christ, for Christ is HOPE itself. **"Christ in you, the HOPE of glory" (Colossians 1:27).**

This means.. . .

(1) There is hope in life's many and varied challenges.

Biblical hope is the kind of stuff that encourages us in our trials and struggles in life, to know that regardless of how tough it may be, Christ is there giving us hope – Romans 5: 3-5.

"And we exult in hope of the glory of God, and not only this, but we exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance proven character, and proven character, hope, 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."

God's hope that He gives us in Christ are the two book ends in these verses – to encourage us in our life challenges that God is there giving us hope to have confidence in Him that something good is going to happen.

(2) There is hope that provides us the impetus to live pure lives.

Paul told Titus –"For the grace of God has appeared, bring salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in this present age, looking for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:11-13).

John in I John 3:2-3 – "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him, purifies himself, just as he is pure."

The any moment return of Christ in the air for us should cause each believer to live with daily anticipation of His return, resulting in a life of purity in thought, attitude, word, and action - really seeking in the Holy Spirit's power to act like Jesus Christ.

So I need to confess my attitude of lack of faith, my attitude of unbelief, of having a whining attitude at time. My thoughts that don't please the Lord. My lethargy in prayer and witness. Knowing Christ could return today should give each believer a renewed impetus to think, speak, and act as Christ would.

(3) There is hope beyond this life and for all eternity.

I Thessalonians 4:13ff – “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

What a hope the Lord gives us. He could return any time, resurrect believers who have died in Him, and take them and us who are alive with Himself forever.

That hope is not based upon some psychological experience but upon the unchanging eternal Word of God which tells us of the gospel of Jesus Christ who provides us through faith in Him His eternal forgiveness, life, assurance, love and hope.

Our relationship with Jesus Christ is not based upon how we feel, for our feelings fluctuate from day to day and experience to experience.

Our faith is based upon the Word of God which is forever settled in heaven and our faith is based on the living historical God-man, Jesus Christ, and His death, burial, and bodily resurrection, yes His eternal gospel!!!

The Song Writers summarize our text today with these words.

My faith has found a resting place, not in device or creed.
I trust the ever living One His wounds for me shall plead.

Enough for me that Jesus saves, this ends my fear and doubt.
A sinful soul I come to Him, He'll never cast me out.

My heart is leaning on the Word, the written Word of God.
Salvation by my Savior's Name, salvation thru His blood.
My great Physician heals the sick, the lost he came to save;
For me His precious blood he shed, for me His life He gave.

I need no other argument, I need no other plea;
It is enough that Jesus died, and that he died for me.

Yes,

The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell.
It goes beyond the highest star and reaches to the lowest hell.
The guilty pair bowed down with care, God gave His Son to win.
He erring child He reconciled and pardoned from his sin.

When years of time shall pass away and earthly thrones and kingdoms fall.
When men, who here refuse to pray, on rocks and hill and mountains call.

God's love so sure shall still endure, all measureless and strong;
Redeeming grace to Adam's race, the saints and angels' song.

O love of God, so rich and pure! How measureless and strong!
It shall forever more endure, the saints and angels song.

Then,

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name.

When darkness veils His lovely face, I rest on His unchanging grace.
In every high and stormy gale, my anchor holds within the veil.

His oath His covenant, His blood, support me in the whelming flood.
When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay.

When He shall come with trumpet sound, O may I then in Him be found.
Dressed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne.

On Christ the Solid Rock, I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand.

And everyone said, Amen. Praise the Lord!!