

Three Pillars of Christianity

1 Cor. 13:11-13

October 14, 2018

When my children were young we played a game when we were in the car traveling - Donna or I would come up with a number - and each person in the car would have to come up with something in the Bible (a Story / an Event / a Truth) that was associated with that number.

For example, the number might be 40 - Can you think of a few things in the Bible referencing the number 40:

- Rain for 40 days and 40 nights during the flood of Noah
- Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebecca
- Children of Israel ate manna for 40 years
- Moses was 40 days and 40 nights on the mountain when God gave him the 10 Commandments
- 12 spies spent 40 days spying out the land of Israel
- Children of Israel spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness
- Saul, David, and Solomon all reigned over Israel for 40 years
- For 40 days Jonah preached in Nineveh
- Jesus was 40 days in the wilderness when He was tempted by Satan

Well, I guess you can see how the game was played - We would work our way around the car with each person taking a turn - The fun was to see who could stay in the longest! - If you couldn't come up with something, you were out! - Parents, this a great game to play with your kids to encourage them to learn their Bibles!

Another popular number was the number 3 - Already I can see some of you quickly thinking of some of the important 3's in the Bible - This morning we are going to take a look at one of those important Trios - This one is found in the 1 Cor. 13 - We will begin reading in verse 11.

1Co 13:11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face.

**Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.
And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these
is love.**

Here Paul identifies **3 foundational pillars of the Christian life: Faith, Hope, and Love** - They stand as giant building blocks upon which every Christian builds their life - They are foundational and necessary - For no believer in Jesus Christ can be all that God desires them to be without a strong Faith - without an encouraging Hope - and without sacrificial Love.

A table cannot stand without at least 3 legs - Take away any one of the legs and the table will tip and fall - So it is with the Christian Walk - if you take away any of these 3 pillars, our walk suffers and sometimes collapses!

Each one - faith, hope, and love - establish a CHARACTER TRAIT in our life that is indispensable - Take away any of them and we ARE NOT GOING to maintain a proper walk with God.

You take one away and OUR OUTLOOK gets out of focus - Soon we will begin to misrepresent our Christian faith - Our walk will become UNBALANCED IN A DIRECTION that is not pleasing to God - Our attitude will MOVE TO AN EXTREME that does not represent Jesus to this world.

This morning I want us to examine what faith, hope, and love add to our lives in the way of **ATTITUDE AND OUTLOOK** - I also want us to examine the mistakes we make when we leave ONE BUILDING BLOCK OUT out and become MORE EXTREME in another area.

1Co 13:11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

To first ESTABLISH OUR CONTEXT, Paul has been talking about Spiritual Gifts - He has been instructing the Corinthians on how to exercise the gifts properly - especially the vocal gifts of Prophecy and Tongues - He is laying down SOME RULES AND SOME BOUNDARIES for the use of these vocal gifts in the public church service.

Then, suddenly in Chapter 13, Paul interrupts his thoughts to remind the Corinthians of the most important factor of their use - **Everything in the Christian life, including the exercise of God's supernatural gifts, must be done in love!**

Without Love, even the most powerful sacrifice - even the most impressive exercise of faith - even the most amazing spiritual revelation - is USELESS AND MEANINGLESS if it is done without love!

Love is the heart of the Christian Faith - Love is part of who God is - God's heart is full of love and compassion - **Everything He does is motivated and driven by love!**

Paul then defines love in verses 4-7 - He describes what love is - and he describes what love is not - Why don't we read it just as a reminder of the incredible beauty of love: **Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.**

Love is the one thing in this life that will last for eternity - the need for spiritual gifts will end when Jesus returns - Love will never end and it will never fail.

Next, Paul makes a comparison - He compares his own life as a child maturing into a man, to that of us as earthbound, corruptible humans becoming incorruptible people in Eternity - Just as Paul matured and put away childish things, we also will one day be changed into Heavenly beings - suited for eternity!

At that time, we will no longer need temporary gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge - In that day, those will be as Childish things! - We will be transformed into something FIT FOR ETERNITY - something that will resemble our Lord Jesus - At that time, we will know as we are known!

This doesn't mean we will be OMNISCIENT LIKE GOD - but it does imply that we will be much different in our knowledge and understanding than we are in this life!

It will be an incredible day when we will see Jesus face to face - The dimness with which we see Him now will be cleared up - We will behold our Lord in all His Glory - What a day that will be!

But, in the meantime, Paul reminds us that we need to stay focused on three important things while we are here on this earth - He tells us to abide in these things: Faith, Hope, and Love!

The word abide means to “stay put” - it means we are to **“hang out with”**, or **“stay close to”** faith, hope, and love - Just as we are to abide with Jesus - keep ourselves right where He is! - we are also to keep ourselves close to faith, hope, and love!

To abide means I don't have to strive! - If I am going to abide on this stage, I am just going to stay right here - I don't have to work to stay here - I just have to refuse to leave - As long as I don't leave this stage, I will be abiding here!

Think of it this way - Jesus and His 3 companions, faith, Hope and love, are all right here together on this stage - If I want to stay close to them as well, I don't have to work hard at it - All I have to do is NOT LEAVE HERE - I just can't walk down these stairs and out those doors!

Too many times that is exactly what we do - We leave where Jesus is to chase after something else that we think will make us HAPPY AND CONTENT - We run out chasing more money - or a better job - or a different spouse - or a more exciting experience - You name it - and we will run after it!

All the time, Jesus and His companions, faith, hope, and love are right here - But we decided we needed something else - We believed the lie that there is something better out there - something that will make us happier - something that will make us more powerful - or more popular - something that will make us more secure.

So, we chase after it and LEAVE THE BEST PLACE BEHIND - the place of forgiveness - of contentment - of love - of peace - of rest - We just walk out that door pursuing something a lesser thing!

What is the thing that your heart wandering after? - Has it lived up to its billing? - Has it fulfilled you as promised? - Probably Not!

And WHAT HAVE YOU SACRIFICED in your pursuit of it? - Have you left behind YOUR LORD? - Have you left behind faith, hope, and love - thinking you can replace them with something better?

You can't be a Christian and leave behind Christ? - We must stay with Jesus! - He is the ONLY SAVIOR! - And TO PLEASE HIM, we will also need to abide in Faith, Hope, and Love.

So, with the remainder of our time, let's examine what Faith, Hope, and Love each individually bring to my life - What do they add to my life? - What impact do they have on me? - What influence do they have on the way I see life and interact with others?

Let's begin with Faith - Faith is defined for us in the Book of Hebrews 11:1 - **“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”** Simply put **Faith is the conviction that something is truth!**

Faith LOOKS BACK - It looks back on the life, work and sacrifice of Jesus - It is having belief and confidence that HIS SACRIFICE has given me a right standing before God - Not because I did something to be right - but simply because Jesus did enough to make me righteous!

Rom 3:28 says, Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

There is NOTHING I COULD DO that could make me right before God - God accepts me apart from any good deeds that I could do - I could FIGHT AND STRUGGLE my whole life to keep God's Law, but even with my GREATEST EFFORT, I would not be good enough.

Rom 4:5 But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness - My right standing before God comes WHEN I LOOK BACK on the work of Jesus - and trust what God has said - This is salvation by Grace! - We DON'T EARN IT - God just gives it freely to those who believe His Word.

Have you had the GRACE REVELATION? - I experienced it when I read this verse - I had been a Christian for years - but I felt so much pressure that I had to be good enough for God - This is the verse that set me free to realize I WAS GOOD ENOUGH because of Jesus - Yes, I could believe!

So, how does our faith grow? - **Rom 10:17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.** - My faith grows as my knowledge and understanding of the Bible grows!

Therefore, the person who abides in faith is the person who is STRONG IN GOD'S WORD - He puts a HIGH PRIORITY on learning, understanding and following the Scriptures.

We are to daily look back AT GOD'S PROMISES - We look back at the events of Jesus' life and study His teaching - We are to constantly look back at THE TRUTHS REVEALED all through God's Word.

This is how Faith is built - and how it grows in my life - It becomes THE FIRST PILLAR that supports my life in Christ - Faith is the STARTING POINT of all Spiritual Growth!

But, next is Hope - Just as faith looks backward, HOPE LOOKS FORWARD - **1Jo 3:2 "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."**

All hope is based on THINGS CHANGING & GETTING BETTER in the future - Events happening in the future that are going to be good for me - Here John is looking to the RETURN OF JESUS - the most important hope for all of us!

John's hope is in the promise that when Jesus returns, we will be changed - We will be TRANSFORMED - in a moment - in the twinkling of an eye - **We will become like Him!** - In Paul's words, **"We will know as we are known!"**

This is the ULTIMATE HOPE for every believer - Of course, we have our day to day, moment by moment, hopes - We hope to be financially better off next month - We hope to be in better health next year - We hope to finish school - or we hope to get married one day.

These are all IMPORTANT ASPECTS of hope - but the hope the Bible speaks of is an eternal hope - It is a hope that looks forward to an end of sin - to a time when Jesus REIGNS AND RULES - to a time when we are set free from these bodies of sin and death!

And John says that this hope has AN IMPACT ON OUR LIVES - Notice he says, **“everyone who has this hope in Him (in Jesus) purifies himself, just as He (Jesus) is pure!”** - **Hope has a purifying effect on our lives!**

This hope causes us to look beyond the temporary pleasures of this moment and focus on the eternal - This hope causes us to think about the ETERNAL CONSEQUENCES of my choices - It helps me to think beyond the moment.

This “LOOKING FORWARD” helps us make Godly choices that please Him - rather than MAKING CHOICES that bring me immediate pleasure - I CHOOSE those things that REAP GODLINESS!

Just as faith adds the strength of God’s Word to my life, hope adds the PURITY OF JESUS to my life - It adds an element of MORAL PURITY to my choices - To quote 1 Peter 1:15, **“as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct!”**

It is this PILLAR OF HOPE in my life that helps me to live my life with an ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE - Do you live daily in that hope? - Do you live life looking to that day when Jesus will return? - It is this hope that has a PURIFYING WORK.

The THIRD PILLAR our lives are to be built on is Love - According to Paul, this is the greatest of the three pillars - the reason for this is that LOVE IS the one eternal pillar - It is a very heart of God - Loves flows from His Throne.

Once we get to Heaven there is NO LONGER A NEED for faith or hope - Our faith will be realized - our hope will have come to pass - But the love of God will continue to flow from the very throne of God for all eternity!

What does love bring to our lives - in a word **Compassion!** - It SOFTENS OUR HEARTS towards those around us - especially those around us in need! - It causes us to be willing to SACRIFICE OUR WANTS to meet the needs of others!

Just go through the Gospels and pay attention to the number of times the phrase **“Jesus had compassion”** or **“Jesus was moved with compassion”** occurs - Our Lord was keenly aware of the needs around him - and when He saw a need, His response was almost always compassion - He was moved to help!

Many of us have been CONDITIONED TO IGNORE the needs around us - We assume that if a person has a need, it is SOMEHOW THEIR FAULT - They must have been irresponsible - or SINFUL BEHAVIOR must be to blame for their needy condition!

Jesus never ignored “THE WHY” of the situation - but His response was still compassion towards the person in need - Certainly He could have passed judgement, but He most often chooses LOVE OVER JUDGEMENT - I find, in this way, I am not much like Jesus - too often I choose Judgement over Compassion.

Did Jesus meet every need? - Did He heal every sickness? - NO! - But he seemed ready to meet as many needs as the FATHER LED HIM - He seemed determined to heal as many as He could - Compassion was a STRONG DRIVING FORCE in His life and ministry to others!

I have heard the Compassion defined as **“Love in action!”** - I think this is a GOOD DEFINITION - Our love needs to wear the shoes of Action - Too often we think of LOVE AS A NOUN - or as a feeling - Love needs to be a verb - it needs to be A MOTIVATING FORCE in our lives as believers!

Let's spend the last few minutes of our study today discussing why we need all three of these working in unison in our lives - As I look around the church as a whole today (**and throughout History**), I believe we all tend to live our lives TO SOME DEGREE out of balance.

Most Christians tend to stress one of these pillars often to an extreme - We stand firmly on one, while ONE OR TWO of the others almost disappear from our lives!

Yet, it is the three working in unison that bring a proper balance and Christ-Likeness to my life - When I only focus on one aspect of the Christian life TO THE NEGLECT of the other two, I find myself in a SPIRITUALLY UNHEALTHY PLACE!

For example, many within the church today focus all of their ENERGY AND EFFORT ON LOVE - They believe that love is "THE WAY" we model Jesus - Compassion is the only driving force in their life.

Faith and the love of God's Word can be compromised if the RESULT IS LOVE - Hope, that brings purity, is not important as long as COMPASSION IS SHOWN.

So, we end up with a church that is out in the community and the world attacking every social cause they can find: World hunger, the sex trade, poverty - you name it - it's their cause! - and let me say, ALL OF THESE are legitimate needs.

The only problem is that MANY OF THESE GROUPS have very little need for God's Word - They are fine with the Bible being treated as a BOOK OF FABLES - They would say it is the lessons behind the stories, rather than the truth of the stories, that matter most!

The Word of God becomes a BOOK OF SUGGESTIONS - a Book of WISE SAYINGS - Not the infallible Word of God.

They are also often willing TO COMPROMISE PURITY in the NAME OF UNITY to fight a cause - We find ourselves PARTNERING WITH THE UNGODLY in order to promote an important cause - This was never the case with Jesus!

He was compassionate, but it was always TEMPERED WITH TRUTH AND HONESTY - When sin STOOD IN THE WAY of compassion, Jesus would deal with the sin first - then He would help the sinner - It was NOT HARSH JUDGEMENT - It was LOVING SOMEONE enough to deal with the REAL ISSUE in their life!

All three pillars were working in His life and ministry.

A second set of problems can occur when a person only builds his life on the pillar of hope - They are always looking forward to the RETURN OF CHRIST - They are HEAVENLY MINDED, but they have little concern for this world and its problems.

They know this world is passing away! - They rightly understand that this world is doomed - BUT LACKING COMPASSION for the lost of this world, they put no effort into helping the lost and needy today.

Like those fleeing from a sinking ship, their whole focus is on getting off the ship - In doing so they ignore THE DROWNING PEOPLE around them!

Because they lack a proper knowledge of the Scripture, they have the Hope of Christ, but they can't keep that hope in its proper context - Their LACK OF GROUNDING in their faith causes them to REACH UNBIBLICAL CONCLUSIONS about many things.

These are the folks who are TOSSED TO AND FRO by every new wind of doctrine that flows through the church! - They are EASILY DECEIVED - they are away CHASING THE LATEST FAD that flows across the landscape of the church!

Hope, without compassion and truth, puts us in a dangerous place - Be careful that you don't allow yourself to wander to this extreme.

But what about the people who FOCUS ON FAITH, but lack a proper emphasis on hope and love? - These are those who have a passion for God's Word, but they can quickly take on the attitude of the Pharisees - They love God's Word, but are CRITICAL AND HARSH with people!

They are QUICK TO JUDGE those who are inferior in their UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORD - They take pride in their knowledge - Though they read and study the Scripture, they never INTERNALIZE THE TEACHINGS of the Bible that reveal the heart of God.

Passages like James 1:27, **Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.**

Here James speaks of the compassion and purity of the Father - Two things that are ALWAYS AT THE HEART of the teaching of the Bible! - They can quote this passage, yet they can LACK THE HEART OF IT - they are HEARERS, but NOT DOERS of the Word.

When we lack hope, and the purity that it creates, we can become a person who TALKS A GREAT GAME, but doesn't walk the walk!

We become the person Jesus talked about when He said of the Pharisees in Mat 23:27 **"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.**

Because of our knowledge of the Bible, we know how to look and talk spiritual - but on the inside, we lack the PURITY OF HEART that God desires in His people - Inside we are full of **"dead men's bones and all uncleanness"**!

This is why PAUL EXHORTS US to abide in Faith, Hope, and Love - We have to build our lives on all 3 pillars - We have to AVOID THE TENDENCY to focus on the one that most appeals to us!

If we are NATURALLY COMPASSIONATE & MERCIFUL, we are going to want to build on the pillar of love - It will become our focus and our passion.

If we are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness - and we just have a love and passion for God's Word - we must be careful that we don't latch on to our knowledge and MISS THE APPLICATION of God's truth.

Lastly, if we are those who LONG FOR HEAVEN - who long to be free of this earthbound existence - we must be careful that we don't miss out on the work that must be done here today - That we don't miss the heavenly work that can be done right around us right now on Earth!

To be the man or woman of God that is **“complete, lacking nothing”**, we must abide in faith and have a passion for God’s Word - We must abide in Hope and have a passion for the purity it brings to my life - and we must abide in Love and experience the compassion for others that it creates in my life.

A Love for God’s Word - a love for a PURE HEART - and a love for those around me - This is God’s desire for each one of us!

Let’s Pray.