

The Christian Life: Faith, Hope, and Love

Colossians 1:1-4

I. INTRODUCTION: Paul's Greeting

Good afternoon, church family.

Before we dive into the Word of God together, I want to take a brief moment to express my deep gratitude. I want to thank our pastors for graciously granting me the opportunity to begin preaching every other month. It is a joy and privilege to stand before you. And as we look ahead to this new preaching schedule, I want to explain the direction I want to take us. In each of my upcoming sermons, every other month, I will be going verse-by-verse through the book of Colossians. We are going to walk slowly through this rich, Christ-exalting letter, and let its truths saturate our minds and transform our hearts. Today, we'll begin our journey in Colossians 1:1-4.

When we open our Bibles to the first few verses of Paul's letters, it is incredibly tempting to skip past these lines, and gloss over them. These verses ARE NOT the fine print of a contract, or the opening pleasantries of a modern email that no one cares about. So often in this day and age we rush right past the hellos and just want to get to the point. But the Apostle Paul does not waste any of his words. These opening lines are not polite formalities, like so many assume. Paul lays the deep theological foundations in these opening verses, everything that he's about to say in this epistle is laid on the groundwork of this opening. In the case of this epistle, this opening greeting is so weighty. Colossians 1:1-4 introduces three theological pillars that the entire letter is built upon. Paul is about to address the many philosophies and false teachings that are threatening the church in Colossae, and he's about to unpack the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ, but first, Paul takes the time to talk about the foundations of our faith. He packs more truth in this simple 4-verse greeting than most letters contain in their entirety.

Why does this matter for us today? Because the modern mind has been trained to mentally skip over these salutations, but if you do that with God's Word, you will miss every seed that Paul is planting here! I lament how we live in such a fast-paced culture, our culture is obsessed over efficiency! Everything is efficiency over depth. We skim headings, jump to the bottom line of emails, or worse upload entire articles to AI to have it summarize the information for us! If you bring that same habit to Scripture, you will miss all the riches that God has hidden in His Word. Paul teaches us so many things in these verses, most importantly, before we can talk about what we're supposed to be doing as Christians, we must first understand who we are!

Our world is constantly shifting how it defines identity, but we are not of the world. So to stand against the world and its waves of doctrine, we should hold fast to our anchor,

Christ. How do we do that? Well, our world constantly brainwashes us to define ourselves by our career, our social circles, our wealth, our achievements, but Scripture teaches the most important metric to define yourself by is your union with Christ. If we want to continue to maintain and build a healthy church, if we want to endure as faithful believers in this chaotic world, we can't skip greetings like this. We must sit at the feet of the Apostle and let him recalibrate our thinking to God's Word.

As we look closely at these opening verses, a beautiful pattern emerges. Paul teaches that authentic Christian faith rests on three pillars: trust in Christ, hope in God's future, and a sacrificial love for others. This is the thesis of my sermon. When Paul looks at this young, struggling church, he gives thanks for the evidence of God's grace in their lives. He gives thanks for their faith, their love, and their hope in heaven. These three virtues: faith, hope, and love, are the backbone of every healthy church and individual believer. Faith looks backward to what God has done in Christ. Love looks outward to our brothers and sisters in the present. Hope looks forward to the promised future God is bringing. This triad of virtues gives us a blueprint for how our lives should look today. Let us look together at how Paul builds his foundation.

II. THE APOSTOLIC FOUNDATION: Authority and Humility

As we step into the first verse of Colossians, we are immediately confronted with a greeting that is unfamiliar to the modern mind. He writes, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother". In the ancient world, letters would always begin with the name of the sender. But Paul does far more than just give his name here. Paul identifies himself as "an apostle of Christ Jesus". Let's remind ourselves what the word "Apostle" means, it comes from the Greek word *apostolos*, and according to the Greek-English Lexicon of the NT, it means "one who fulfills the role of being a special messenger... The relationship of an apostle to Jesus Christ... refers to having been commissioned by Christ for a particular task or role." ([Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains](#), V 1, p 541). To the early church, Paul being an apostle meant he spoke as an official emissary of the King, which is honestly the most true description of who Paul is, the emissary of our King.

This claim appears very consistently across his letters, being the apostle establishes his right to speak with divine authority into the lives of these churches. If we compare this pattern to his other writings, we see that Paul opens this way deliberately. Ephesians 1:1-2 opens with identical language, and 1 Corinthians emphasizes the exact same apostolic calling. In 1 Corinthians, Paul directly reminds the believers that his authority comes directly from his encounter with the risen Christ.

What I love though is how Paul tempers his authority with amazing humility. Notice the significance of his next phrase: "by the will of God." Paul did not ask to become an apostle. He didn't ask to meet Jesus, or get blinded for that matter. Paul didn't choose

this, and in this sinful, heart of stone, he never wanted this. But God did. Paul wasn't elected by a vote, he didn't have to campaign for his position. God commissioned him because Christ wanted Paul. I love that so much. No one could ever accuse Paul of being arrogant here, Paul was not puffed up about his position, but he also wasn't shy or uncertain. Paul didn't look at those around him and fear how he might come across, because Christ Jesus is the one who commissioned him! He knew that his calling was God's choice. And everything that follows in this letter comes from God's initiative. Paul is merely an instrument in the Redeemer's hands.

Next, Paul introduces his companion: "and Timothy our brother". Timothy is the co-sender of this epistle, and his inclusion here is very important. Does Paul treat Timothy as a subordinate? Is Timothy basically Paul's secretary? No, Timothy is a brother, an equal of Paul in the ministry. Paul was never alone, and I think that gave these early churches, and ourselves, a great picture to model ourselves after. The apostles and the church leadership worked together, and so should we. Leadership in the body of Christ is meant to be shared, we are meant to be accountable to each other, we are meant to have intimate relationships with one another. These are all things that we've heard taught to us in our 9Marks studies on the church in Sunday school, and we see these truths all throughout Paul's opening.

Finally, we come to Paul's greeting in verse 2: "To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ in Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father". This is Paul's signature opening in nearly all his epistles. I absolutely love this opening, Paul is ingeniously combining the Jewish greeting of "peace" (shalom) with the Christian theology of "grace" (charis). According to the Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible, Shalom means "total well-being, prosperity, and security associated with God's presence among His people." I've elsewhere heard shalom described as a radical peace. When we use the English word peace, we tend to think "peace means there's no conflict". As long as we aren't at war, we're at peace. But that's not what shalom means. Shalom is God's gift, it is a radical peace that can only be found where God is present. Psalm 29:11 says "YHWH will give strength to His people; YHWH will bless His people with shalom." Ps 85:8 says, "Let me hear what the God, YHWH, will speak; For He will speak shalom to His people, to His holy ones; But let them not turn back to folly."

That's what Shalom means, but what about the word Grace that Paul uses. Grace is the Greek word "charis", and it speaks of God's ill-deserved favour poured out on treasonous sinners. By placing these words together, Paul is laying the foundation of a very profound truth: true peace is impossible without grace. You cannot experience the shalom of God until you first receive the grace of God. Furthermore, Paul makes it very clear that all of our spiritual blessings flow from God our Father. To find peace, all these Colossians had to do was come to the Father, peace flows from Him, and that peace is secured for them

through the Lord Jesus Christ. What a great foundation for everything the Colossians, and we, desperately need to hear.

III. THE RECIPIENTS: Identity in Christ

Having established his own authority, Paul now turns to the recipients of his letter. In verse 2, he writes, “To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ in Colossae.” With these few words, Paul teaches us how we ought to define our identity. He addresses us first, primarily, as “saints.” The Greek word here is *hagiois*. Most of us here have heard this before, but for those who may have not, the word saints literally means “consecrated” or “set apart”. To be a saint means that you are God’s. You belong to Him. You have been set apart for His use and glory.

The word saint can be more literally translated as “holy ones.” Why do that translation matter? Because in the Old Testament, the phrase “holy ones” *qadoshim* in the Hebrew, is used in the plural over twenty times, and in almost all instances, it refers to angels. Key passages like Psalm 89 place the *qadoshim*, the Holy Ones, in the assembly in Heaven.

By utilizing *hagiois*, Paul is making a link between Christians and angels. To an OT believer, the phrase “holy one” meant that being belonged to God, but it also meant that these angels, holy ones, were glorified, and able to live in Heaven. We we just read “saints”, we can so easily forget how an OT believer would have read such terms, which separate us modern readers from the original worldview of the readers. Paul is making a massive claim here that we are also God’s holy ones now.

And not once will you ever read Paul saying, “Act more like Christ, become saints.” Paul’s whole theology is that “You are saints, this title has been given to you, you HAVE BEEN set apart, so live like it.” Our actions should flow from our new identity.

Next, Paul calls them “faithful brothers”. The word translated as faithful here actually carries a dual-meaning in the original Greek. It can mean “full of faith”, and it can also mean “reliable”. By using this term, Paul is obviously saying that these believers have already demonstrated that they are in a covenant relationship with Christ. These are doers of the Word, and not hearers only! And yes, Paul is about to address some serious problems and false teachings that are threatening this young church. But before he corrects them, he encourages them that he already sees God’s grace in their lives. They are our family, these are our brothers in Christ.

And perhaps the most essential phrase in this entire greeting are the two words I just said: “in Christ.” This phrase appears all throughout Paul’s epistles, it is the definition of being a Christian. To be a Christian doesn’t mean that you agree with a list of theological propositions, or that you had a one-time emotional spiritual experience where you were born again and went to the altar call. You are a Christian if you have an ongoing, covenantal relationship with Christ. You are a Christian if you are a branch that is grafted

into the true vine; all of life, all our identity is what we receive from our union with Him. Everything that Paul is going to write in this epistle about faith, hope, and love cannot happen with a relationship with Christ. Apart from being “in Christ”, there is no “Christian”, no “Christian life”, and no “Christian church.”

And I love to see the pattern that Paul uses in his epistles. When we compare this greeting with other Pauline greetings, we see Paul addresses the Philippians as “all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi.” In 1 Thessalonians, Paul addresses “the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” I love the duality in all these greetings. These are real people, with real jobs, real struggles, real pagan cultures all around them, in real cities: Colossae, Philippi, and Thessalonica. But, they are all in Christ. We’re all the same. We’re all living in the same world as these, but we’re all not of the world; we’re all in Christ.

This dual citizenship is a tension that all of us have to live with. We all live in cities and towns like Colossae, which means we all live in a broken, pagan world, but we are in Christ first and foremost. If we lose our anchor in Christ, the culture of Colossae will gladly sweep you away into how it wants you to think. But if we remember who we are and whose we are, we can stand against the world. Our identity is settled: we are the holy ones of God, we are the faithful, and we are in Christ.

IV. THE TRIAD OF VIRTUES: Faith, Hope, and Love

When Paul commends the Colossians in verses 3 and 4, he highlights a triad of virtues: faith, hope, and love. This isn’t the only time he talks about this, 1 Cor. 13:13 says, “**But now abide faith, hope, love – these three; but the greatest of these is love.**” This triad appears across multiple epistles, it’s foundational to Paul’s theology. These are all interconnected, and they all define what it looks like to be Christian. Why these three? Because together, they form a complete picture. Faith looks backward to what God has done in Christ. Hope looks forward to God’s promised future. Love looks outward to others in the present.

First, Paul gives thanks because he heard of the Colossians “**faith in Christ Jesus.**” These brothers trusted in Christ. In Galatians, Paul emphasizes that “faith working through love” is what matters. Faith works, faith produces fruit. I love what the author of Hebrews writes in Hebrews 6:10-12, “**For God is not unrighteous so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and continuing to minister to the saints. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not become dull, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.**”

Secondly, faith inevitably bears the fruit of love. Paul commends the Colossians for “**the love which you have for all the saints**”. Love is the ultimate measure of our spiritual maturity, Paul calls it the greatest of these three virtues in 1 Cor. 13:13, which we read

earlier. Love also has great transforming power. Romans 5:5 says “and hope does not put to shame, because the love of God has been poured within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” What an amazing thing, to realize that the love we have is the love of God that has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Do you realize that loving other Christians is not normal? How does that make you feel to realize that your love isn’t normal. A sacrificial, Christlike love is in fact very ABNORMAL. In fact, I’d go so far as to say it’s not natural. It’s supernatural. The supernatural love that we have, is a gift given to us through the Holy Spirit.

Third, this triad end in hope. Now, in two months I’ll be preaching on verses 5-8 of this chapter, and verse 5 talks about hope. But for the sake of sermon, I want to at very least emphasize here that Paul teaches us that biblical hope is not the same as wishful, optimistic thinking. Hebrews summarizes our hope beautifully in Hebrews 10:22-24, “let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.” What an awesome truth, that the object of our hope is eternal and unchangeable. Just a couple minutes ago I quoted from Romans 5:5, but the first five verses of that chapter trace the progression that affliction in our lives produces perseverance, perseverance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. Do you realize, and do you believe, that all the suffering in your life, is there because God is producing hope in you. Suffering gives us hope!

Furthermore, 1 Thessalonians 5:8 says “But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.” Here, we see the triade again, but do you see what hope does to us? Hope is our helmet. The hope of our salvation protects us from despair. Our faith, hope, and love are pieces of armour that sustain us, that keep us alive, through our Christian walk.

How do these three virtues work together? Faith receives Christ; hope anticipates His promises being fulfilled; and love serves His body. Faith is our root; love is the fruit; and hope is our sustenance. As 1 Thessalonians 1:3 notes, Paul remembers their “work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope”. May we all pray for our faith to grow and our love to increase. May we all pray that our suffering and afflictions produce perseverance and hope! And let us rejoice! Because as Ephesians 4:4-5 says, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism”. These virtues of our faith, hope, and love are shared by the whole church. The unity we have in our faith and hope allows us to have a radical unity in love for each other. Together, this triad is what the Christian life looks like.

V. PAUL’S RESPONSE: Thanksgiving and Prayer

As Paul reflects on the faith, hope, and love alive within the Colossians church, his heart begins to overflow in worship to God. In verse 3, his immediate response is: “We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you”. When Paul sees the spiritual fruit in the lives of believers, he doesn’t commend the believers, and he doesn’t praise their personal effort. He instinctively looks past the secondary causes to the primary cause. He thanks God. Even in expressing his thanksgiving, Paul is teaching us a vital theological truth: all of our spiritual growth is the result of God’s work and grace. Before a single Colossians ever thought of seeking the God of Israel, God was at work seeking them. Their faith in Christ and their love for the saints could not have been self-generated, which is why they were evidence of the Father’s grace. Paul’s thanksgiving here ought to strip us of all spiritual pride, it ought to humble us to the ground before the grace of God.

And again, let’s not skip over a single word here. The phrase Paul uses is “praying always for you”. Paul prayed for these Christians habitually, always, all the time. Paul says basically the same thing in 1 Corinthians 1:4-8, where he thanks God for the grace He’s given them, and expresses confidence in verses 7-8, that we are all, “eagerly awaiting the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end”. Paul saw what God was doing then and there in Colossae, and he looked forward to that God will ultimately do when Christ returns. I am so thankful that we can trust that our God who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion.

And finally, let’s consider the basis for Paul’s thanksgiving. It is crucial to recognize that Paul doesn’t thank God for the Colossians’ perfection. If we were writing to a church that was teetering on the edge of compromising essential doctrine and syncretizing with pagans, we might instinctively, immediately launch into critiques of “What are you guys doing? What are you thinking? What happened to you guys!?” We would likely address and expose their theological errors, and we would want them to repent of their actions.. But that’s not where Paul starts. Paul thanks God for their faith and love, he celebrates what God has begun in them. What a masterclass in pastoral ministry and shepherding. This is exactly how leaders should approach struggling and imperfect churches. Yes, the false teachings that threaten to shipwreck their faith need to be addressed, but let’s not forget the spiritual life that already exists among them. Even in the flawed church, the grace of God can be powerfully at work. Paul will address the heresies fiercely in the chapters to come, but he starting point here is grace. He celebrates the faith and love because he knows that these virtues are the very things they need to overcome the deception knocking at their door. Paul wants these believers to be strengthened as they confront what is wrong.

VI. CONCLUSION: The Unfinished Symphony

As we draw out time to a close this afternoon, I want us to step back and look at the big picture of where the Spirit of God is taking us in this letter. I titled the concluding section

of this sermon “The Unfinished Symphony”, and for good reason I think. What we have looked at today in Colossians 1:1-4 is the opening movement of a large masterpiece. These four verses are just setting the stage the letter. Paul is preparing to address some insidious false teaching creeping into the church, threatening to strip them of the sufficiency of Christ. He is about to unpack one of the most majestic, soaring declaration of the supremacy of Jesus Christ in all of Scripture. But before he take us to that mountaintop, he has to take us through these first steps of our everyday life of faith, hope, and love.

And the way that Paul start this epistle is so informative to us. As these false teachers come offering secret knowledge and angel worship, Paul doesn't tell Colossians about this new mystical experience they really need to have; they just needed to remember their faith in Christ Jesus, the love for the saints, and the hope laid up for them in heaven. Paul knows this is a vulnerable church, these Christians were under a lot of pressure from the surrounding pagans. But Paul knows that faith, hope, and love are exactly what they need to withstand the storm. If their faith is rooted in Christ, no false teacher can uproot them. If their love is binding them together as the holy ones of God, what enemy could divide and conquer them? If their hope is anchored in heaven, what temporary things of this world would keep their appeal to the Colossians?

The truths of these verses are truly timeless, shocking I know. Every generation of believers have faced the exact same challenges that the Colossians faced. Spiritual warfare evolve, heresies evolve, cultures evolve, but the way we fight the good fight remains identical. Whether you were a first-century Colossian or a twenty-first century Windsorite (or whatever you city folk call yourselves), the challenge is this: have faith in Christ, hold fast to hope in God's promises, and love God's people. In the first century, the treats these believers were at war with was Jewish legalism mixed with Gnostic mysticism. Today, we face secularism, and countless foreign religions that are mixing into our society every year. In our day and age, we're facing the hyper-individualism of our culture that tells us we don't need a church, which destroys our love for the saints. As the years go by, we're facing more and more ways to get immediate gratification, which erodes our hope in a future reality, replacing it with the pursuit of momentary comforts. The world will constantly try to redefine you, and get you to think how it wants you to think, but our identity is settled, we're God's holy ones.

So, as we prepare to close, the Word of God calls you to examine your own life. Ask yourself: Is your faith in Christ growing? Has your faith grown stale and cold? Is your love for the saints deepening? Is it a supernatural, radical love that cares for God's people? Have you allowed the doctrines of the world, flesh, and devil to seep into your theology? Are you a faithful brother or sister to the person sitting next to you? Thirdly, is your hope in God's promises strengthening? Do your afflictions produce perseverance and proven character, leading to an unshakable hope? Or are you despairing, looking for hope in the broken cisterns of this world?

And Church, while you're reflecting, remember that these virtues are not achievements we check off a spiritual bucket list. They cannot be earned by your willpower. These are gifts to be received from the Father of lights, share within the church.

Again, Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 13:13 that love is the greatest virtue. And it is. But love never stands alone. It is always accompanied by faith and hope. Love is the greatest fruit, but faith is the root, and hope is the sustenance that keeps you alive through the harsh winters of life. If you try to separate these, you'll lose the essence of the Christian life. As we continue to move through Colossians in the coming months, we will see exactly how Paul applies this magnificent foundation to every single area of the Christian life. We will see how faith, hope, and love translate into putting off the old self and putting on the new. We will see how they dismantle worldly philosophies and exalt Christ as supreme. But rest in this truth today, the God who began this good work in the Colossians, and in us, remains faithful to complete it. The symphony of our salvation is unfinished, but our Composer is relentless. He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Let us pray.

Heavenly father,

Thank you so much Father for this passage of Your Word that you have given us. What a great encouragement it is. Thank You so much for giving us the gift of faith. Thank You for pouring Your love into our hearts through Your Holy Spirit. Thank You for giving us such an awesome hope of Heaven, where moth and rust will not destroy and thieves won't break in and steal.

Thank you for giving us an eternal, unchangeable hope in Your Son, Christ Jesus. Father please may these three virtues increase in us, make us shine brighter and brighter as lights in this world. And may all of our lives work as signs pointing to You in all things.

In the name of our King Jesus, I pray,

Amen.