

Faith, Knowledge, Hope and the Spirit.

Colossians 1:1-10

I was brought up in a working family in Cardiff: we weren't the most prosperous and my parents struggled from time to time as they brought us up. My mother was a real stickler for looking smart. A favourite phrase was "we might be poor, but we don't have to look poor". Reputation was important – we were a decent Christian family and my mother made sure that we looked like one.

We all vary in how concerned we may be in what other people think of us. When it comes to the Christian faith, if we want to see people come to Christ then we do need to think hard about it? What is really important about our reputation and what isn't?

Paul had never met the Colossians but he already knew of their reputation. And that was...

3 We always give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you. 4 For we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all God's people. 5 When the true message, the Good News, first came to you, you heard about the hope it offers. So your faith and love are based on what you hope for, which is kept safe for you in heaven.

From a Christian point of view, it was a good one. We have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all God's people. Their reputation was one of faith and love. Both are positive things in modern society because faith is the basis of trust and love is central to relationships. In a world that has left God behind, you'll find these characteristics are still valued. Faithful loving marriages, trusting relationships, sacrificial helping of others. Motivation to faith and love can depend on a number of things, but with the wrong focus never reaches its true potential.

Paul identifies what's really important when it comes to faith and love: we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all God's people. Our lives should be characterised in two directions. Firstly upwards through faith in Christ and then outwards to God's people. Love and care for people that is anchored by faith in Christ works, because it is all being done for the right reasons, for His glory and for their benefit. Once self-interest gets in there, something doesn't work.

Of course at the root of our motivation is the hope that we have:

5 When the true message, the Good News, first came to you, you heard about the hope it offers. So your faith and love are based on what you hope for, which is kept safe for you in heaven.

We have been given something that is certain, steadfast and sure. Because we have that foundation then it makes our faith certain and makes our desire to honor Christ by loving others our priority. Hope is central to that but in a few moments we'll see that something else is even more vital.

It's something that again at the beginning of another year when we are seeking God's will as to the shape our ministry and mission as a Church, we need to be certain of our foundations and motivation. That is why I'm focussing on the glory of God because as we understand the awesomeness of the God we follow, the outworking of that is our faith in Christ Jesus and our love for others.

6 The gospel keeps bringing blessings and is spreading throughout the world, just as it has among you ever since the day you first heard about the grace of God and came to know it as it really is.

We live in a country where the gospel has been in decline for a while and that for one reason or another the church of God is not highly regarded. We live on the end of a peninsula so in another sense we are isolated. As I've said many times before we are the exception not the rule. The gospel is spreading throughout the world. It's alive, it's active. It's changing societies, it's changing nations. Never feel we are alone. We're not. We are God's people. Danger of believing we are on our own, when we are not. Our World needs to be expanded. As we shall see later our view of Christ needs to be expanded as well.

Being church in the 21st century is the same as in the first and the other 20 centuries. We need to realise afresh how powerful the message is because we have a powerful Saviour. This letter grows our picture of both. We are the future.

7 You learned of God's grace from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is Christ's faithful worker on our behalf.

.And how did they know? That man was Epaphras – one of their own. Perhaps we also need to realise that also our survival, our recovery and our growth isn't something we should look outside for. The Colossians became Christians because someone in their community became a Christian and shared it with others. How do people become Christians in our community – when WE tell them!

8 He has told us of the love that the Spirit has given you. 9 For this reason we have always prayed for you, ever since we heard about you. We ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will, with all the wisdom and understanding that his Spirit gives

A few minutes ago I mentioned, that apart from hope something else is vital in motivating us to faith and love. Before we start thinking this all derives from our own hearts and motivations, we see that their love was in the Spirit. One response

comes from us – from the hope that we have in Christ. But in reality how we deal with God and with the world effectively is of the Spirit. So this sermon is not about me trying to drum up emotions and make you think more deeply about the hope in each of us, because quite frankly, most of you are familiar with this passage or at least with the principles therein. What this series is about and indeed what the morning series is about is asking God the Holy Spirit to open our hearts and minds to see the glory and understand the wonder of Christ more clearly.

My car has demisting problems. It is common to all Citroens. When I start up on a cold day, the whole interior of the car mists up about a minute after the car is started. ON a bright sunny winter day that can be very dangerous. I have to stop and wait until it is demisted. For as long as we live we well see through he glass darkly – or through a misted up screen, but the Spirit can help us see through the glass just a little better – He can start to take some of the mist from us - as far as our human understanding may take us. Our Christin lives should be one of allowing Him to clear the glass and allow us to view God more clearly. So often we resist for whatever reason.

When we come to verse 9 and 10 we see that Paul actually prays this very thing for them:

9 For this reason we have always prayed for you, ever since we heard about you. We ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will, with all the wisdom and understanding that his Spirit gives. 10 Then you will be able to live as the Lord wants and will always do what pleases him. Your lives will produce all kinds of good deeds, and you will grow in your knowledge of God.

Then our lives will reflect what God is doing in us by His Spirit and what He wants to do through us by His Spirit. Once we understand the hope and the fact that it is the Spirit that gives us knowledge and wisdom that allows us to please God and grow as Christians, then we will start to seek Him to that end -asking to change us in to what He wants us to be.

We will look at this in a bit more detail next time.

Preached by Mark Reid

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