

**CONTINUING IN THE FAITH**

Colossians 1:21-29

**Intro:** Those of you who were here last week will remember that I am using the same text today that I did last Sunday. But I am not going to preach the same message that I did last week. At that time I emphasized the way the Apostle Paul referred to the three phases of salvation which give us the three tenses of salvation: the past, the present, and the future. As I brought out then it is entirely in accord with Scripture to say that “I was saved, I am being saved, and I will be saved. It is all the same salvation but all of us who are saved, were saved at some time in the past. We may not know the exact date, but there was a time when we were born again, a time when we first trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior.

But that was just the beginning. There is a parallel here with our physical birth. There was a time when we were born into this world. We may not know exactly when that was, or we may be very certain when it was, but the fact remains that our presence here today is evidence that we were born into this world some time in the past. But that, too, was just the beginning. We had to grow, we had to be fed until we could feed ourselves, and there was a lot that we had to learn.

The same is true of us as Christians. Once you and I were born into the family of God, we needed to grow, and for our growth we needed to learn to feed on the Bible, and there was much that we needed to learn. We are still learning, and should continue to learn how to live as Christians until the Lord comes, or until He takes us to heaven. This is the present tense of salvation.

But the time is coming when we are with the Lord when God’s purpose in saving us will be completed. He has not saved us just to take us to heaven, although that is a very important part of our salvation. But the Lord has saved us to make us like Christ as amazing as that may sound to us. Now we have all three phases of our salvation in the first three verses of this passage in Colossians 1.

Look at verse 21 and you will see what we used to be. (Read v. 1) In verse 22 we read about what has happened to all of us who are saved. We were reconciled to God. Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer tells in his book entitled *Salvation*, that there are thirty-three things that happen to all of us

when we are saved. We are not only reconciled, but we are forgiven, we are justified, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit – and so on and on. But Paul just mentioned one of those blessing of salvation here: We are reconciled to God by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross. And we will never become un-reconciled. All of salvation is eternal.

But what is God's ultimate purpose in saving us. What is the future of our salvation? This, too, is stated in Scripture in different ways, but I call you attention to how the future is stated here in verse 22, in the latter part of the verse: "to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in His sight," that is, in God's sight. When the Lord has finished His work in us there will not be anything wrong in any one of us.

But I still have to point out the present tense of salvation. And you will see this in verse 23. (Read v. 23.) *Continuing in The Faith* is the present tense of salvation. And this is what I want to talk to you about this morning.

As I mentioned last Sunday there are, and have always been, people who claim to be Christians, but they do not continue in The Faith. That is, they don't live like a Christian should live, in obedience to the teaching of the Bible. They would be bored to come to a church like Trinity Bible Church where all we do in our classes and services is to teach the Bible. They want to be entertained. They want to feel good about themselves. If the pastor talks about sin, it makes them uncomfortable, and so they would rather go to some church where sin is never mentioned. But a Christian is a person who believes the Gospel. His, or her, sins have been forgiven, and a true Christian cannot hear too much about that!

But let us look at this verse another way. Paul mentioned *continuing in The Faith* as something that each one of us has to do. We are responsible to God for *continuing in The Faith*. How are we to do this? Well, let's think about this.

For a Christian there is no book that can possibly be as important to him, or her, as the Bible. The Bible is God's book. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." There is no other book like it in the world. In it, as we are presently learning, God tells us about Himself. Many writers were used by God to give us the Bible, but the God, the Holy Spirit, guided every one of them to write what God wanted them to write. So we have many writers, such as Moses, David, Isaiah, Matthew, Paul, and Peter,

who lived over a period of sixteen hundred years, most of whom did not know each other, and yet we have in the Bible a book that amazingly is *one book*. *No writer contradicts any other writer. In this book we find the truth about God.*

But the Bible tells us also about ourselves. The Bible describes very clearly what is wrong with us, why we all are called sinners, and what God has done for us in Christ to forgive us and to save us. That message is called *the Gospel*. And the Gospel runs through the Bible from start to finish, from Genesis to the Revelation.

Nobody understands everything that is in the Bible. That is why we always need to be learning. The Author of Scripture is the Holy Spirit, and He has been given to every Christian, every child of God, as our Teacher.

Now if you are going to continue in The Faith, this means that you are always going to be reading the Bible, not because you have to, but because you want to. You will read it daily. You will accept it as the Word of God. You will believe what it says, and you will, with God's help, live the way it tells you to live. The person who claims to be a Christian, but does not continue in The Faith, probably is not a Christian.

If you continue in The Faith, you are going to believe what it says about God, and about Christ, and about the Holy Spirit. You are going to hang on to the Gospel. Not to continue in The Faith means that you are willing to forget about the Gospel, and as our verse says, "the hope of the Gospel." What is "the hope of the Gospel"? It is the purpose for which God has saved us, to make us like the Lord Jesus Christ. We will never be God, but we are to be God-ly, and growing more so all of the time. The Apostle John was speaking about continuing in The Faith when he wrote the words we find in the first three verses of 1 John 3:

1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure (1 John 3:1-3).

John was not using the word "hope" here like we often use the word

“hope,” to express something that we would like to see happen, but over which we have no control, and so cannot be sure that what we would like to see happen will actually take place. In our text, and in this quotation from the Apostle John, they were speaking of that which is absolutely certain to take place. And John was saying here that if we are truly saved and have the prospect of being like the Lord, we are going to be doing that which under the blessing of the Lord will lead to our purification, which is another word for holiness. And that can only come about as God uses the Word of God in our lives. But we are said to be purifying ourselves when we see to it that we are reading the Word, believing the Word, and obeying the Word. We definitely are responsible to “continue in The Faith.”

And so let me ask you a question. Do you have a daily habit of reading the Word of God, and of praying before you read, and as you are reading, and after you read. Do you think about what you read? The Bible calls that meditation. When Joshua took over the leadership of Israel from Moses, do you remember what the Lord told him. His work was primarily that of a five-star General. But the Lord told him this:

7 Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.

8 This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success (Joshua 1:7-8).

Jeremiah was continuing in the faith when he wrote the words found in Jeremiah 15:16:

16 Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts.

The writer of Psalm 119, probably David, was continuing in the faith when he wrote what we find in Psalm 119:97-98:

97 O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.

98 Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me.

The Apostle Paul was encouraging Titus to continue in The Faith when he wrote what we find in Titus 2:11-15,

11 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,

12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;

13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;

14 Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

15 These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.

All of this is found in the Word of God. To believe it and to live in the light of it is continuing in The Faith.

Closely connected to continuing in the faith are two other points which the Apostle Paul made in this part of the Colossian epistle. The first of these is suffering.

Remember that Paul was in Roman confinement when he wrote this epistle to the church at Colosse. You would think with all of the wonderful truths contained in The Faith, that the world would open its arms and hearts to the Gospel. But such is not the case, and it has never been the case. The Gospel has always been hated by the world. The Gospel cost our Lord His life. He suffered as no other person has ever suffered for the Gospel. The Gospel is that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." But what did Paul mean when he wrote in verse 24? Did he mean that his sufferings somehow completed the suffering of Christ for our sins?

Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the church.

The idea that the sufferings of Paul were in any way vicarious with respect to his own sins, and ours, so that he completed Christ's work of salvation, would have been considered blasphemous to Paul. And it should be considered blasphemous to us. The Lord Jesus did a finished work of salvation on the Cross. But suffering of the people of God has continued because of our relationship to Christ. When our Lord stopped Saul of Tarsus as he was then, when he was on his way to persecute believers in Damascus, you remember that the Lord appeared to Saul and said to him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 9:4). The Lord took the persecution of the people of God as against Himself.

Paul also wrote to the church at Corinth that “the sufferings of Christ abound by us” (2 Cor. 1:5). In Hebrews 13:12 and 13 we read,

12 Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.

13 Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

And even in Hebrews 11:24-26 we read this about Moses’ amazing decision to cast his lot with his fellow Israelites rather than be identified with the royal family of Egypt. This is what these verses tell us:

24 By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;

25 Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;

26 Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward (Heb. 11:24-26).

The Apostle Paul was suffering because of his relationship with Christ, but Christ comforted Paul by entering into Paul’s afflictions. As Isaiah said in Isaiah 63:9, “In all their afflictions He was afflicted.” The Apostle Paul by his sufferings was filling up, or adding to, the sufferings of Christ on behalf of His people who were suffering because of their relationship to Him. Some day, when the Church is glorified, all suffering will be complete.

So we are not promised an easy way, but whatever we suffer because of Christ, He bears the affliction with us.

Now I have one more point to make concerning our continuance in The Faith. It has to do with Paul’s preaching.

From verse 25 on to the end of the chapter Paul speaks of himself as a divinely appointed preacher. And notice the place that his preaching had in the edification and ultimate glorification of the people of God. Every believer needs to understand the object of preaching, and every preacher needs to keep this objective before himself as he ministers the Word to others.

The Apostle Paul was given the privilege of being the first to reveal to the people of God the glorious truth concerning the Church. It was a God-kept secret concerning the Church, the body of Christ. And Paul’s objective in declaring this glorious truth was to present every man, every

person in Christ, man, woman, or child, “perfect in Christ Jesus,” the Head of the Church. But the job was too big for him just as it is too big for any of us. So he was working, “striving according to His working, which worketh in me,” he said, “mightily.”

Now this speaks of the tremendous importance of the preaching of the Word. God never intended for any of us to make it alone. We need our daily times of Bible reading and prayer, but we also need to be in the fellowship of other Christians where together we can sit under the teaching of the Word of God.

**Concl:** Let me conclude with what the Lord said in John 13:17 as He ministered to His disciples: “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.”

We don't continue in the faith to save ourselves, nor do we continue in The Faith to keep ourselves saved, but we continue in The Faith to show that we are saved, and to enter in the blessings of a life of genuine fellowship with our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.