

Being So Heavenly Minded You Are Of Some Earthly Good.

Swimmer Florence Chadwick was undertaking a long Pacific Ocean swim in 1952. After 15 hours, she begged to get out of the water, but her mother encouraged her to keep swimming. Finally she did stop swimming – only to find out that the shore was less than half a mile away. She said later, “all I could see was the fog; if I could have seen the shore, I would have made it.”

Her words can be converted into a Christian version – *if we had seen the shore of heaven, we would have kept on trusting and loving*. In this message I would like us to examine from Colossians how to be so heavenly minded you are of some earthly good.

Paul begins with genuine joy and gratitude to God for the Colossians. This was a church worth commending. They were not a church completely astray – they were right in many respects, and Paul wanted to keep them right. They had known and believed in the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ. If we are to be a church which brings joy to God, which brings glory to God, we must pay attention to what it is that Paul praised about this church.

What was it that got Paul excited and thanking and praising God about this church? What was it that had become so public that Paul had heard about it, and thanked God for it?

He thanked God because he had heard about their **faith in Christ Jesus and their love toward all the saints**. Now, if the Colossians were the ones having faith and love, why does Paul thank God and not them? Because He knows their faith and love is a work of God. God has worked in them to produce faith and love. And anytime God has done it, you can be sure He has done it for His own glory.

So this is the first question. What is it about faith in Jesus Christ and love toward the saints that glorifies God?

1. Why do Faith and Love Glorify God?

To answer this, we must know what is meant by faith in Jesus Christ and what is meant by love toward the saints?

What is faith? John Paton was a missionary to the New Hebrides islands, and translated the Bible into the language of the tribe. He found that their language did not have a word for faith or believe.

The islanders trusted nobody and there was no word for "trust" in their language. His native assistant entered the room and Paton had an idea. "What am I doing?" Paton asked. The man replied that he was sitting at his desk. Paton then raised both feet off the floor and sat back on his chair. "What am I doing now?" He asked. In reply, the native used a verb which means "to lean your whole weight upon". This is the expression that Paton used through the gospel to translate "to believe in" Jesus. (Source: Unknown)

Faith is a wholehearted leaning on, depending on, surrendering to.

Notice firstly, that their faith had an object – Jesus Christ. They did not have faith in faith? Sometimes you will hear unbelievers say, “Well, just keep the faith.” Or they will say, “As long as we have faith, we're fine.” But that's not true. Everything depends on what your faith is in. If you were an investor, and were seeking advice as to where to place your money, what would you think of a financial advisor who said to you, “It doesn't matter where you invest, so long as you invest.”? You would reject that, because if you invest in a bad deal, it is not good enough to have simply invested. To place your faith in someone other than the Preeminent Jesus Christ of Colossians is not a good thing; it is a spiritually fatal thing.

This phrase in the original suggests that Paul was commending not their initial faith in Jesus for salvation, but their continuing faith in Jesus Christ. The Colossians continued to have faith in Jesus Christ.

So that phrase *faith in Jesus Christ* meant the Colossians were, as a way of life, leaning the entire weight of their lives on Jesus Christ - for forgiveness from sin; for righteousness to be acceptable to God; for empowerment to obey; for endurance; for wisdom. They were leaning.

The only reason you will rest your entire weight on something is when it is entirely sufficient to hold you. The only reason you rest your entire life; your desire for fulfillment and purpose and meaning and a happy future and deliverance from God's wrath, on Jesus is *because you believe*. He is entirely sufficient. And so you rest your ultimate satisfaction on Him.

This is why God gets glory from faith in Jesus. Jesus Christ, the preeminent one, in whom God's fullness dwells, is glorified when people transfer their trust from lesser things, and the things of this world, to Him. It magnifies Him as reliable, and desirable, and of supreme value.

That is why when you hear the doctor give a report which gives you less than a year to live; or when your spouse turns to you and says, "I think it's over between us"; or when your teenage child comes home and says, "I don't believe in Christ"; or when the car breaks down and can't be repaired and there is no money; or when your unsaved spouse mocks your faith for the umpteenth time; your colleague cheats you out of money or a promotion by lying about you; or when all your friends avoid you because of your stand for Christ – when everything in this life seems to drain away and you say – "Christ is still more than enough" – that glorifies God!

The other thing which the Colossians had which glorified God and so caused Paul to thank him for it was their **love to all the saints**.

I believe more and more that love is not something that unbelievers really do. Now I understand that unbelievers have natural affection for family, I know unbelievers fall in and out of love romantically, and sing all about it, but my belief is that real love is something only God can do through you. In fact, verse 8 says that their love was love **in the Spirit**.

True love requires something radical. It requires a heart that is so set on drawing others to the fountain of joy – Jesus Christ, that it will sacrifice itself to do so. My definition of love is a *strong desire to see others find sufficiency in Christ*.

You see, if I try to meet the needs of people through me, they will soon find out that I am not the all-sufficient Christ. I am a stream connected to the fountain, hopefully bringing to people the sufficiency of Jesus. But if I do anything but communicate the sufficiency of Christ, and point people up to Him, I cannot and will not love them. I might manipulate them; I might be friendly to them for my own purposes; I might be courteous and sweet to them, because I find life works better for me that way; I might be helpful and charming and cordial because then people like me, but in all that, who am I pleasing? Myself. And I am using interactions with others to feed my own lust for approval and popularity, or to receive favours, or to just get my own way most of the time.

But this thing called love – where you forget yourself, because you are so enthralled with Jesus, and so engaged with getting people to drink deep in Jesus – that is love, and that is from God.

Romans 5:5 *Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

When you love the beautiful, the charming, the influential, the pleasant, the warm, people – no one notices, because unsaved people selfishly enjoy the company of such people as well. But when you

love the difficult, argumentative, negative, plain, average, ordinary and unremarkable people, who have nothing in common with you culturally, economically, educationally or interest-wise – then Christ gets the glory.

When you love that way – it is obvious who gets the glory. You have a new motive for loving – pointing people to Jesus. You have a new method of loving – pointing people to Jesus. You have a new means for loving - the Spirit of Jesus.

Some claim to have love for others, but no faith in Jesus Christ. That won't glorify God, because Jesus is the revelation of God, and love that does not centre on Him glorifies man, not God. To claim to love much without faith in Christ is to get the glory for your love. Others claim faith in Jesus Christ but they seem to have no love for one another. That is confusing because the natural result of faith in Christ is love. Galatians 5:6 says that faith works through love – faith works through the internal person out into love for one another – for all the saints. If you trusted Christ and it produced no love, it certainly wouldn't glorify God. It is both that brings glory to God.

When you see Christians with real faith in Jesus Christ and real love for one another, it calls attention to God's glorious work inside them, which is why Paul thanked God for it.

How do we get that kind of faith and love? What produces it?

After the phrase 'love for all the saints' comes the crucial word **because**. Because. That is giving you the ground or the source of the faith and love. You need to learn to look out for these words like *for, because, that* or *therefore*, because they open up the meaning, the argument, the intention of the author.

So what is their faith and love based upon? What causes faith and love to spring up? We read **because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven**. There you have the familiar three: faith, hope and love. But only here do we read that hope gives rise to faith and love.

Why? Why does hope produce faith and love? If you want to glorify God with faith in Christ and love to all the saints, you need to know why hope produces faith and love.

2. Why Faith and Love Spring up from Hope

What is this thing the Bible calls hope?

Paul makes sure we know where this hope lies. He says it is laid up in heaven. That word is the word used by Jesus in his parable of the talents in **Luke 19** where the one steward kept the money hidden in a handkerchief. The word for hidden is the same word used here. Paul also used this word in **2 Tim 4:8** "Henceforth there is **laid up** for me a crown of righteousness". The hope you have in heaven is protected, wrapped up, reserved for you (**I Pet 1:4**). Nothing can steal it, nothing can harm it while you are away. No one can bump you or take your spot, nothing can cause it to decay or devalue.

Whatever this hope is, it is permanent, and protected. Your faith and love don't have to be like a neon light about to fuse – flickering on and off as the hope comes and goes.

So what is the hope laid up for us in heaven? I sometimes wish another English word was used to translate this idea, because when we hear hope, we think optimistic desire. 'I **hope** I get a raise. I **hope** there isn't a power-outage before I need to iron my shirt. I **hope** the car makes it without breaking down.'" You have a desire, and you are wanting a positive outcome; but you don't know for sure if it will happen. That may be fine to use hope in that sense in everyday talk, but that is not

what the Bible means. When you read of hope in the New Testament, you should read “A Christian's future”. Hope is what is promised to come to a Christian through Christ now, and to be consummated in heaven. All the time, a Christian's future hope is flowing into the present.

What is the essence of that future? It is to experience Christ Himself. Chapter 1:27 of Colossians says “Christ in you the hope of glory.” Christ in you is the down payment on more glory to come – the hope of ultimate fulfillment when we are made one with Jesus.

If you are born again, the thought of knowing and seeing and experiencing Christ in His fullness should be your ultimate hope. That is what is waiting for you in heaven. It is to know the sufficiency of Christ without limits, without your faith failing and losing your grip on His sufficiency; without guilt dulling your joy in Christ; without finding your heart cold and needing continual work to get it aflame again; without the discouragement of people rejecting Christ; without the discouragement of fellow believers not glorifying God; without doubt clouding your communion with Him; without sickness in the body disturbing your experience of Him; without the endless problems, concerns, troubles of living in this sin-cursed world; *without sin*.

If we could only hear the music of what that will be, even if it is a faint background tune which begins to grow in our minds.

I ask you – what kind of person is one in whom this hope is before Him and growing? The Bible answers – a person of faith in Jesus, and love for the saints.

Sometimes you hear people say, “don't be so heavenly minded you are of no earthly good.” They mean, don't be theoretical – and that's fine. But in the strict, Biblical sense of the term, the only way to be of any earthly good *is to be as heavenly minded as possible*.

Have you ever met a person, who was captivated by these thoughts, who failed to love God and man? Have you ever met someone who was enthralled with the hope of glory, who was a selfish, impractical person with little faith and little love? I have never met such a person. It is just the opposite. The more a person has been in love with the hope of heaven, the more loving and faithful they have been. The hope of heaven is not what makes people unbelieving and selfish. It is the love of this world that does that.

What is it that prevents people from desiring others to find their needs met in Christ? Is it an excessive love of heaven? No, it is a selfishness borne of loving this world, not the next. It is a love of money, and sport, and TV, and food, and parties, and popularity, and good health - loving my pleasure over others, loving my comfort, my money, my house, my goods, my reputation, my time, my family, because I still love this world and its rewards.

What prevents faith and love is an earthly-mindedness. Hope is what breaks the hold that this world has on our loves. That is where my ultimate satisfaction will be. That is where my true joy lies. That is where I will truly take my rest.

Colossians 3:1-2 *If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.*

Do you know what that does? It frees you to lean your entire weight on Jesus Christ, and give yourself to point others to Christ. If you are not desperately trying to get a good deal out of this world, because you have set your hope in the promises of Christ awaiting you in heaven – then you are free to keep resting on Christ, even if the things of this world keep getting taken away. If your hope is in heaven, you are free to love others sacrificially, even if they don't always like it, or even if it costs you dearly in this life.

Hebrews 11:24-26 *By faith Moses, when he became of age, 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 passing pleasures of sin, ²⁶ esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.*

What would make a prince, accustomed to the finest, most comfortable living in Egypt –rest his faith in God, and love the despised slaves of the land?

The answer to this is - he looked to the reward. Egypt was no longer the reward! Being a prince was no longer the reward. Luxurious living, power, honour, prestige, riches, were no longer the reward. The reward was seeing and knowing the glory of God.

1 Corinthians 15:19 *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.*

What glorifies God is faith in Jesus, and love for the saints. Faith and love comes from the hope of seeing and being one with Christ in glory. Where does this hope come from?

The answer is in **verse 5 (Colossians 1): “of which you heard about before in the word of truth of the gospel.”**

Hope comes from the gospel.

3. Why Hope Comes from the true Gospel Received

What is this Gospel?

The word means *good news* – rejoicing message. In this passage Paul explains what it is.

In verse 5, he calls it **the word of truth**. It is the most reliable message you will ever find in a world without truth. You can bank on it, you can trust it.

It is not some new message which the Gnostics invented. It was the one which came to them through Epaphras and is **also in all the world**. The Gospel is a simple message, that has been with us for nearly 200 years. When you hear of new innovations, new books which purport to tell you what the world hasn't known up to now, don't believe it. It is the old, well-known Gospel that saves. In verse 6, Paul explains a bit more. He says the Gospel message is about the **grace of God**. It is the message that Jesus Christ graciously came to earth to die in the place of sinners, and rose again. Everyone who turns from their sin and looks to Christ as the payment for their sins; and leans on Him for His righteousness, God graciously promises to save. He promises to forgive all your sins, count you righteous in Christ, grant you a position in Christ, and secure it for all eternity. Instead of eternal wrath, you will experience eternal joy in Him. That's grace.

The Gospel contains the hope in its message, doesn't it? The Gospel is itself the promise of our future. Trust in my Son, God says, and I will grant you eternal life now, and in the age to come. You will begin to taste of the joys of being in me, and eventually drink without limit one day.

The Gospel is essentially a promise. It is a promise of these future joys based on Christ. **Colossians 1:27** – *Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

The Gospel is about perfect future joys flowing into the present as foretastes of things to come.

What do you have to do to get this hope producing Gospel? What must you do with the Gospel for it to produce hope which produces faith and love?

[***You must hear it.*** V5 – ‘**which you heard before.**’ V6 – ‘**since the day you heard.**’ V7 –

‘as you also learned from Epaphras.’ The Gospel is a message which must be communicated. Whether you heard it at church, or heard it on the radio, or heard it from a friend or a relative, or heard it from your parents, or heard it, in a sense, when you read something – you must hear the news. God does not inject people with the Gospel secretly. He wants them to be able to say – I know whom I have believed – because I heard it. Ref. Rom 10:17

- [**You must understand it.** V6 – ‘**since the day you...knew the grace of God in truth.**’ The Colossians did not only hear it; their hearing was mixed with understanding; they came to know it. They came to have the knowledge of it. Having a textbook on your shelf won't automatically give you a pass mark in an exam. You will need to take in that information, process it until you have understanding. The reason why some don't have hope is that they haven't really understood the Gospel. You know this because you ask them why they expect to enter heaven when they die and they say, “Because I have tried to live a life without sin;” “because I have been a churchgoer;” “because I have never doubted that there is a God;” because I always trusted He was there for me.” If that is your understanding of the good news, then it isn't good news, and there isn't much hope. If it is dependent on you and your works and your actions, and your righteousness, then your hope is built on very shaky ground.
- [**You must receive it.** V6 – ‘**which has come to you**’. This word does not only mean come to you, it can mean *present in you*. The Colossians had accepted the Gospel. They had transferred trust from self to Christ. You cannot have hope if you are still observing the Gospel. You must receive it (**John 1:12**)
- [**You must experience it.** V6 – ‘**bringing forth fruit,**’. The Gospel is not just a piece of information. It is not like when a capitalist becomes a communist. It isn't an idea which you agree with. It is a miracle which occurs within you. When you believe in Christ, that is itself a miracle, and what follows is a miracle. The fruit of Christlikeness which follows is evidence of God's Word. Do you know what that is? That is a down-payment of more to come. When you get engaged, the engagement ring is a type of down-payment. You are promising loyalty with a costly item. You are saying, there is more to come. The fruit of the Gospel is the down payment of the full inheritance. God does a work in our hearts now, to assure us of the full and complete work in the future. Someone who has not experienced the Gospel has no hope, because he has not even tasted of what is to come.
- [**You must reflect on it.** Paul takes the time to remind the Colossians of the Gospel. Why did he do that? To say – ‘always remember the Gospel’. In fact, a number of times in this epistle, he is going to remind them of what Christ did, and therefore what awaits you in Him. (Col.1:20-22; 2:12-14, 3:3). God wants us to be Gospel-centred, because the simple message of what Christ has done for us in the past, to secure our future, is what produces hope.

Now I will direct you to one of the most hope-producing verses in all of Scripture and reflect on it with you:

Romans 8:32. There is the Gospel in that verse. God did not spare His Son, but delivered Him up for us all – why? For our sins; to pay for them; to purchase our forgiveness. And the verse says, if God did not hold back in giving His Son, now that this is done, what will He hold back from us now? The hardest thing for God to do was give up His Son. That has been done. Past grace. The Gospel. So what can we expect for the future. I mean five seconds from now, two minutes from now, three hours from now, two days from now, five weeks, eight months from now, seven years from now, 10000 years from now. What can we expect from Him based on the Gospel? All things - every good thing necessary for your joy and love for Him.

When you think about what the Gospel means, hope for every second of your future springs up. And when hope surges through you, the pull of this world and of the flesh is broken. I don't need to chase the things of this world, nor do I need to put myself ahead of others. I can rest my weight on

Jesus Christ for all my sufficiency, I can keep pushing and driving and pointing others to Him at my own cost, because I'm not tied to this world. And when we live like that, people see the sufficiency of Christ, and give glory to God.

Jonathan Edwards said: "It is fitting for us to spend this life only as a journey toward heaven, to which we should subordinate all other concerns of life. Why should we labor for or set our hearts on anything else, but that which is our proper end and true happiness?"