

Faith, Hope, and Love: Recovering the Essential Triad of Christian Living

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We are called to be many things as Christian—generous, hospitable, disciplined, respectful. Each biblical characteristic is important and should be pursued wholeheartedly. But there is one set of characteristics—a triad of traits—that is *foundational* and *essential*: namely, **faith**, **hope**, and



love. If we do not have these, we do not have Christ. When you feel like you are overwhelmed by the complexity and lofty calling of biblical Christianity, refocus on this simple triad which sums up the heart of Christian living.

First, notice the triad in Paul's prayers for the Thessalonians.

We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your **work of faith** and **labor of love** and **steadfastness of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thess 1:2-3)

Did you see it? Now let's reflect more carefully on what these words mean.

Work of faith

When Paul prayed for the Thessalonians, he always remembered their "work of faith." We might paraphrase this as: "conduct produced by allegiance to Christ."

Paul himself describes their faith as allegiance to Christ when he remembers how they "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess 1:9). This change of allegiance, or "faith" as he also calls it, had gone forth and made them famous among the believers of their region.

Their change of allegiance was then manifested in their conduct. That is why Paul speaks of a "work of faith" here. Formerly, they partook in the practices of the pagan world (such as sexual immorality, see 4:3), now they strive to "walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory" (2:12).

Paul knew that the Thessalonians' allegiance to Jesus was under attack, especially because of persecution. He was worried, he says, that Satan had brought such trials upon them that they would give up their newfound commitment to Jesus.

For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain. (1 Thess 3:5).

Faith working itself out in action is a basic component of life in Christ. Follow the example of the Thessalonians who held true to their

commitment to Jesus even in the face of tremendous persecution and temptations.

Labor of love

Paul also remembers the Thessalonians' "labor of love." We might restate that phrase like this: "hard work for others generated by love for them."

Paul is a good example of such loving labor. Later in 1 Thessalonians, he describes his love toward the Thessalonians when he first brought the gospel to them.

But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. (1 Thess 2:7-9)

Why was Paul so willing to labor night and day in order not to be a burden to them? Because of his great affection. As he says, they were "very dear" to him. This love then birthed hard, sacrificial work. Like a nursing mother caring for her children, so Paul cared for them. A mother rises in the night, she changes diapers, she bathes the child, she is vigilant to see to the child's well-being. How many of us love others in the body of Christ like *that*?

Steadfastness of hope

The last trait is steadfastness of hope. We might put it like this: perseverance inspired by hope.

Hope for what? Paul centers on two future realities—salvation from God's wrath and resurrection of the body. When the Thessalonians turned to God, he says, they began to "wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" (1 Thess 1:10).

If we have this kind of hope—hope for future salvation from God's wrath and for coming bodily resurrection—we will persevere. We will keep hanging on to our allegiance to Jesus in spite of affliction, we will continue to pursue holy conduct even when tempted to give in to passing pleasures, and we be assured that our labor of love for others is not done in vain.

If we are going to win the good fight of Christian living, we must put on the indispensable armor of faith, hope, and love. As Paul writes, "let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation" (1 Thess 5:8).