

# “These Three”

***“Now abideth  
faith, hope, love,  
these three; and  
the greatest of  
these is love.”***

***—I Corinthians***

***13:13, Revised***

***Version***

## **AFTER POINTING OUT THE**

vital importance of love as a motivating influence in the Christian life, Paul wrote the words of our opening Scripture. The apostle mentions “these three” again, expanding upon their meaning, in

I Thessalonians 1:3, which reads, “Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.” In this statement Paul indicates the relationship of faith, hope, and love to the Christian life. Faith “works,” love “labors,” and hope enables the Christian to have “patience,” he declares.

Some have endeavored to establish the relative value of faith compared to works in the Christian life. However, this cannot actually be done, for neither real faith nor Christian works can exist alone. A true Christian faith will be demonstrated by works, and the only works which are acceptable to God are those which are the outgrowth of faith. James expressed a similar thought when he wrote, “Shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.”—James 2:18

## WHAT IS FAITH?

Hebrews 11:1 reads, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Verse 6 reads, "Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." The rewards which God has promised to the faithful followers of the Master are spiritual, and therefore invisible, but our faith provides a basis, or substance, to these things. Contrasting temporal, earthly matters with eternal, spiritual realities, Paul wrote, "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."—II Cor. 4:18

Because we have faith in the existence of God, and believe his promises, we are desirous of doing his will in order to demonstrate our faith. This has been true of the Lord's people in all ages. Abel believed God and offered an acceptable sacrifice to his Creator in demonstration of his belief. Noah had faith in God, and when asked by him to build an ark, he proceeded to do so. Noah believed that a deluge would come upon the earth, although at the time there was no visible evidence that this would happen. It was his confidence in the divine forecast of a coming flood of waters, however, that gave substance to his faith. Thus, building the ark was Noah's work of faith, based on his conviction of God's Word.—Heb. 11:4-7

Abraham believed God, and on the strength of his belief was willing to leave his native country and go to a land he had never seen, with little or no knowledge of the conditions there. Paul said that Abraham

left his own country “not knowing whither he went.” (vs. 8) Abraham could not visibly see the land of Canaan, but his faith in God and in his promises gave substance to it, and enabled him to make the necessary sacrifice, and to endure the trials involved in obeying the Lord’s voice.

Abraham’s faith also worked in his obedience to the voice of God when asked to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering. (vss. 17-19) Isaac was born as a result of a miracle in response to the work of faith on the part of Abraham and Sarah. Now, however, God asked Abraham to offer his miracle son in sacrifice. In this Abraham might well have wondered if he actually heard the voice of God, for what he was asked to do seemed so contrary to what he believed was God’s purpose. Abraham knew the voice of God, however, and his faith rose to the occasion. His faith was so great that he believed God would raise Isaac from the dead, so his faith worked in obedience to the divine instructions. Abraham built the necessary altar, laid his son upon it, and would have slain him, but God intervened and, as Paul says, he received Isaac “in a figure” from the dead.

## **MOSES ALSO**

In Moses we have another outstanding example of the work of faith. Moses was raised in the court of Pharaoh but had learned the promises of God concerning his people from his mother, who had been engaged as his nurse. In Moses’ position he had every opportunity for promotion in the Egyptian government, but his faith in God’s promises to the Hebrew people would not permit him to accept the praise of men.

We quote Paul's eloquent tribute to Moses, and his faith: "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible." —Heb. 11:24-27

As with Abel, Noah, Abraham and Moses, so it was with all the faithful "ancient worthies" of old. They demonstrated their faith by their works, and upon this basis proved their worthiness to "obtain a better resurrection." (vs. 35) Faith demonstrated by works is likewise an essential element of Christian character if we are to prove worthy of a share in "the first resurrection" to live and reign with Christ.—Rev. 20:6

## **OUR WORKS OF FAITH**

Paul mentioned some of our works of faith in his letter to the brethren at Thessalonica. To these he wrote, "From you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing." (I Thess. 1:8) Here the sounding forth of the Word of the Lord is referred to as a work of faith. This is a work of faith because it is in obedience to the instructions given to us by our Master, Christ Jesus, to give witness to the Gospel message.—Matt. 5:14-16; 24:14; 28:19; Acts 1:8

If we fail to let our light shine, we would be in the same position before the Lord as Noah would have been had he failed to build the ark, or as Abraham would have been had he remained in Ur of the Chaldees when God called him to go to Canaan. With these patriarchs it would have meant faithlessness, instead of faithfulness. It would have meant a disregard for the will of the Lord, based upon a lack of faith in him and in his promises. It would have meant disobedience, and so it would mean for us should we fail to do the Lord's will.

Paul also recalls to the Thessalonian brethren how they had "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." (I Thess. 1:9) This was another work of faith. In their worship of idols there was something which they could see with their natural sight, but they could not discern the "living and true God." He became substance to them through their faith, a faith which enabled them to believe that he existed, and that he was a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. (Heb. 11:6) They had heard the Gospel and had responded to it. They knew that they were to depart from the unclean gods of the heathen. Upon the basis of their faith, they were obedient.

A similar test is upon the Lord's people at this end of the age. There are many false gods in the professed Christian world from which the Lord's people are called upon to depart. There is the torture god, for example. If, through the Scriptures, our spiritual vision sees the true and living God of love, the doctrine of a torture god becomes unacceptable to us, and we speedily turn away from this unscriptural teaching. This is not difficult except as our friends and family, whose eyes of understanding

are perhaps not yet opened, look upon us with suspicion and sometimes contempt. It is a work of faith to stand up for the loving and merciful character of our Heavenly Father in the midst of the misconceptions and traditions of men.

Before we gained a vision of the true God, we may have set up idols of our own—idols of pleasure or riches. We may be inclined to make idols out of our hobbies. Anything which diverts our hearts and minds from full devotion and obedience to the true and living God properly can be considered an idol. To turn away from these, and to give our full devotion to our Heavenly Father and to the doing of his will, is a work of faith which believes that God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him only, and no other god or idol.

Obedience to any aspect of the divine will is a work of faith. God's will runs contrary to the desires of our fallen flesh, and to the selfish spirit of the world around us. Unless we have faith in God and in the rightness of his will and ways, we will have no interest in doing the things which are contrary to the desires of the flesh and the world. Our faith in him, however, gives pleasing substance to those things pertaining to God's will which otherwise would seem empty and foolish.

## **MOUNTAINS MOVED**

Paul speaks of possessing mountain-moving faith. (I Cor. 13:2) This is evidently a symbolic statement denoting that which seems, from the human standpoint, to be impossible. The faith that prompted Elijah to call upon God to accept his sacrifice by fire sent down from heaven would be a mountain-moving faith.

(I Kings 18:30-39) Jesus exercised mountain-moving faith when he raised Lazarus and others from the dead. Moses likewise exercised this sort of faith when he led the children of Israel through the Red Sea.

While our experiences today are not as outstanding and dramatic as many of those recorded in the Bible, nevertheless, hindrances to the doing of God's will are still encountered by the Lord's people. These hindrances may be insignificant to the Lord, but they often appear as mountains to us. However, they are mountains which can, and will, be removed if, by faith, we go forward depending upon the Lord to help us in our every time of need.

Given the conditions in the world today, one of the hindrances which might easily confront the Lord's people today is the "mountain" of fear. We may fear the uncertainties of the troubles and perplexities all around us. We may hesitate to bear witness to the Truth because we are fearful of what the results may be. We may fear our ability to proclaim the message, or that we might be misunderstood. There are many ways in which fear needs to be overcome by faith in God and in his promises. However, if we exercise an abiding faith in him we will see these "mountains" removed again and again, for the power of God will be manifested in our weaknesses.—II Cor. 12:9,10

## **LABOR OF LOVE**

True Christian character is not made up of faith alone. Paul emphasized this when he wrote that although we may have mountain-moving faith, if we do not have love it profits us nothing. (I Cor. 13:2) We recall that Paul, who complimented the

Thessalonians on their “work of faith,” included in his encouragement the expression “labour of love.” Faith works and love labors. These two thoughts are closely related, although we believe that there is a difference.

One of the differences is that faith is that confidence and conviction of heart and mind which gives us the necessary courage to step out on the promises of God and do the works outlined for us in his Word. Love, on the other hand, is the motivating character quality which prompts us to engage in the works of faith. Paul uses both of these words in Hebrews 6:10: “God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.”

Certainly, to lay down our lives for the brethren is a labor of love. It is also a work of faith, because it means the sacrificing of the flesh and its interests in order that we might have time, strength and means which can be devoted to the service of the brethren. Such service primarily is in their spiritual interests, but may also be along material lines when needed. Just as with faith and works, there is no measuring the relative value of faith and love. Both are essential elements of Christian character. Without faith and its associated works it is impossible to please God, and without the labor of love all our endeavors toward faith would be as nothing in God’s sight.

## **LOVE NOT ENOUGH**

In the 13th chapter of 1st Corinthians, Paul stresses the great importance of love, and some have mistakenly supposed that he thereby discounts the



importance of faith and works. However, this is not Paul's thought. He wrote, for example, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity [love], I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." (vs. 1) Here is the thought of proclaiming the Truth, which we are commissioned to do. Indeed, the Lord wants us to proclaim the Gospel as effectively as possible. All Paul is saying is that unless our efforts are prompted by love for God and for the doing of his will, they will be of no avail.

Knowledge of the Truth and an understanding of the mysteries of God apart from love would be valueless. (vs. 2) However, the Lord wants us to study his Word and to gain as much knowledge as we can of his plans and purposes, not for personal satisfaction or glory, but for the glory of the Lord, because we love him. However, we cannot substitute love for a knowledge of God's plan.

Even a mountain-moving faith such as we have discussed, apart from love, would not be pleasing to God. We know that without such a faith we cannot please God, nor would we have the strength and the courage to move forward in the doing of his will. Love must always be the motive which prompts our works of faith if we are to be pleasing to the Lord.

Jesus said to the rich young ruler that if he bestowed all his goods to feed the poor he would be laying up treasures in heaven. (Matt. 19:21) Laying up heavenly treasure is what we should do, for it is the condition upon which we walk the narrow way. Paul explains, however, that if we thus give our all in the service of the Lord apart from the motivation of love, it will profit us nothing. (I Cor. 13:3) There will be no treasure laid up in heaven.

Paul invites us to present our bodies a living sacrifice, or, symbolically speaking, give our bodies to be burned. (Rom. 12:1) This is what consecration means. Taking up our cross and following the Master into death is a crucial test of our faith, and the works of a true faith will be manifested by giving “the witness of Jesus” and “the word of God,” sacrificing our all in service to the Lord and to the brethren. (Rev. 20:4) Here again, these aspects of the Christian life must be intermingled with, and prompted by love, else we will fail to make our calling and election sure.

How wonderful are the qualities of love! “Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth.”—I Cor. 13:4-8, *Revised Version*

### **“PATIENCE OF HOPE”**

As quoted in the beginning, not only does Paul speak of the Thessalonian brethren as being faithful in their “work of faith, and labour of love,” but also of their “patience of hope.” Christian hope engenders patience, or cheerful endurance. A bright and shining hope helps us to avoid becoming “weary in well doing,” knowing that “in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”—Gal. 6:9

Hope is a combination of desire and assurance. A person might be afflicted with an incurable disease. Naturally he would desire to be cured of that disease, but since the doctors could give him no assurance

that he could be cured, he would have no real hope. An individual might desire to possess wealth, and all the good things of life which wealth could procure. However, if his situation in life is such that he has no assurance of ever being wealthy, likewise he would have no true hope along this line.

On the other hand, the person with the incurable disease might be convinced by the testimony of his physicians that he would soon die, but we could not say that he hoped to die. The individual who desired to be wealthy might fear that he would grow old in poverty, but he would not hope to this end. If we both desire something and have an assurance from a reliable source that what we desire is obtainable, only then do we truly have hope.

Hope always relates to the future, either the near future or the distant future. Paul wrote, "We are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." (Rom. 8:24,25) Many in the world today are without hope. Though they desire many good things, including health and life, they have no assurance that the things desired will ever become realities. The reason so many people of the world have no assurance is that they have little or no faith in God, and therefore no confidence in his promises.

However, what a wonderful hope we have for the world! It is the hope of restitution, based on the assurances which God has given to us by the mouth of all his holy prophets. (Acts 3:20,21) In brief, these restitution promises of God assure us that a time is coming, and soon, when there will be no more war, no more pain, no more death. They reveal also that

those who have died are to be awakened from the sleep of death and given an opportunity to share in the blessings which the Lord has provided for the whole world of mankind. Yes, a glorious new day is near for the suffering world of mankind, and in this blessed hope we rejoice.—Mic. 4:1-4; Acts 24:14,15; Rev. 21:3,4

## **OUR GLORIOUS HOPE**

The individual child of God has an even more blessed hope. Paul describes it as the “hope of the glory of God.” (Rom. 5:2) We are “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” This includes the hope of immortality and partaking of the divine nature. (Rom. 2:7; 8:17; II Pet. 1:4) As natural men and women we did not desire these blessings, for we knew nothing about them. However, God opened the eyes of our understanding, and by his love we were led to devote ourselves to the doing of his will. As we learned of the glorious things provided for those who love him and follow in the footsteps of the Master, we desired them, and through his promises God assures us that by his grace we can obtain them. Thus we have a glorious hope!

As quoted earlier from Paul, having this hope “we with patience wait for it.” That is, we wait for its fulfillment. This is the “patience of hope.” We need patience, for many difficulties are involved in attaining the fruition of our hope. Paul wrote that we are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ “if so be that we suffer with him.” (Rom. 8:17) Therefore, to attain that for which we hope we must suffer. We must be planted together in the likeness of Jesus’ sacrificial death. (Rom. 6:5) We must continue faithful in the

narrow way of sacrifice until we have been faithful even unto death. It is only thus that we may hope to attain the “crown of life.” (Rev. 2:10) Truly, we have much need for the patience of hope!

Faith, hope and love are fundamental in the Christian life. Paul wrote that “the greatest of these is love.” (I Cor. 13:13, *RV*) This does not detract from the importance of faith and hope, but reminds us that love, being one of the attributes of God himself, will be eternal. Faith in God will likewise always be essential, for although the world of mankind will receive the kingdom blessings of restitution in many visual ways, their eternal relationship with God will still require faith.

Hope will not be needed once it is realized and understood. As quoted earlier, Paul wrote that when we receive what we have hoped for, there is no further need to hope for it. Love, on the other hand, will always be essential. It is the opposite of selfishness. All pride and selfishness are to be destroyed from the earth. Indeed, they will not be permitted anywhere in God’s great universe. Meanwhile, may we continue our work of faith, and our labor of love, while we patiently wait for the fulfillment of our hope. ■