

# FAITH, LOVE, AND HOPE

By Bill Irby

## FAITH, LOVE AND HOPE...

When Paul spoke of faith, love and hope in 1 Corinthians 13:13 he used a different order, "faith, hope and love." The order here is from Colossians 1:3-5. In 1 Corinthians Paul made it plain that the greatest of the three was love. So it must be that the order he chose in Colossians is not one of lesser to greater. But he does use a different order and one wonders why.

A look at the context reveals that he is in the midst of giving thanks for the church at Colosse. He prayed for them in this way: "Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in word of the truth of the gospel" (1:3-5). We know that the word "hope" means "desire plus expectation" and such is clearly the meaning in 1 Corinthians 13.

Notice that in Colossians Paul speaks of a hope "laid up for you in heaven." This formulation puts us in mind of 1 Peter 1:3-4 where we learn that we have been "begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." Here Peter emphasized heaven as Paul did in Colossians, a location of hope.

In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul uses the words faith, hope and love to describe the permanent characteristics of Christian behavior, thus the ranking of love as the ultimate. In Colossians, as with Peter's use, the word "hope" is used to describe not so much a behavior as an objective of the Christian life.

We should not be surprised to find that the meaning of a word be dependant on the context in which it is used. For example, Jesus is cast as the personification of hope in Hebrews 6:18-20. Hope then can be a Christian attitude or spiritual behavior (as in 1 Corinthians). Hope can be the person of Christ (as in Hebrews). And hope can be that for which we strive as an objective.

Though Peter sees hope as having its purpose a concentrated looking forward to our inheritance in heaven, another shade of meaning is revealed by Paul. He was thankful that the saints in Colosse. He also prayed for the hope which was "laid up" for them in heaven. They practiced faith and love towards an end...that end was the hope they had in heaven.

Sooner or later reflective minds realize that the future without a rather specific hope is an empty proposition. For what object does a man who sees himself as without God have to hope? A man may deceive himself and think that God does not exist and therefore once he dies he simply exists no more. A simple matter, unless it is not so. And since God does exist it is manifestly not so that a man simply and only dies. We will face God.

It is this hope, this object of Christian life, which makes life meaningful in the midst of disconsolation, bearable in the throes of pain, and even joyful when surrounded by trials and troubles. This objective called hope is the thing we are looking forward to, the thing that makes it all worthwhile. And it is safely reserved in heaven for the Christian.

Please take time to notice that Paul reminds the Colossians that they heard about this in the gospel. The good news is that this hope is still available from the same source...the truth of the gospel.