

Sunday, October 26, 2014

Series: BECOMING ALL GOD DESIGNED US TO BE Using Colossians as a Manual

Theme: Three Cardinal Virtues of Christian Living

Video: Who God Says You Are

Scripture: Colossians 1:3-6

We always pray for you, and we give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>4</sup>For we have heard of **your faith in Christ Jesus** and **your love for all of God's people**,

<sup>5</sup>which come from **your confident hope of what God has reserved for you in heaven**. You have had this expectation ever since you first heard the truth of the Good News.

<sup>6</sup>This same Good News that came to you is going out all over the world. It is bearing fruit everywhere by changing lives, just as it changed your lives from the day you first heard and understood the truth about God's wonderful grace.

As we prepare for the transition of Pastoral Leadership of NCCN in 2016 we are seeking to become all God designed us to be as a church and as individual disciples of Jesus using the letter to the Colossians in the New Testament as our manual.

- Objective: to present us to God perfect in our relationship with Christ (1:28).
- A Vision for the church is identified in a prayer expressed in 1:9-14
  - May God to give you complete knowledge of his will along with spiritual wisdom and understanding that you might
  - Honor and please the Lord in everything we do (9c; 3:17)
  - Produce fruit in every good work (10a; Galatians 5:22-23)
  - Grow in the knowledge of God (10b)
  - Be strengthened with his glorious power (11a; Ephesians 1:19-20)
  - Be filled with joy (11b-14)

St. Paul, the author of this manual, saw and commended three virtues being practiced by the Colossian Christians (1.4-5):

1. Faith in Christ Jesus
2. Love for all of God's people
3. Confident hope of what God has reserved for them in heaven

A Virtue is a moral excellence; a positive trait or quality deemed to be morally good and thus is valued as a foundation of principle and good (Wikipedia). St. Paul commends these virtues in two other letters in the New Testament: 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians.

What would happen if we made these three virtues standards for our church?

- I. Faith in Christ Jesus centers life for believers and the church in Christ Jesus as Lord
  - Faith is a God-given capacity to believe and act on that belief.
    - The question is not whether we have faith or how much faith we have.
    - The question is, "where is your faith centered?" This center identifies your values and guides you in your decisions in life.
    - Don't claim faith in Jesus when you do not follow him as your Lord.
  - The significance of Jesus in this *Manual* of Christian Living

- *Through Jesus* God has enabled *us* to share in the inheritance that belongs to his people, who live in the light. For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins (Colossians 1:12-14).
- God, in all his fullness, was pleased to live in Christ and reconciled everything to himself through Christ. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross. This includes us who were once far away from God. We were his enemies, separated from him by our evil thoughts and actions. Yet now *God* has reconciled us to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought *us* into his own presence, and we are holy and blameless as we stand before him without a single fault (1:19-22, *paraphrased*).
- Faith in Christ Jesus is living as citizens of the Kingdom of God in this world.
  - It believes and lives as though God's promise to bring everything in heaven and on earth to unity under the lordship of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:9-10)
    - This same God prophesied the defeat of Satan by Jesus in the Garden of Eden about 5,000 years before Jesus came to earth (Genesis 3:15). And He fulfilled that prophesy through the resurrection of Jesus from the grave.
    - This same God promised this Messiah through the prophet Isaiah about 700 years before Jesus came to earth and fulfilled that promise in Jesus.
    - This same God is moving toward a time in the future when he will bring to fulfillment the kingdom of Heaven (Revelation 21-22)
  - Warning: Jesus taught: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21)
  - Church is not about my needs and me. Church is about the Kingdom of God.
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer's warning of cheap grace is significant for us here. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate. Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ
- Where is your faith centered today?
  - Is it in Christ Jesus as proclaimed in the Scripture?
  - Are you settling for a modernized Christianity shaped by ideas of being nice or have you placed your faith in a Christ who will transform us in His image.
  - Do you have a faith in Christ that makes you a witness for Christ in this world or are you trying to reproduce church programs that died?

- Do you have a faith in Christ that makes a difference in the difficult choices of life?
- I invite you this day to renew your faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

## II. Love for all God's people

- Love for one another in this church
  - It's sometimes easier to love people in Africa than sisters and brothers in your family or in our church family.
  - Jesus said the world will know we are his followers because of the way we love one another (John 13:34-35)
- Love your neighbor as yourself
  - Second greatest commandment according to Jesus
  - The greatest of the commandments according to Paul (Romans 13:8-10)
- This love grows out of our faith in Christ Jesus as Lord
  - It is insufficient to love because God tells us to
  - God brings healing and pours his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5)
  - This faith enables us to genuinely pray: "Forgive our sins as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us."
- The most significant tool we have for leading people to Christ is love for them as persons who are loved by God. In our desire to lead people to faith in Jesus we can make them projects to be saved rather than authentically loving them as people God loves.

## III. Confident hope of what God has reserved for us in heaven

- We are citizens of the kingdom of heaven
- Sometimes we feel like prisoners and want to escape the hardship of this world. Stories of the Bible reveal God's bigger story. Illustrations: Joseph and Daniel
- The Christian hope is that God's way is the best way, that the only happiness, the only peace, the only joy, the only true and lasting reward are to be found in the way of God. ...The Christian hope is the certainty that it is better to stake one's life on God than to believe the world (William Barclay, *Colossians, Daily Study Bible Series*, 127)

The faith and love of the Colossians have been nourished, not by an inner effort of the will, but rather by the solid fact of the promises of God. This hope of the coming of the Saviour, of the resurrection of the body and of life everlasting, is something given by God. As such it depends, not on whether they can maintain a mood of optimism in changing circumstances, but on the unchanging character of God thus it is described as being *laid up* for them *in heaven*. ... so the hope of glory is carefully kept by God as a treasure which one day they will fully share (Herbert M. Carson [vicar of St. Paul's Church, Cambridge]. *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary* from Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, P. 31)

Faith, Love and Hope: Are you practicing these virtues today?

GOOD NEWS: we are called to practice these virtues in the ordinary routines of life.

“You Need a More Ordinary Jesus: We are united with a Christ who seems not to have done much of note for most of his life” (Kevin P. Emmert, *Christianity Today*, October 20, 2014)

Mother Teresa, in her book *No Greater Love*, encourages us to do the same: “Do not pursue spectacular deeds.... In the work we have to do it does not matter how small and humble it may be, make it Christ’s love in action.... What matters is the gift of yourself, the degree of love that you put into each one of your actions.”

That is good news! The Christian stay-at-home [parent] with four kids, barista, janitor, or injured construction worker on disability can lead just as meaningful and “Christian” a life as the missionary, social worker, or conference speaker. The homely side of the Incarnation tells us it’s okay to attend an ordinary church, to have an ordinary job, to live in an ordinary house in an ordinary suburb. We can spread the gospel and the love of Christ in whatever context God has placed us.

In no way, however, does this justify spiritual lethargy. God wants all Christians to embody and live out the gospel in some form or another. And to be sure, he indeed calls certain people to express their faith in singular ways. ... But for most of us, life will be ordinary.

At the same time, our lives will often be necessarily countercultural. Christian faith defies cultural norms and human reason. We profess faith in a triune God and in a Savior who is both fully human and fully divine. Scripture calls us to celebrate crucifixion, rejoice in suffering, and hope for a physical resurrection. It instructs us to love our enemies, help the poor, care for orphans and widows, and tend to the sick. Our faith is radical indeed when compared to the world around us. But radical is not synonymous with extraordinary, as some are wont to conclude. Neither is ordinary synonymous with complacent or hypocritical. In Christ, we can live meaningful, gospel-centered lives in the midst of the ordinary and the mundane. That plain truth is a relief.

NCCN, you will be calling a new pastor in the next year to lead you into the future.

- There will be changes. We will never do “church” like we did in 70’s, 80’s or 90’s. Life has moved on. Times have changed. The way we do church will change. Small churches will not do programs like mega churches do.
- This is not a time for wringing our hands in fear or grumbling or being discouraged
- It is time for us to nurture our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, love people and do ministry confident in the hope of what God has planned for us here on earth and reserved for us in heaven in the future?

Are you known for your faith in Christ, your love for the people God loves and confident hope in the promises of God? Are they realities for you today?

Are these three virtues visible in your daily life in the midst of the communities where you live and work?

Can the Apostle say of us:

We have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all of God’s people, which come from your confident hope of what God has reserved for you in heaven.