

The Fundamental Marks of A True Christian

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[0 : 0 0] 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. Amen.

There's a lot of ways to learn about a person, isn't there? But perhaps the best way to really get a sense of who a person is is if you can ever get a hold of some kind of personal correspondence that they have sent or received, maybe in the form of a letter or a journal.

That's the reason that those of you who are ladies who had a journal as a middle school or as a teenage girl hid them in private places so that your brothers couldn't get to them and see what's really in your mind about them or about someone or about things that are going on in your life.

You get a sense of who a person is that way, don't you? I mentioned to you last week by way of introduction to 1 Thessalonians how that when Julie and I were in college, there was a letter exchange program on campus for the student body that they called the Pony Express and it was a way for you to send lots of things but primarily you'd send your love letters to the people that you were interested in.

And Julie and I took advantage of that and the girls discovered that during the sermon last Sunday. And then Ashlyn and Harper discovered that Julie actually keeps a box full of those letters from college in our closet.

[1 : 3 5] And from what I understand from Julie, the girls have been eager to get their eyes on those letters. And I sat and I thought as I was preparing for this sermon this week, I thought, why do they want to read these letters?

These things would probably be so cheesy. Like it's just going to make them laugh probably more than anything else. And maybe that's why they want to read them. I think there might be a little bit more to it.

But they know Julie and me better than anybody else in the world. Nobody knows mine and Julie's heart and our behavior and who we are better than the three girls that live in our house with us every single day.

Why would they care to read these letters? Because despite that fact, they know that reading those letters will give them an even fuller sense and understanding of their parents.

And of our love and of our lives together. They want to read them because they want to get inside our hearts, so to speak, so that they might get a better sense of who we are.

[2 : 4 1] That's why we do that. When we come to the first three chapters of 1 Thessalonians, what we have here is it consists primarily of personal correspondence.

And it's through this personal portion of the letter that we get the best sense of the people involved. We often think of the Apostle Paul as a brilliant theologian, as an impactful and useful preacher of the gospel.

We think of him as an accomplished missionary in the early church and establishing churches, really as far as he was concerned, all over the world and the known world in his mind.

And yet when we come to 1 Thessalonians in particular, we see it in other places, but in 1 Thessalonians in particular, in these first three chapters, we start to get a different sense, a fuller sense for Paul.

We see him here as a pastor. We see him as a friend. And it gives us a fuller sense of who he was as we read what he wrote to these individuals.

[3 : 50] But it doesn't just give us that. It also gives us a better sense of the people in Thessalonica, particularly a better sense of their radical conversion.

We just get a little piece of that in Luke's narrative in Acts chapter 17. But when we come to the letters that Paul, in the personal correspondence that they add with one another, we get a better sense of their radical conversion to Christ.

And primarily we get really a wonderful sense of their perseverance of faith in the face of really quite extreme persecution. As we'll see in the coming weeks, even in the remainder of this paragraph in chapter 1, their perseverance was the thing that stuck out the most about them.

It was their perseverance of faith that was so commendable that unbeknownst to them, they actually became an example of faithfulness to all the other churches in their region.

It was really quite amazing. Well, this morning we turn our attention here to the opening statements of this correspondence. And as was Paul was wont to do in the letters that he wrote to the churches, he opens this one with a statement of thanksgiving for the church.

[5 : 02] And that's what's recorded in these two verses. It's primarily just a prayer of thanksgiving on behalf of the Thessalonian Christians. It's a prayer of thanksgiving that is shaped entirely by the gospel message that we know this church was rooted in from our study last week.

Now what I want to do is I want to draw out this morning more than just Paul's thankful heart. We're going to address that. That's important. There's things we can learn from that to be sure.

But that's not what I want us to focus most of our attention on. I don't think it's the main emphasis of what he's saying. The focus of his thanks is what we really want to draw our minds focus to.

The focus of his thanks is the fruit of genuine Christianity that marked the Thessalonian church. What is the essence of a true Christian?

How might we define that from a biblical sense? That is what this text helps us to understand. And that's what I want the focus of our study together to be.

[6 : 14] I want to show you from this text the fundamental marks of a true Christian. Not a professing Christian. A true Christian.

The first thing I want you to see, we'll skip verse 2, we'll come back to it. And I want to go directly to verse 3. That's where the emphasis is. And this is where we find three essential virtues of genuine Christianity.

Just read the verse with me again. Remembering before our God and Father your work of faith, your labor of love, and your steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

You notice the common triad here. Faith, love, and hope are a triad of Christian virtues that are repeated regularly throughout the New Testament in reference to what is the essence of a true Christian.

What marks them. And very often we see these three things put together in that description. Let me give you just three examples to show you how this is repeated in the New Testament.

[7 : 25] Galatians chapter 5 verses 5 and 6. Paul again writes to this church and he says that it is through the Holy Spirit, by faith, that we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.

For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

Here's the triad again, intentionally brought together by the apostle in connection with the person and the work of Jesus Christ in order to say, as he does in verse 6, that who you are is irrelevant to whether or not you're a Christian.

Your context is irrelevant to whether or not you're a Christian, but it is faith working through love that shows up in the hope of righteousness and the hope of Jesus Christ.

What is the essence of a true Christian? Faith, hope, and love. 1 Peter chapter 1 verses 21 through 23. Peter writes, You through Christ are believers in God who raised Christ from the dead and gave him glory so that your faith and hope are in God.

[8 : 46] Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart since you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable.

How does this faith, love, and hope come about? Last phrase of the verse. Through the living and abiding word of God.

What is the essence of a true Christian? Peter says, Well, it has elements of faith and hope and love all tied to the gospel of Jesus, and it comes about as a work of grace through the scriptures, through the word of God.

Hebrews chapter 6 is the third one I'd like to show you. There are many more that you could look at, most notably would be 1 Corinthians 13, 13. You probably, maybe you had this displayed at your wedding. Then there is faith and hope and love, but the greatest of these is love.

Why would Paul even say that? It's not that love is more significant than hope and faith when it comes to these virtues. It's that there will come a time when faith and hope will no longer be necessary. They will be fulfilled.

[9 : 52] But even at that time, the love will continue. But it's Hebrews chapter 6 that I want to draw your attention to now. Verse 10. God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints.

Now what is the nature of this virtuous love? It is love towards others in the name of God and his son Jesus. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness, to have the full assurance of hope until the end so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Again, faith, hope, and love, this triad of Christian virtue. What is the essence of a true Christian? We continually come back in different ways to this triad in the New Testament.

Every true Christian possesses them and they will continually grow and flourish as believers mature in Christ. These three virtues will only get bigger and broader and wider and more evident.

But what is the relationship of the three of them together? Back to 1 Thessalonians 1 and verse 3. What is the relationship of them together? Is there a relationship of these three virtues together?

[11 : 16] And I would suggest that there is. The faith that Paul mentions in this verse is not unloving or without hope. The love that he mentions here is not unbelieving or hopeless.

The hope that he mentions here is not unloving or unbelieving. Else it wouldn't be what it is. There is an interconnectedness here.

Though each virtue is distinct, they are not independent of one another. They are interconnected and they are interconnected by the final statement of verse 3.

That all of these things are functioning, that they are grounded and that they are rooted in what? That they are rooted in our Lord Jesus Christ.

faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ produces true works of righteousness.

[12 : 19] Love for Jesus motivates the Christian's love for others. Hope in Jesus brings about the steadfastness of faith in the face of suffering.

The three virtues are unique perspectives of one event in a person's life. That is their conversion to Jesus Christ.

Meaning that all three are essential to and will be present in anyone who is a true, genuine, biblical, Christian.

Faith, not in faith itself, but faith in Jesus in particular. Love, not in a generic sense, but love for Jesus in particular.

Hope, not in wishful thinking, but hope that is rooted in Jesus in particular. To say it another way, without these three virtues being present and rooted in Jesus, you cannot possibly be a true Christian.

[13 : 48] They are the essence of genuine conversion and they have everything to do with Christ. They are the fruit. Jesus is the root.

Now, Paul's thanksgiving for the Thessalonian Christians is focused on their display of these fundamental virtues. But the way that he speaks about them is actually quite unique.

Every statement includes a spiritual action that is motivated by a specific virtue. Just set your eyes on it again. He says of their work of faith.

That is, this faith motivates and produces certain works. Then he talks about their labor of love. That is, their love for Christ produces a kind of loving labor for Christ and for others.

Then he talks about their steadfastness of hope. That is, their hope in Jesus produces then a steadfastness. That is the only way it works. The works cannot possibly produce the things themselves.

[14 : 58] Works does not produce faith. It is the other way around, isn't it? Faith produces works. Labor does not lead to love. Labor may actually lead to hate.

It is the love that leads to joyful labor. Steadfastness or just pulling yourself up by your bootstrap is not what is going to get you through and produce hope.

No, it is not how it works. We know it works the other way around, doesn't it? That is Paul's point. It is unique. He mentions the triad but he mentions these spiritual actions that are revealed, that reveal this triad of Christian virtue.

What I want to do here for just a moment is take each of them in turn. Let's look first at the work of faith. The work of faith. Paul, of course, he does not mean to imply a connection between human merit and eternal salvation.

We know that because he has settled that anti-gospel heresy sufficiently in other places. Let me give you two examples. Romans chapter 3 verses 19 to 30.

[16 : 00] Paul, writing to the church in Rome, says, Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law so that every mouth may be stopped.

That is, in judgment, no one will be able to say, well, look what I've done because everyone will have to say, I have not done what I ought to have done. I have failed. I have sinned.

That's the point of that statement. And the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law, Paul says, no human being will be justified in God's sight, will be declared righteous.

Another way we might say that is that it will be declared as saved in God's sight since through the law does not come forgiveness of sin. Through the law just comes the knowledge of sin.

The law exposes our sin. It cannot redeem us from our sin. No, it takes something else for that. Galatians chapter 3, Paul says it again, even more elaborately perhaps.

[17 : 03] He says in verse 10, for all who rely on works of the law are under a curse. For it's written, cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law and do them.

Verse 13, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law. How? By becoming a curse for us.

For it's written, cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come even to the Gentiles so that we might receive the promised spirit.

How? Through faith. So we don't need to mistake what Paul's saying here. We need to look at the entire corpus of Pauline literature and understand Paul was not insinuating or implying in any way here that it is works that is connected in some way to salvation.

That's not what he means. And if you're relying on your morality to earn some kind of saving favor with God, the scripture makes it clear particularly in Galatians 3 that you are under a curse.

[18 : 17] And what is this curse? The curse is that you have not and will never fulfill all that God's moral law requires of you. There you are, thereby you are cursed to face God's judgment because you'll never live up to God's standard.

No human ever will. We cannot. So salvation then is not earned by what you do. It is received by faith in what Jesus Christ has done on your behalf.

You are cursed under the law. He never offended the law even in one way. He fulfilled it on your behalf. He lived the life that we were meant to live as I often say.

And then he died the death that we deserve to die. And in doing so, he made it possible for God the Father to declare us righteous even though we are not so.

Our righteousness before God is not an actual righteousness. righteousness. It is what we call an imputed righteousness. It is credited to us by the work of Christ in his death and in his resurrection.

[19 : 42] And it is credited to us not through human merit. It is credited to us through faith alone. That being said, the New Testament clarifies that genuine saving faith is not alone.

But it produces, it is followed by human works. Thus Paul, when he's referring to the Thessalonians here in verse 3, he recognizes their faith and he recognizes that faith because it has produced something in them.

It has produced an action in them. As the scriptures make clear, it does. James makes this abundantly clear. In James chapter 2 and verse 18, someone will say, you have faith and I have works.

James says, in response to that person, show me your faith apart from your works and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one, you do well.

But even the demons believe and shudder. What's James' point there? He's saying that intellectual, assent or belief is not the thing that we're aiming at here. That's not saving regenerate faith.

[20 : 59] Even the devil is orthodox in what he knows to be true. And yet he is not redeemed. So what does James mean? Do you want to be shown you foolish person?

He says that faith apart from works is useless because a faith that does not work is not a genuine saving faith.

That's Paul's point here. He says when I look at you I'm thankful for you because your faith has produced certain works. But what are those works that Paul is referring to?

They are not here merely what we would call good deeds. That's a part of it to be sure. But that's not what he's primarily referring to I don't believe. they are true works of righteousness that are motivated by genuine faith in Christ.

They include repentance of sin not in one moment but ongoing continually in every moment.

[22 : 09] A humble heart of turning away from sin. Those are the works of faith. they include trust in God's word. You say how can I trust something that I don't fully understand?

Well that's the nature of faith. The works of faith include trusting what God has said. They include the fruit of the spirit.

A supernatural transformation whereby as a result of our faith and redemption the Holy Spirit begins this progressive transformation and where was once the works of the flesh he now begins to replace them with things like love and joy and peace and long suffering and gentleness and goodness and faithfulness and meekness and temperance and so on and so forth the passage goes.

What are the works of faith? Well it is the evidence of the fruit of the spirit in someone's life and then yes there's also good deeds but we must not narrow down the works of faith to volunteering at the homeless shelter or providing some formula for the people in the mountains when they were really struggling as many of you did just last week.

It's not that that doesn't matter or that it's irrelevant it's just it's not the fullness of what he's talking about here. The fullness of the faith that works is repentance it's fruitfulness in the faith it's trust in God's word and yes it's also goodness and love for others.

[23 : 38] Thus Jesus said just as you can know a tree by its fruit you can identify an apple tree by the fact that it grows apples is Jesus' point. So you can identify a true Christian by the works of righteousness that flow out of in particular their personal faith in Jesus Christ.

Not works of righteousness that are alone but works of righteousness that specifically are the overflow of their faith in Christ. That's the works of faith.

Second we have the labor of love. The labor of love. Surely you've heard this statement before perhaps you've used it before. We've long used the phrase in English to refer to voluntarily taking on a task for pleasure rather than reward or payment.

That's a labor of love isn't it? It is out of love for the thing itself or love for those that will benefit that one enters in to toil and hardship and labor.

Many of you know my dad. Dad has been here even recently. He was here just a month ago to preach. If you spent more than 20 seconds with my dad on that Sunday when he was here then you probably know that my dad's current labor of love is restoring cast iron skillets.

[25 : 07] The reason you know that is because he tells everybody about it. He is as much an evangelist for his cast iron restoration as he is for the Lord Jesus Christ at this point in his life. If you were to walk into my parents' kitchen today there are dozens that is not an exaggeration is it Julie?

There are dozens dozens of remarkably restored cast iron skillets and they are on display they are just there.

He has got these racks of them and they are on the walls and he cooks with some of them. Most of them they just sit there. He loves to go to yard sales and he gets on Facebook marketplace. He has a spot at the police station in Gastonia where he goes and he meets people on Facebook and they exchange their cast iron skillets and he takes them home and he spends days.

He has got this makeshift machine that he has built that he has put in his garage and he doesn't sell them. It is not a side hustle. He does not have his own Facebook marketplace page where he puts them back on there and tries to make money.

They just sit there and he gives them away. The girls each have like two and he gives them away to people. What is that? It is a labor of love. It is work to do it.

[26 : 17] It is work to find them. It is work to restore them. It is work to make it all and he gets joy out of the labor because he loves the thing itself and he loves the people that he gets to give the things to.

But there is no reward for him. It is a labor of love isn't it? In the case of this text it is unmitigated love for Christ and Christ's people that motivates the toilsome task of Christian service and discipleship.

we just covenanted with three Christians in membership in our church. A labor of love would be to actually take the responsibility in a practical way for their discipleship the way that we have just said and promised that we would.

Meaningful membership and discipleship and service to one another through the church is a labor. It is a toil. It is a hardship. It is not easy.

It leaves you vulnerable. And yet out of love for Christ and out of love for his people we are to eagerly and joyfully enter into that labor.

[27 : 36] I heard someone say this week the church is where it's none of your business goes to die. Why?

Because it is our love for one another that drives our service to one another and essential to our service to one another is the continual discipleship correction maybe and teaching of the gospel and of what God has asked of us to be.

That is our purpose with one another. We don't just meet together on Sundays to have a worship service. You ought to be with one another throughout the week for the purpose of Christian love and discipleship.

Jesus himself said that it is our love for one another that will testify to the world that we belong to him. He said it in John 13 verse 34 a new commandment I give to you that you love one another just as I have loved you that's the qualifier.

He says in the way that I have loved you that is the way that Christians are to love one another. by this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

[28 : 50] There we get it again from the very mouth of Jesus. He says what is the essence of a true Christian? Well it is someone who bears the love of Christ for others especially other Christians and that's how the world will know.

It is an essential virtue that belongs to those who are truly in Christ. nothing is more laborsome than love.

Nothing is. Love is not merely a feeling. I'm tempted to sing a song and I won't do it.

Hooked on a feeling. That's not what we're talking about here. Don't tell my mom I did that. love isn't something you can fall into or fall out of.

It doesn't actually work that way. Love is a relational commitment at its heart. Love calls us to sacrifice self for the good of someone else.

[30 : 01] Isn't that what Jesus means when he tells his disciples in John 13 in the way that I have loved you and by the way I'm about to go to the cross for you in the way that I have loved you. That's how you are to love one another.

Isn't that what he says to husbands in Ephesians chapter five? Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. love. The only way to know that kind of love to the fullest extent in God's common grace we get to experience a touch of this but the only way to really know it in its fullest extent is to set your gaze on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Romans chapter five verses six through eight tell us that plainly. While we were still weak at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

And then Paul says for one will scarcely die for a righteous person. If you think somebody's a pretty good guy yeah you might offer your life for them. Perhaps for a good person one would even dare to die.

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. While we were still sinners that's not speaking of a past thing that's thinking of a present thing.

[31 : 17] In that moment we are his enemy and we are acting as his enemy and yet he gives himself to us anyways. That is the nature of God's love.

It is the supreme love of Christ for sinners that then motivates Christians' love for one another. That's what Paul means here.

There is love for Christ that then shows itself in a kind of labor. A labor in Christian ministry for Christ but particularly a labor for other Christians and discipleship.

For even people outside of the church in just kindness and love showing the love of Christ to others in a very real sense of that word. Self-sacrifice.

Thirdly we see steadfastness of hope. Steadfastness of hope. When the apostles wrote hope in the New Testament it's important to understand that they intended to communicate something different than we typically do when we use that word today.

[32 : 28] For the apostles in the biblical sense hope is meant as an absolute certainty of heart not a wishfulness about an uncertain future.

We need to understand that appropriately here. Otherwise steadfastness really doesn't make sense. It only makes sense in the context of an absolute certainty not in a potential wishfulness of something that you're uncertain about.

That will not cause you to endure anything. But what will cause you to endure is a certainty about what it is that you have placed your faith in. And incidentally that's what John Piper actually describes hope as.

He describes it as biblical hope being saving faith with an emphasis on future fulfillment. So it is the faith of Christ and the works of faith looking forward to the fulfillment of all of Christ's promises.

That is what the meaning of hope here is. Let me just give you a couple of examples of this that show you that I'm not just making this up. Look at Philippians chapter one in verse 20.

[33 : 34] This might be on the screen for you. Paul says to the Philippians, it is my eager expectation and hope hope that I will not be ashamed but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body whether by life or by death.

Now what's happening there? Paul was facing his potential martyrdom in Rome. He was under house arrest at the moment and he was uncertain about whether or not he was about to be beheaded or turns out that he wasn't martyred at that particular moment.

That would come later in his life. But he didn't know that at this point. So he's writing to the Philippians and he's talking about what is on his heart and what's in his mind in relation to this potential death. And what is it that he says that he would indeed remain faithful to the end.

Why? Because he was absolutely certain of the gospel message he had been proclaiming which had landed him in such a situation. It wasn't his wish.

He spoke of it as his eager expectation. expectation. That's the sense of hope. Let me give you just one more and this is all over the New Testament but let me just give you one more. In Acts chapter 26 and verse 6 we see of Paul and now I stand here.

[34 : 48] This is he saying as he's on trial. Now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers. So he's referencing the gospel here and he's standing there on trial he says because of his hope in that gospel message.

Paul wasn't on trial because he wished for the gospel to be true. Nobody in Rome was threatened by Paul's wishfulness.

What they were threatened by was Paul's certainty which was revealed in his gospel preaching. And that's what led him to faithfully proclaim the gospel at the risk of his own life.

That's the kind of hope that we're talking about here. So when we get back to 1 Thessalonians 1:3 we see that the hope here is not a wishfulness. It is a certainty that exists in the Thessalonian believers.

So when Paul and Silas and Timothy write to the Christians there and of their hope they're referring to their absolute certainty of heart regarding the truth of Jesus Christ, his resurrection, and his return.

[35 : 58] Now why would Paul do that? Why would he find it necessary to write of their steadfastness of hope? Well as we learned last week this church was under severe persecution from its very inception.

The reality of this persecution that looms large over this entire letter. So severe was it that Paul was concerned in chapter 3 that we'll eventually get to, Paul was concerned whether they would continue in the faith at all or if they would just abandon it all together because of the pressure of it.

Yet despite their circumstances, the church of the Thessalonians remained steadfast. They endured. Why?

Because their hope in Christ produced such steadfastness. Their certainty of the gospel caused them to persevere. They patiently endure the suffering with firm expectation that what Christ began at his resurrection he will complete at his return.

All Christian hope thus rests in the historic bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is as a result of their hope in the resurrection that they had an eager and firm hope in Christ's return.

[37 : 29] Three essential virtues for Christianity. Now lest we think that we accomplish all of this on our own, it will be necessary for us to finish by looking at verse 2.

So look at it with me. Before focusing in on the triad, Paul says, we give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers.

What do we find here in verse 2? We find God's work of grace in our faith, love, and hope. What's most noteworthy about the thanksgiving here is that it was offered in the context of prayer.

It wasn't just occasional prayer, continual prayer. They were thankful for the Thessalonians, but their thanksgiving was not directed to the Thessalonians.

Did you notice that? In fact, they explicitly say, we give thanks to God for you. Now, I want you to meditate on that.

[38 : 44] Let that sink into your mind. The subject of their thanksgiving is the actions performed by the Thessalonians.

That's verse 3. But the object of their thanksgiving is God. Now, that's strange. If I were to give you a gift today, no doubt you would, in response, turn and say thank you.

But what if instead of thanking me for the gift that I purchased and wrapped and handed over to you, you turned to Josh Francis and you said, oh my goodness, Josh, thank you for this gift that Jared gave me.

That's weird, right? You wouldn't do that. Why is it that Paul does it then? Paul and his team were immensely thankful for the Thessalonians' actions.

But they understood God to be the definitive cause of those actions. Therefore, all of their gratitude was directed to the Lord.

[39 : 51] Everything happening through the church of the Thessalonians was a work of grace. And whether thinking of their radical conversion or their exemplary perseverance of faith, Paul understood that it was all the result of God's gracious work in the hearts of those young Christians.

And the same goes for you and me. It is no different for us. The truth is that every conversion to Christ is a miracle of God's sovereign grace.

It is a miracle. You wonder if miracles still happen today. Look around. Listen to the three testimonies of conversion.

That doesn't happen because Kathy and Sarah Lynn and Todd just decided, you know what? We figured it out and we're going to go with it. No, that's not how it works. No, God is active in that.

We're so lost in our sins, dead in them, according to Ephesians chapter two and verse one, that the only possible way for our hearts to repent and turn to Christ is if God himself does a miracle of resurrection whereby he brings a dead soul to life in Christ.

[41 : 07] Christ, it is a work of grace. The same goes for our spiritual maturity, for our perseverance of faith. It is all a work of grace.

Consider Ephesians chapter two, verses eight through ten. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing. It's a gift of God.

It's not a result of works so that no one may boast. And then he continues even beyond the conversion. We are his workmanship.

What does that mean? It means that even after we come to Christ in faith, God is still doing a building work. We are a work. There was a song we sang when I was a kid. He's still working on me to make me what I ought to be.

It took him just a week to make the moon and the stars, the sun and the earth and Jupiter and Mars. How loving and faithful he must be. He's still working on me.

[42 : 12] You know that song? You know what we learn in that song as kids? That there is a work that God is doing. We are cooperating with him in that work to be sure.

But this is his work. We are his workmanship. We are created. It's important.

You can't create yourself. Created in Christ Jesus for the purpose of good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

This is a work of grace, loved ones. what does this mean for us in this text well why does it matter that we acknowledge that paul sees these virtues and then he thanks god for them if nothing else it's a reminder that all of our praise belongs to god alone that's what he says in ephesians 2 so that no man may boast god is the definitive cause of anything good that is in us he awakens our hearts to trust in christ he supplies us with his spirit so that we might grow in faithfulness he will complete that work at christ's return finally delivering us from sin and sorrow that's the hope we owe everything to the gracious work of god he alone is worthy of our praise and it is to him that we must ultimately direct our thanksgiving let me finish with a question i made an argument today and you may disagree with the argument but the argument comes from the scripture itself so according to the word of god according to what is said by god in the scriptures are you a true christian is your faith in christ is your love for christ is your hope in christ prove it how well that faith will produce certain works works of righteousness and that love will produce a certain labor a labor of christian love for the lord and for others and that hope will produce a kind of endurance that will persevere through the darkness through the temptation through the struggle and through the hardships that we face not because we just got it all together but because god is gracious to us well how does god do this work it sounds a lot like i can't do anything about it as sarah lynn said in her testimony i just thought that some were in and some were out and i just happen to be in the out category and it's a bit of a mystery isn't it until we study the scriptures and we find that god does this work of grace through his word he does it through his word it is not for us to know the mystery of god's sovereign purposes what we do know is that he has revealed himself and his truth in the pages of the bible and that it is we come to the bible the sword of the spirit that god does this work of grace that's why we preach the gospel because it is through the preaching of the gospel that god does this work of grace it's why we observe the ordinances the way that we do and that we want even unbelievers to look in on those ordinances because god does his work of grace through his word that's why he can say you will be without excuse our rejection is willful isn't it that part is all of us but there is a work of grace that god does through the gospel and he calls us to respond to that gospel and if you sense that tug of heart that conviction of heart that's not you feeling bad about yourself that's god doing a work of grace

so come to christ are you a true christian only christ can make you so and he offers it offers it to you freely so come and receive the rest that he provides