

“The Habits of Your Heart”

1 Corinthians 13:13

Rev. Min J. Chung

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¹³ *So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

Introduction

We have two natures. Our hearts consist of two natures if you’re Christian. Nature means bodies of desires. We were born with a sinful nature but now we have spiritual nature and we have two kinds of desires – good and bad desires – battling inside of us. There is always conflict in our hearts, even as Christians.

We have a complicated relationship with sin. Pastor KJ and I are not only both tall and play basketball, but we also like Oberweis vanilla milkshakes. We can’t say no to one because we have a complicated relationship with a vanilla milkshake. I love the taste of it but I hate what comes after that. I love what it does *for* me but I hate what it does *to* me. Sin is like that. We have pleasure in our sin. We sin because we like what it does *for* us, but we know what happens afterward. If you’re Christian, there is a desire in you that hates sin because we know what it does *to* us. We need to know that we are eternal beings and our heart is alive. We are ever changing, with both natures and desires ever growing. Therefore, both one minute of prayer as well as one choice to sin change us forever, one degree to another. So, by His grace, we choose – at this moment – to live for Jesus. Every moment is a choice.

The question is, can we really choose? When we’re failing in sin and we’re struggling with our addictions, can we really control our hearts? I would say yes because we can control our heart, not in the way we control our body, but in the way that we control our health. There is a delayed pleasure when we choose to do what is right and choose to get closer to the Lord. Sometimes we may not have immediate gratification, but in the overall sense, it’s going to help us to control our hearts and our lives. You have a choice to control your heart, sometimes immediately, but most of the time, eventually.

In the bigger picture, though we feel like we are losing the control of our hearts, we are actually in charge of it. Quit saying someone broke your heart. They can’t break it if you don’t give it to them. Quit saying “someone hurt me” as if we are victims because we can have control over that and they can’t hurt you if you don’t let them. Even though it hurts us immediately, it is eventually possible for us to overcome that, because the grace of God is available to infuse His power and grace into our spiritual nature. So just as we ask doctors, “what should I do for this problem?” and obey their instructions, we need to ask God and heed what He says to heal us and our hearts. Jesus is the healer and redeemer of our soul and the Bible is His prescription.

What does a good heart look like? This passage says, “*faith, hope, and love.*” This is talking about the condition of our heart because our heart, with two natures, can have the condition of doubt or the condition of faith, the condition of hopelessness or the condition of hope, the condition of selfishness or

the condition of loving other people and loving God. Two desires are battling. These are the three faces, the trio of conditions, of the heart.

What we do and the habits that we have eventually influence the condition of our hearts and control it. As we think about the past year, we will make some concrete commitments for the future that can help us to have a constant condition of faith, hope, and love in our hearts.

I. Faith – Seeing who God is and what God can do for you – you hunger

As we read Paul's books, we can understand his definition of what faith means. We can have our own definition of faith that is often unbiblical and wrong. When you read a textbook, you have an interpretation that is often different than the author's. The Bible is like that.

A. Initial faith - Salvation

Initial faith is while you were dead in your spiritual life, you hear the Gospel and you believe for the first time. You are saved. While you had your sin nature, the birth of the spiritual nature takes place. Now, you have a heart that can be in the condition of faith. Ephesians 2:8 says, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is a gift of God.*" By grace through faith, the spiritual nature is born.

B. Doctrinal faith – The Bible

Doctrinal faith, bodies of teaching and what you believe, is the belief in the Bible.

Ephesians 4:13 says, "*until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*" Here, "unity of the faith" is referencing bodies of teaching and doctrine. "Knowledge of the Son of God" is talking about doctrinal faith.

1 Timothy 4:1 says, "*Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,*" Here, "Depart from the faith" means departing from bodies of teaching, the Gospel, and sound teaching and doctrine. "Teachings of demons" means worldly teachings.

1 Timothy 4:6 says, "*If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed.*" Here, "the words of the faith and of the good doctrine" comes from the Word of God, which you believe and have followed.

C. Overall faith – The direction

Philippians 1:25, which says, "*Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith,*" is talking about the overall Christian life.

In 1 Timothy 6:12, when Paul says, "*Fight the good fight of faith,*" it's the comprehensive spiritual life and faith.

Likewise, Colossians 1:4 says, “*since we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints.*”

D. Condition faith – The present heart condition

Your heart is alive, and the present condition of your heart and faith is whether it is believing right now.

Matthew 21:22 says, “*And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith,*” which is if you believe in the promises of God.

Matthew 14:31 says, “*Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’*” Peter is walking on water and he’s looking at Jesus and trusting in the Word. The condition of his heart is faith, but when he looks at the wind and the waves, it reminds him of what his science teacher said. The condition of his heart is suddenly not of faith but of doubt. And Jesus comes and says, “*O you of little faith*” which is not talking about the amount of faith, but the condition of your heart. Large faith is continually believing. So, Jesus’s statement is talking about the present condition of your heart.

Right now, are you believing? The same sun that melts the snow hardens the clay. The same truth that softens some hearts hardens other hearts. If your heart is believing, your heart is soft and the Word of God will melt your heart. Your life will never be the same again.

As we pass from 2018 into 2019, how am I to build myself in such a way that I would have more? All four definitions of faith become the foundation. You must have initial faith – a spiritual life and heart that is born and the capability to receive God’s grace. Your heart has to be alive. The doctrinal faith must be there to understand the Scripture and see the greatness of God. The overall faith, the direction of commitment to the Lord, is also needed. With all those things met, as you think about the promise and greatness of God and you believe in your heart, the condition of your heart will be in faith through prayer and the Word. It takes all of that, comprehensively, for you to have the condition of your heart believing right now and have consistency of that, leading to greater faith.

II. Hope – Seeing what God will do for you and through you forever – you persevere

“What God *will*”: the future. So, you have hope and you persevere. What is hope?

A. Something good that will happen for sure that did not happen yet – certainty

We’re talking about the certainty of Christian hope. If you think about what man’s hope in this world is like, what do you hope for? “Oh, I hope he likes me” or “I hope I get an A” or “I hope I’ll win” or “I hope it doesn’t rain.” “I hope he likes me” depends on another person. “I hope it doesn’t rain” depends on the circumstances. The world’s hope is based on either somebody evaluating you (like getting an A from teachers), or the evaluation of yourself, or the circumstances. Worldly hope depends on people and circumstances. We are never certain.

Biblical hope is based not on human beings but on God, who is all powerful, all loving, and all faithful to His Promises. Therefore, using control of us and all the circumstances, what He says will be done. If you have hope in God, you have certainty.

B. You will receive the best thing in eternity – glory

The word “glory” is associated with something that is greater than what you want to have.

Romans 5:2 says, *“Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”*

This verse starts a new section in the book of Romans. The first four chapters mainly emphasize faith, and the next four mainly emphasize hope. Paul summarizes chapters one through four in the phrase, *“Through him (that is, Jesus) we have also obtained access by faith”*, and now introduces chapters five through eight in the phrase *“hope of the glory of God.”*

This “hope” is related to the glory of God. Let’s compare again worldly hope and biblical hope. If you’re hoping for something, it’s usually associated with what you want and love, like the health of yourself or your family, success of yourself or your children, status, or financial success. Usually, when parents push their children to do well in school, it’s associated with the alleviation of pain; financial gain can offer happiness or even less suffering. Worldly hope is related to either our own pleasure or the alleviation of our pain. It is something either outside of ourselves that we can attain or related to our happiness and the alleviation of pain. These are things that we feel temporarily, which could be gone any moment.

These are the things that we hope for in this world. The Bible says that you may or may not have those things, but you have something that is eternal and much better and bigger: the glory of God. Whatever you’re seeking, like beauty in a person or yourself, the glory of God is more beautiful. Whatever you think is worthwhile, the glory of God is more valuable. If your spiritual nature receives the glory of God, it’s the most pleasurable thing. You don’t just attain it in your head, but it gets into the deepest part of yourself, not only temporarily, but eternally. That’s what the *“glory of God”* is talking about in Romans 5:2. God’s value and worth is personified in Jesus Christ and the glory was landed when Jesus Christ came into this earth. Through our faith in Jesus Christ, we can have Jesus in our hearts. We have so much of his glory in us that we become like Jesus. Even in heaven, we’ll become more like Jesus, meaning that we’ll be more glorious, valuable, and beautiful because He is eternal and infinite. We’ll never be Jesus but we’ll always grow to be more and more like Him.

2 Corinthians 3:18 says, *“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”*

We are becoming more like Jesus. Whatever you want in this world pales in comparison to what you’re going to get. Hope is glory to the deepest part of us eternally – something more beautiful, more valuable, more pleasurable.

C. You will live for the most worthwhile cause that you will never regret – glorify

The first point talked about certainty, the second talked about your character, and now we're talking about your purpose: living to glorify Him. That's what "hope of the glory of God" means. The glory of God comes into you in such a way that you can live to glorify Him and help other people to receive that glory as well. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, "*So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*" It's the greatest purpose. This is our hope and we persevere. Our hope is often not on our present path but in the promise of God. God is not concerned about perfection, but He is always concerned about participation. Our hope is that we're going to go through this, and God is doing something in us and through us all over the world, to His glory and greatest joy inside of us. That is our hope.

III. Love – Seeing what God is doing now and changing you to become – you serve

When we receive God's love, we're talking about love as a condition of our hearts. It's the subjective aspect of what happens inside of us, of God's love coming in and pouring His love into our hearts. So, there's love inside of us as a condition of our heart. What does that look like? To answer that, we need to answer this question: why is love the greatest?

A. Motive is important

We talked about the condition of our heart, but love is the motive of our heart. What we read in chapter 13, is about why we're doing it. A husband and gives flowers to his wife on Valentine's Day and she says, "Aw, thank you! Why did you give this to me?" She wants to hear, "Because I love you" but he says, "Because I have to." Oftentimes, that's our motive when we do things for God but what God wants is us. What God wants is the love in our hearts as the motive. That's what 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 is saying: the condition of your heart is being in love. Motive is important. If you pray, "*but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.*" Your prayer is useless without the motive of love. "*If I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries*" and you're using your lips to minister to other people "*but have not love, I am nothing.*" Your prayer and ministry is useless. In verse 3, "*If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing,*" there's no reward or fruit. Basically, Christian life means nothing without the right motive.

B. Character is important

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 says, "*Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*"

As it describes the characteristics of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, there are two statements of "is," eight "not," and four "all." These verses describe not only love but, really, a loving person. It's talking about our attributes and our character. Our motive, as we consistently fight to choose the right motive of doing for Jesus, it becomes our character. You're not just loving now, you become a loving person. Progression is taking place. That's why love is important.

C. Jesus is important

1 Corinthians 13:8-12 says, *“Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 12 For now we see in the mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known”*

These characteristics (1 Corinth. 13:4-7) are describing Jesus. As Paul is describing love, it’s talking about the body of Christ. It’s picturing each and every one of us being different aspects of Jesus, so we can picture Jesus together. That’s what 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 is saying about perfect and partial. If you’re selfish not loving, you’re imperfect. The more and more you become loving, the more you become perfect. If you’re selfish, you’re like a little child. Although they might be cute, they’re so selfish that all they do is eat, cry, and make noises. They don’t wash dishes for people but as they grow up, they start to do the dishes, take out the garbage, buy you a car. Now you’re a child but you’re becoming an adult. When we are becoming more like Jesus, we’re growing up, but Jesus Christ is the most perfect and the most grown up human in humanity. This is picturing Jesus and how we, as we fight our hearts in our motive, we become the character of a loving person and we become like Jesus.

D. Right now is important

1 Corinthians 13:13 says, *“So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”*

Love is the greatest because right now is important. Through faith we receive grace and mercy as we see how great and awesome God is and what He can do for us. We have hope because we look at what He’s going to do for eternity. But right now, through faith and hope, we receive His love and grace so we not only experience His grace but have the power to become like Jesus, to have the motive of love, and that is the ultimate goal. As we receive glory, glorify. He will be glorified in us and through us, and we have the greatest joy in Him. That is why love is the greatest.

E. How to guard your heart

1. Attack doubts, hopelessness, and selfishness

The condition of your sinful nature when you’re in doubt, hopeless, and selfish, is what you must attack.

Matthew 21:21 says, *“And Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea, it will happen.’”*

While you have faith, you can still doubt. While you have love in your heart, you can also be selfish. You have two natures. They’re all operating at the same time. When you see doubt, attack those doubts, because when we have faith, doubt attacks faith. “Is there

validity to this doubt?" "Why do I doubt? Because my science teacher said you cannot walk on water? What does my science teacher know?" Do a couple of people with PhDs know more about what God said? We must learn to doubt our doubts because those things are based on what somebody said in history. Compare the author of your doubting ideas to the author of this world. When you're hopeless, ask yourself, "What is my hope? What is my foundation? What is the basis of my hopelessness?" You have to attack these things. When you're selfish, hate your selfishness. "Help me. Help my unbelief! Help my hopelessness and help my selfishness." Attack your sinful side and strengthen your spiritual side by doing the following things.

2. Hear the Word of God
Faith comes from hearing through the Word of Christ.

Mark 11:22 says, "*And Jesus answered them, 'Have faith in God.'*" Hear God's Word. Your doubts can be overcome through faith. Hear God's Word and your hopelessness can turn into hope. Hear God's Word so that your selfish desires can be redeemed into a desire for God and to love others.

3. Pray for the condition of your heart
Luke 17:5 states, "*The apostle said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith!'*" We can pray that. Increase our hope. Increase our love.

Spurgeon said, "A prayerless church member is a hindrance. He is in the body [of Christ] like a rotting bone or a decayed tooth." If you don't pray, the condition of your heart is not in faith, in hope, or in love. You're slowly dying. You become critical. You become hopeless. You become negative. You blame. You're selfish. You're trying to use the means of the Church to get what you want. I've seen so many church splits and problems. "A prayerless church member is a hindrance." He's slowly dying in the body. It's going to cause pain. Pray for the condition of your heart.

4. Be with others who have faith, hope, and love
Matthew 9:2 shares, "*And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.'*" Here's a paralytic, someone who cannot walk by himself. His friends carry him through the roof.

Do you hang around people with faith? If you hang around people who have hope, you become hopeful and faithful. You know those people who eat and they look like they're enjoying it? It makes you want to eat their food. Hang around people with hearts that are alive, so your heart will be alive.

5. Take a step of faith, hope, and love
Peter goes down in the water and that took faith. He's better than the eleven guys who were holding onto the boat. He actually took a step of faith.

Matthew 14:31 says, “*Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’*” If he didn’t, he would not have learned this lesson from Jesus. He would have never had the experience of walking on water. Only a few people can say that in heaven. He grew in his faith even though he failed because he failed in progression. Take a private step of faith. Take a personal step of hope. Just do it.

As you think about the past 2018, repent and redeem. What did I lack? What can help me to have the habit of faith, hope, and love in my heart. In 2019, what should I add so that I can guard my heart?

Conclusion

What is hope like as we face 2019? We’re preparing for the One In Love conference and one of the songs, “There is a Cloud,” reminded me of the passage in 1 Kings about Elijah with fire and rain coming down. There is a drought in the land because the Israelites were in sin. So God gives them a drought to show how they are spiritually so that through the drought, they would see God and receive His blessings. In the three and a half years of the drought, God calls Elijah to go to the Israelites and prophesy to His people. In 1 Kings 18, we see that he fights against the 850 prophets and fire comes down. God is victorious and Israel is cleansed. Now they’re ready for rain and blessings. God already promised that there would be rain. Elijah, after the cleansing of sin in the Israelites, prays for rain. Elijah prays earnestly seven times and buries his face into his knees because he’s trusting in the promise of God. The servant goes back and forth to check. The seventh time, he said, “there is a cloud, as small as your hand, coming.” When Elijah heard that, he said, “Prepare, because it’s going to pour!” and it does. Faith is that God can do it. Hope is that God will do it. Love is receiving Him pouring His rain into our hearts and our lives.

What is rain? This verse is a wonderful description of Romans 5:5, which says, “*Hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*” There are many of us who have no personal hope. You’ve been in a drought and you’re trying but it’s just not working. Hear the Word of God because there is a cloud. You have to go through those times and it will pour. Just keep on persevering.

I also think about this generation. Where is this world going to? But when you see God’s blessing on even one person in this generation, there is a cloud. It is guaranteed that God blesses every generation in their own way. God is going to cause revival in the next generation. That is my hope; there is a cloud. In this world filled with tribulation, eternal blessing and eternal rain is coming. There is a generation of global hope. There is eternal hope and I always see the cloud. It’s going to pour. It’s going to rain. Let’s have hope as we face 2019.