2025 Fredericksburg Texas Conference

PART ONE
"Out of Weakness Made Strong"
The Secret of the Heroes of the Faith

PART TWO
"Paul's Hidden Signature"
The Power of Faith, Hope, and Love

I. Out of Weakness Made Strong (Hebrews 11:34b)

A. This short phrase seems to be the key to the story of every hero in this chapter.

B. Each and every one of them was weak—all in unique and different ways. Yet, the one common factor in each of their lives is that they became strong "out of their weakness." The Greek words are enlightening: *dunamoomai*: (aorist passive indicative), *apo astheneias*. The literal translation would be, "Being strengthened out from/from the source of their weakness." The idea is that their weakness drove them to rely on the power of God, as Paul said, "When I am weak, then I am strong," because it forced him to trust in the power of God.
   1) The aorist tense is culminative (end result); the passive voice indicates the divine action which they received; the indicative mood is a statement of absolute truth and reality
   2) The really astounding thing is the preposition *apo*, often referred to as the "preposition of ultimate source." The source of the strength originated in their weakness!

C. It all comes together when we factor in Hebrews 11, verses 1 and 6.

   1) Hebrews 11:1—What we have in the first verse is almost like an encoded message in three parts:
      a. *"Now **faith** is."* The word *"is"* (*estin*) is in the emphatic position. It is a verb of being, of existence, of reality. Not only does faith lay hold of the ultimate reality (God), but in doing so, brings that ultimate reality into existence on this Earth.
      b. *"The substance of things **hoped** for."* The word "substance" is *hupostasis,* which refers to the essence of a person or thing. We use it theologically when we speak of the "hypostatic union" in reference to the nature of Christ as the God-Man. It is used in Hebrews 3:14 in a way that is vital to understand its use in Hebrews 11:1,

> *"For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence* [*hupostasis*] *steadfast to the end."*

In the same way that Jesus Christ brought the *"substance"* of God into human existence, even so, when we walk by faith, we are bringing the "substance" of Jesus Christ into life and action.

c. *"The **evidence*** (*elenchos*—courtroom evidence) *of things not seen,"* In light of the above, this now makes sense. That which is invisible spiritual reality, unseen by human eyes, is made visible to the human eye. When Christ is manifested in a life, what is the most evident quality? The **love** of Christ (John 13:34–35; 2 Cor. 5:14; 1 John 4:8, 16).

Point: What we have in v. 1 is **Faith, Hope, Love**.

2) Hebrews 11:6—We again have three parts in the verse. The underlying idea, *"Without faith it is impossible to please* [God]*."*

a. *"He who comes to God must believe."* **Faith** gives us access to God (Romans 5:1–2).
b. *"That He is,"* The *"is"* here refers to His existence and nature, which we have seen is **"love"** (1 John 4:8, 16).
c. *"And that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."* The anticipation of eternal reward is what we call **"hope."**

D. Putting all this together, we see that believers "out of weakness are made strong" when their weakness drives them to **faith, hope, and love**.

E. To these passages we can add that of 2 Corinthians 12:8–10. Paul, suffering under incessant demonic attack, cried out to God to remove this "weakness." God's answer was, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."*

1) When weakness lays hold of God's grace, His power is perfected.
2) Only faith can lay hold of God's grace, thus weakness + faith = grace and sufficiency (see 2 Cor. 3:5–6, where Paul uses the word *hikanos*, meaning "sufficient, qualified, capable." Amazingly, this word, as an adjective, is used in the LXX (Septuagint)to translate *Shaddai*, the name of Almighty God!

F. Having *"learned"* this formula (see Phil. 4:11–13, three steps) Paul concludes, *"Therefore I take pleasure in my infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong"* (2 Cor. 12:10). The key here is in the phrase *"for Christ's sake"* (*huper Christo*), that is, "on His behalf."

G. Thus, the formula is: weakness + trials + faith + hope + love = the power of Christ in us! Now, let us see how often Paul brings **faith, hope, and love** into his epistles, and how it is like a "hidden signature" of the apostle.

II. The Signature of Paul

"The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write."
2 Thessalonians 3:17

Because there were false apostles who tried to pass off false epistles (*pseudepigrapha*) as coming from Paul and other apostles, Paul signed the epistles, which were written by an amanuensis/ secretary, with his own hand. But we do not have the original letters! Certainly, we trust the early Church fathers who canonized the 27 books of the New Testament (Athanasius, 367 AD; Council of Hippo, 393 AD; Council of Carthage, 397 and 418 AD). However, perhaps Paul gave us a "hidden" signature in most of his books.

The Hidden Signature of Paul

Paul appears to have given us a "hidden" signature in most of his epistles. In each epistle, we find different applications of his "faith, hope, love" formula, as it relates to the central theme of the book.

Before we go into the books, let's consider two main applications of this doctrinal triad:

Two Applications of the Grace Triad

1. "Faith" looks to the **past** (finished work of Christ); "Hope" looks to the **future** (God's promises/prophecies); "Love" looks at the **present** (how we can serve the lost and the saved). These provide a three-fold anchor for us in the Christian life.
2. As far as our use in the present, faith lays hold of the Word of God. Hope grasps the promises of God for present use, and love, as always, puts both into practice. In any situation or condition, the weakest believer who will determine to hold on to and practice all three of these will definitely be "made strong."

First Thessalonians

It is debatable whether first Thessalonians or Galatians was Paul's first epistle. We'll start with this one because the Thessalonian church is often referred to as the "model" church. They took the doctrines Paul taught, believed them, and put them into practice in their lives. Though they were new believers, they were a mighty force in the early church.

1 Thessalonians 1:3

The practicality of these three spiritual exercises is seen in that faith produced work (practical outworking, Phil. 2:12–13), love produced labor (i.e., ministry), and hope produced patience, or endurance in persecutions and trials.

1 Thessalonians 5:8

Paul closes this book with a reference to our spiritual warfare, and shows that faith, love, and hope, are the key to putting on the "armor" of God." This was written some time before he wrote Ephesians, where he amplifies the armor idea (Eph. 6:10–18).

Galatians

In the Galatian letter, Paul is fighting against the heresy of works-salvation (i.e., Law vs. grace). The intrusion of works (human good) into grace essentially neutralizes faith (Romans 11:6). Here, Paul ties them all to the second application above, as they relate to our present Christian walk (i.e., not past, present, future). We "hope" to live righteously and can only do so as our faith lays hold of the love of Christ (2 Cor. 5:14–21). In our frailty, faith brings the love of Christ into our lives, thus producing a righteous walk.

Romans
This is often considered Paul's greatest theological epistle. Not only will we find faith, hope, and love twice in the book, but they also provide a perfect outline for the book.

1. Faith, Chapters1–8.
2. Hope, Chapters 9–11.
3. Love, Chapters 12–16.

Romans 5:1–5
Here, Paul uses them in the first idea—that of faith in the past finished work of Christ; hope of the future glory of God; and love as the sustaining power in the midst of life's testing and trials. Here, faith (v. 1) in Christ's finished work brings us *"peace with God."* Hope (v. 2) brings joy (*"rejoice"*), and love (v. 5) gives us stability through fellowship with God.

Romans 12:6, 9, 12
We do not always find these three words closely knit in a single verse or two, and it is good to keep your eyes open for their more spread-out use. Here, in v. 6, faith is the key to effective use of our gift. In v. 9, love delivers us from evil and motivates us to diligence. And hope, v. 12, is our motivator for prayer, steadfastness, and ministry to those in need. We know that faithful service will result in eternal reward.

1 Corinthians
In this epistle, the theme is correction of faults within the body of the Church. These can only exist where the triad of virtues is missing.

1 Corinthians 13:13
This is one of the best-known passages where we find faith, hope, and love together. It is often confusing to some that Paul exalts love above the others. However, in the context of the book, it makes perfect sense. It is possible for us to have faith in the finished work of Christ, and hope in our future eternal home, but be lacking in love in the present. When it comes down to how we interact with and treat fellow believers, love is preeminent. Furthermore, in Heaven, there will be no need for faith, for it will be realized, and so also will hope. But there, in our Father's house, love will endure forever!

Ephesians
Many commentators have noted the three-fold nature of this epistle. It is often outlined, as was done by Watchman Nee: Sit (Chapters 1–3), walk (Chapters 4–5), and stand (Chapter 6). We might say that we "sit" in the assurance of faith, we "walk" in love (Eph. 5:1–2), and we "stand" in the assurance of hope.

Ephesians 4:2–5
In this passage, Paul is urging us to *"walk worthy"* (v. 1) of our heavenly calling, by maintaining the *"unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (v. 3). To do so, we must be gentle and patient with others, *"in love"* (v. 2). We recognize that all who believe share in the hope of eternal life. And our faith is one Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 5), and one heavenly Father (v. 6).

Colossians

The Colossian epistle was written to counter certain gnostic heresies that had crept into the church. Though Paul needs to warn these believers, in the following verses he commends them for the stability of their faith in the midst of this onslaught.

Colossians 1:3–5

The context is Paul's prayers for them, and he gives thanks for their faith in Christ, love for all the saints, and hope of their heavenly home and reward. Remember that the hope of eternal life is one shared by all believers. However, reward is something that results from faithful service. In this passage, the triad is more a faith in Christ's work (past), love to others (present), and hope of eternity (future).

First Timothy

This is the first of the "pastoral epistles." Paul's exhortations, while focused on Timothy as the shepherd, certainly apply to us all.

1 Timothy 1:1, 4–5

Paul begins in vv. 1–2 by naming the Lord Jesus Christ as our hope and identifies Timothy as *"a true son in the faith."* After he reminds Timothy of his commission (vv. 3–4), he ends v. 4 with *"godly edification which is in faith."* Then, in v. 5, he declares that the commandment of the Lord is *"love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith."* In these verses, *"faith"* occurs three times, because it is foundational to all further Christian growth (2 Peter 1:5–11).

Hebrews

It is no secret that I am convinced that the Apostle Paul is the author of this epistle. This is based not only on evidence within the book itself but, even more importantly, on the testimony of Peter (2 Peter 3:15–16), who declares to the scattered Jewish believers (see 1 Peter 1:1–2) that Paul had written to them *"in which are some things hard to understand,"* which he equates with *"the rest of the Scriptures."* If Hebrews was not written by Paul, then we are missing an inspired epistle. This would violate the promise that *"the word of the LORD endures forever"* (Isa. 40:8; 1 Peter 1:25).

Hebrews 6:10–12

The theme of this epistle is impending judgment on Jewish believers because they had, like the Exodus generation, hardened their hearts to the truth, and had turned back to the rituals of the law, and forsaken the policy of "by grace through faith without works" (Rom. 4:1–5; Heb. 3:7–19). After rebuking them for their reversion/backsliding (Heb. 5:9–14) and calling them to immediate spiritual recovery (Heb. 6:1–8), he encourages them to return to their original faithfulness (Heb. 6:10–12). They had once "labored in love" (v. 10), had the *"full assurance of hope"* (v. 11), and had the kind of *"faith and patience"* that inherits promises (v. 12, i.e., blessings in time and reward in eternity). While they had initially been on the road to spiritual maturity, they had turned back from the life of faith (Heb. 10:38), and were relying on the works of the law, and temple rituals.

Hebrews 10:22–24

In this amazing section, Paul sets forth the three-fold ministry of every believer. This is the present application of faith, hope, and love. After challenging them to live in light of the High-Priestly ministry, and our access to the throne of grace (see Heb. 4:14–16), he presents a three-fold exhortation to them:

Our Priesthood—Faith (v. 22)

Every believer in Jesus Christ is a royal priest (1 Peter 2:5–9). Our duty in this capacity is to intercede for others: for the lost to come to faith in Christ, and for fellow believers to remain faithful and effective in their service. The phrase *"draw near"* comes from the Old Testament service of the priest, as he prepared to offer up sacrifices. Our prayers are the sacrifice we now offer—on the altar of the cross of Christ. We can only draw near when we come *"in full assurance of faith"* that God hears our prayers. We also must come with *"hearts sprinkled,"* just as the OT priests were required to wash themselves before approaching the altar (Exod. 30:17–21), so we are cleansed by confession and correction of any sin in our lives (1 John 1:9; 2:2; 1 Cor. 11:28–31). Again, it is faith in the finished work of Christ that gives us the confidence that He will forgive us our sins when we come to Him in confession.

Our Ambassadorship—Hope (v. 23)

As an ambassador of Christ, we have a ministry of witness to those who are lost (2 Cor. 5:20; 1 Pet. 3:15). Our words will have little effect, unless we portray to the unbelieving world the *"confession of our hope without wavering."* To proclaim the assurance of hope in Christ, while living in doubt, fear, and anxiety, is counterproductive. How we live demonstrates to the world that *"He who promised is faithful."* Faith and fear cannot co-exist (Psalm 56:3). Neither can faith and doubt (James 1:6–8). Our actions speak louder than words when we speak of confidence in Christ by faith, and at the same time live in doubt and anxiety. A life of genuine faith is a life of stability and peace.

Our Ministry—Love (v. 24)

We are to *"consider one another"* (i.e., "bear down with the mind")—our fellow believers, with a goal in mind. That is, that our life and our service will *"stir up"* others to *"love and good deeds."* First comes the motive, then the deed. The phrase *"stir up"* comes from a Greek word where we get "paroxysm" in Romans. It means to "irritate, incite, provoke, stimulate." How often we hear the saying, "iron sharpens iron," but we forget that this takes friction, sparks, and heat. We need, in the church today, more spiritual agitators!

A good New Year's resolution for all of us would be to be more agitating, but always in a gracious and patient way. We ought to strive for a life that is worthy of imitation (1 Cor. 11:1). We should also live lives that are a rebuke to this present age.

Conclusion

We began with the concept "out of weakness made strong." This led us into a study of the spiritual triad: faith, hope, and love. The two ideas work together. It takes three legs to make a stool stable. It takes these three virtues to make our lives not only stable, but effective in personal growth and in public ministry. Let us all pray to be more determined to achieve the balance and power that comes from a life of faith, hope, and love!