

## Things that matter!

# FAITH, HOPE, LOVE



Karl Marx once said that religion was the opium of the people. He thought it acted like a pain-killer to help people cope with the sadness of living. How should we assess religion today? Outmoded superstition, or a valid, helpful approach to living properly?

Let us compare Karl Marx’s assessment with the understanding given by Paul – one of the first Christian teachers. Two thousand years ago Paul wrote that three things are important: “faith, hope and love”. But, he added, “the greatest of these is love”.

### Faith

Faith means belief or trust. Paul used it of belief in God and in Jesus, of trust that God provides a meaning and purpose to our existence, and that he has demonstrated this in the way Jesus lived and taught, and died and rose again from death.

It’s not easy to believe such things, and it wasn’t easy 2000 years ago. But this belief and trust has influenced the world and changed it for good.

Can it still be accepted today? Many people say “No”.

But many people have not really examined the facts and claims for themselves. We invite you to do so.



### Hope



Hope means having an attitude that looks for better things. The weather is bad today, but we can hope it will improve tomorrow. I feel ill at the moment, but hopefully I’ll be better next week. The economy is in a bad way, but don’t worry, when we’re right

down at the bottom, the only way is up – so we hope. And it is hope that keeps people going and stops them from despairing.

Hope is built into people. But many people feel there is no hope. There are several ways to proceed:

- We can give in to despair, or
- We can do something to distract attention from feeling there is no hope, or
- We can find a meaningful hope. And that’s what Paul found when he began to believe in Jesus.

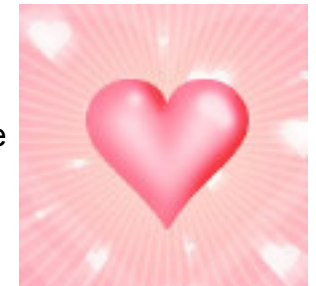
Previously Paul thought Jesus and his followers were deluded fools, but dangerous, so he helped round them up, imprison them, and have them killed. But suddenly he changed. He converted to belief in Jesus. He started out on a new course in life. He had a hope that made him a new person with new values. And that hope led him to live a renewed life in the present, with the prospect of a new life in the future beyond death.

But why does Paul say that love is greater than faith or hope?

### Love

Love in English has several meanings: physical attraction towards another person, such as is expressed in sex; or it can mean the fondness parents have for children or the attachment people have for an interest or hobby (“He loves motor racing”).

But the meaning of love when Paul uses the word is: active concern for the good of other people.



He describes it in this way:

**Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud; love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth. Love never gives up; and its faith, hope, and patience never fail. Love is eternal.**

*(Paul's first letter to believers in Corinth, chapter 13, verses 4-8 – written about 55 AD)*

Think how different the world would be if we all behaved like this all the time. There would be the occasional misunderstandings, but so many of the things which spoil life today would be eliminated: selfish behaviour, violence, crime, murder, war, terrorism. That is why Paul says love is the most important. He also says, "Love is eternal". That's hard to believe – unless you accept the teaching of the Bible that God is love, and therefore love applies now and will do so in the future, even after death.

### **Is this just pie in the sky?**

It is easy to argue the opposite and to assert that faith in God is a delusion. We could say that hope is just wishful thinking. We could maintain that love is foolishness in a world that is selfish. Above all, we could insist that the idea that "God is love" is ridiculous in the face of natural calamities such as the 2011 tsunami in Japan or the 2010 Haiti earthquake.



### **Faith, hope and love do continue**

But if we explore the full picture, we should begin to wonder at the faith that enables people to push on despite the disasters they suffer. We should marvel at the hope that leads men and women from despair into new meaning in life as taught in the Bible. And we should be astounded at how ordinary human beings who have suffered the most dreadful loss can forgive those responsible because they see love as a more appropriate and fruitful response than hate and revenge.

### **There is hope**

There *is* hope therefore for a world in which many people do not have hope.

### **Try and see**

An old proverb says:

"The proof of the pudding is in the eating". In other words, you cannot tell if a cake is delicious until you taste it.



The same goes for faith, hope and love. Unless you try them, you can't tell if they are any good or not.

We invite you to consider the valuable difference to life which **faith** in God, and **hope** in Jesus and practical **love** can make. Look, taste and see for yourself.

### **Our invitation**

We meet for worship together on Sunday mornings at 11.15, and on Wednesdays for discussion in the evening at 7.45. We seek to be positive, helpful, and understanding. We invite you to come along to our meetings, or arrange for us to discuss with you if you wish. Although we are keen to advocate and recommend the Christian faith, we are non-aggressive and do not seek to push ourselves on people who do not wish to continue contact with us. So, if you would like help in exploring the meaning of life as taught in the Bible, we will be happy to help for as long (or as short) as you wish.

To get in touch with us, you can call at 4 Gayfield Place, or drop a note through the door with your name and contact details on it, or email us at [enquiries@Bible4now.info](mailto:enquiries@Bible4now.info).

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