

Why the Gospel is a Faithful Saying

Part 2 of 2

(II Timothy 2:12b-13)

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Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

I. Introduction:

- A. Today we will further examine why the Gospel is to be considered “a faithful saying,” as it is described in God’s word on 4 occasions. So I ask that you look with me again in 2 Timothy 2 where today I’ll be bringing the 2nd of a 2 part series on this subject – “Why the Gospel is a Faithful Saying.”
- B. Today we’ll be focusing on the latter part of verse 12 and verse 13 of 2 Timothy 2; however, to capture the fuller context, let’s begin our reading again back in verse 8. Here we read, ***“Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel: ⁹Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound. ¹⁰Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. ¹¹It is a faithful saying:*** <You may recall in the previous session, we established that the “it” here is that which Paul called “my gospel” – the specific “word of God” –the word of the Gospel – how God saves sinners based solely upon the merit of Christ’s Person and work – His righteousness. So he is saying, that the gospel is a faithful saying – trustworthy, worthy to be believed “for” (or forasmuch as or because) and he continues to describe why, saying,> ***For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: ¹²If we suffer, we shall also reign with him:*** <and this is where we left off in part 1. But he continues here saying> ***if we deny him, he also will deny us: ¹³If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.”***
- C. To refresh your memories, in part 1 of this series, as we focused on verse 11 and the 1st part of verse 12, we saw that Paul was saying that the Gospel is a faithful saying because of:
1. The union (or oneness) between Christ and His sheep (the elect as mentioned by Paul in verse 10). And we considered this union in 2 aspects:
 - (a) In the suffering, death, resurrection, and resultant reign of the sheep as one with Christ in His accomplishment on the cross as their Representative and Substitute and...
 - (b) In the believer’s resultant walk of faith.

Now as we go forward this morning, we will see that not only is the Gospel a faithful saying because of the union of Christ with His elect, but also because of ...

2. The truth concerning these 2 united parties. Specifically, we have...
 - (a) Fallen sinners in desperate need of that which they cannot produce united with...
 - (b) The God-man who cannot fail and did not fail to produce what they needed
3. So today we will see that in addition to the believer's union with Christ being cited as a reason the gospel is worthy to be believed (a faithful saying), we also see here the complementary truth regarding in whom it is we are to trust (the trustworthiness of the One to whom believers are united) that makes this, the gospel of God's grace, a faithful saying indeed.

II. Verses 12b – 13: Now to begin with, I want you to notice that as Paul continues citing the reasons why the gospel is a faithful saying that there is a distinction between those things listed prior to the middle of verse 12 and the reasons cited going forward. The distinction is this: In verse 11 and the 1st part of verse 12, he lists those things which are true of both Christ as well as those He represented. E.g. – When He died, His sheep died with Him. Likewise, they can be said to have suffered with Him and thereby, they reign with Him.

But going forward, he only mentions actions that can be attributed to men and women in this life. That is, in no sense can it be said of Christ that He denies Himself or that He believes not. And yet we know that it can accurately be said of all men and women at some point or another that they deny Christ in unbelief.

So today I want to point your attention to the sharp contrast made between what we, the sinner, cannot produce or accomplish with what Christ, the sinless One could and has produced or accomplished. And in this we will see again why the religion of works (wherein we all initially imagine that salvation is conditioned in at least some way and /or to some degree on ourselves) is an unfaithful gospel in sharp contrast to the one true religion of grace (wherein all of salvation's conditions have been met in full by Christ alone).

A. Verse 12b - Denying Christ: In the middle of verse 12, Paul adds, “*...if we deny him, he also will deny us.*” Now this comment is related to the first part of the verse that speaks of our suffering both with Christ on the cross and in our walk of faith for His sake. As we consider our own walk in this world, we know that if and when we are not actively involved in the ministry of the Gospel which confesses Christ before men, then we certainly will not suffer for it. Sadly, persistence on such a course is a denial of Christ Himself as He said in Matthew 10:32 – 33: “*Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.*”³³ *But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.*”

Now in this latter part of verse 12 and in verse 13, I think we can see that there is a sense in which the actions mentioned can be attributed not only to the lost, but to born again believers as well. We know that initially we all begin in this life in darkness, alienated from and in opposition to God. That is why a new birth, the gift of spiritual life – a quickening – is necessary. So initially, we all deny Christ, yet those who obtain like salvation, who come to Him in faith and repentance, Christ says He will in no wise cast out – He will not deny them before the Father. So how are we to understand this?

1. First, we can see from our text and Matthew 10, that there is a total or final denial of Christ of which many are never brought to repent. From the whole of scripture, we know that these are the ones of whom Christ speaks when He says that He will deny them before the Father. When I think of this, I'm reminded of the many mentioned by Christ in Matt. 7 who will approach Him at the judgment on the basis of their having prophesied in His name (the name of Christ), and cast out demons, and done many wonderful works – all in the name of Christ. Yet Christ denied them as He declared that He would then profess unto them that He never knew them, saying, “...*depart from me ye that work iniquity.*” Well, how can it be said of these religious men who named the name of Christ and labored in His name that they denied Him? Consider that the Greek word translated “deny” is a word that means to disavow, reject, disown, or contradict – having thoughts that stand in contradiction to the reality.
2. Denying Christ: So, how does this apply to our day? How do multitudes, the “many” men and women of our day who sincerely consider themselves Christians, unwittingly deny Christ, like the “many” mentioned by Christ in Matthew 7? How do men and women do that?
 - (a) Well, I can speak for myself as a prime example of one who in years past denied Christ though I did not recognize it until God providentially brought me to hear this faithful saying (His Gospel) and granted me true faith and repentance. I considered myself a sincere, zealous, dedicated Christian. Yet my gospel – how I thought God saved sinners – caused me to view the triune God, not as He is revealed by Christ in God's gospel, but as a contradiction. As such, I was actually rejecting the Christ of the Bible or denying Him at that time.
 - (b) You see, consistent with how I was taught, I imagined that every human who ever lived was an object of God's love and that Christ came, lived and died for all without exception. And yet I also believed the clear scriptural truth that many, even most, shall ultimately perish from among all those I presumed that Christ had died for. We know that God by definition must be perfect in every attribute of His character. For anything less than perfection would be a denial of His impeccable holiness. Now I want you to see the contradiction I held and how it was indeed a denial of Christ.

- (c) By my doctrine, my gospel at that time, whether I confronted the reality of my thoughts about God or not, they exposed underlying perceptions about the triune God in stark contradiction to the reality of who He is according to the scripture. You see, I had to assume either that (a) God just wasn't quite powerful enough to overcome all of the obstacles that would keep Him from saving all those He loved, or (b) perhaps He wasn't all knowing or all wise so that He could foresee all of the obstacles so as to engage His power, or (c) if I insisted that He was both omnipotent (all powerful) and omniscient (all knowing), then think of what my doctrine must have imagined about the efficacy of God's love – a worthless love that would not bother to engage these, His infinite attributes, on the behalf of all those He loved.
- (d) Many imagine as I once did that in believing that God loves all without exception, we were magnifying His love. But the reality is that such thoughts reduce His love to nothing. Such a god certainly could not be immutable for if He initially loved those whom He sends to hell – then it would have to be presumed that He turned on the objects of His “everlasting” love – His love turning into wrath and fury as He determines to punish them with everlasting destruction – these the objects of His everlasting love (???)
- (e) And what of His justice? If Christ died for the sins of all men, and the punishment of their sins was endured by Christ for them, and yet multitudes of them (even most according to the scripture) are forever punished for them, where is the justice of God? If Christ has paid the debts before God's justice of all men, can it be just with God to cast such folks into hell? The scripture says the Judge of the earth shall do right.
- (f) The truth is that there was a time that I just didn't think about it in those terms because I had no regard for the honor of God's character. The question of how God could accept me, a sinner, didn't enter my mind for like all men by nature, I was consumed with the notion that there must be something I must do in order to be saved. And in my practice of the religion of works (disguised under the banner of grace) – the religion so natural to us all -- I and others of like mind denied God as He is. By my way of thinking, God would have to dispense with His justice in order to show mercy. And if your notions of Christ's work likewise are connected with such a scheme or way of salvation, then recognize that it must pit God's attributes against one another. And that cannot be for the exercise of one of God's attributes (e.g. – His mercy) would have to contradict or deny another (e.g. – His justice). Such a scheme of salvation would require that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all deny their undivided essence of character as Deity – as God.

3. But as the last phrase of verse 13 tells us, “...***he cannot deny himself.***” He must act consistent with who He is in every attribute of His character. The scripture teaches that He changes not and that He cannot lie. This is why if we deny him, He will also deny us. It’s because of who He is. And for any who persist in such a denial of Him is to die in unbelief.
4. So what distinguishes believers from unbelievers when it comes to this issue of denying Christ? As I’ve said, we all initially deny Christ yet he doesn’t deny those He saves? Furthermore, even after being enlightened by God’s Spirit under the true gospel of grace so as to see God as He is, a just God and a Savior, true believers still on occasion sinfully deny Christ due to the influence of their remaining sin which plagues us all until we leave this world. This often takes the subtle form of being unwilling to confess him among others or by our silence or in some other way we allow friends or family who believe another gospel to assume we are of like mind. We naturally are prone to avoid the disfavor of others, even to the point of compromising our faith.
5. Peter is perhaps one of the best known scriptural examples of one of God’s own who denied Him, yet not in a total or final manner. So look with me in Luke 22 at the record of Christ’s discourse with Peter to help shed some light on this. In Luke 22, beginning in verse 31 we read, “***And the Lord said, Simon, Simon,*** <speaking to Simon Peter> ***behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:*** ³²***But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*** ³³***And he*** <Peter> ***said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.*** ³⁴***And he*** <Christ> ***said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.***” And yet scripture is clear that Christ does not deny Peter. So what distinguishes Peter (who denied Christ) from others to which the words of our text does apply, “...***if we deny him, he also will deny us.***” I’ll tell you what is different. And it’s not Peter or any virtue found in Him but it is Christ alone that makes Peter to differ so that he, Peter, would not deny Christ in ultimate unbelief so as to perish therein. Notice Christ pointed out this difference when He said, “***Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:*** ³²***But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.***” Note He didn’t say “if thou are converted” but “when.” Peter’s conversion was sure and certain because Peter was bought with the price of Christ’s precious blood and His resulting conversion and perseverance in the faith was sure and certain to be manifested in time.
6. The book of Jude closes with these words, “***Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,*** ²⁵***To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen.***”

You see, we all would fall, none would persevere, and all of us would persist in denying Him if we were not kept by His preserving grace. This gospel is a faithful saying because it is ALL conditioned on the Lord Jesus Christ – who cannot fail.

B. Verse 13: ***“If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself”***

1. Again, in the context, Paul is saying that this gospel is trustworthy to be relied upon, “...a faithful saying...” in that our salvation isn’t a product of our believing, our faith, but rather the faithfulness of Christ who cannot deny himself. He brings up “if we believe not” right after having mentioned “if we deny him.” We see the continuity of the thought since denying Christ is a product of our unbelief. All of our doubts, fears, and worries are due to some degree or occasion of unbelief or lack of faith.
2. Let’s talk about how sinners “believe not.” Consider...
 - (a) (1) That some never believe on Christ – never believe the gospel of grace. If we leave this world in unbelief, then it will be to our own destruction. As Christ told his disciples in Mark 16, beginning in vs. 15, ***“...Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. ¹⁶He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”*** The gospel is a faithful saying. As this verse teaches us, those who believe it shall be saved and those that believe it not shall be damned. This must be the case because Christ abideth faithful and cannot deny himself. And the Gospel we’re commanded to believe points sinners to Christ as the One who met every condition and requirement for the salvation of His sheep, calling sinners to have no confidence in the flesh – that which proceeds from them. So the gospel itself excludes any notion that sinners are saved because they believe. Rather they believe because of what their Savior has done for them. A few pages over from our text in the opening salutation of Paul’s letter to Titus he writes, ***“Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; ²In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;”*** For God to lie concerning the promise of salvation to His elect would be a denial of Himself.

Now I remind you again of Christ’s words in the book of John when He said that all His sheep given to Him by God the Father shall come to Him and all those who come to Him, believing His gospel shall be saved. No ifs, ands or buts about it. And likewise, God has said He will not clear the guilty. Any sinner who clings to the notion that God will save him or her if they’ll do their part – because of something that proceeds from them, the sinner – does not believe God’s gospel of grace. And Christ said they shall be damned.

You see, God cannot deny who He is – both a just God and a Savior. And for any lacking the perfect righteousness by which all are judged before God, His justice demands their eternal damnation. God is holy and will not commune with sin. Only those whose sin debt has been paid can stand before him cleared of all guilt, having the merit of His perfect obedience unto death imputed (or accounted) unto them.

- (b)(2) Then consider that in the same sense that we all initially deny Christ, we also all come into this world in darkness as unbelievers (believing not), trusting in a false way that seems right to us. But, as Proverbs 16:25 teaches, what seems right to us by nature is a way that ends in death. So all initially “believe not,” including God’s elect prior to their regeneration (the new birth) and belief of the Gospel
- (c)(3) And then lastly consider what Heb. 12:1 calls “...*the sin which doth so easily beset us*” – speaking of the sin of unbelief that continually plagues true believers. The literal translation of this phrase in 2 Timothy 2, “If we believe not” is “if we are unfaithful” – that is, if we are without faith. Many physically die without God-given faith. God’s elect, justified by His shed blood, shall be given the gift of faith in time, but they begin life’s journey void of faith. And finally, even born again believers are plagued with moments of sinful unbelief throughout their lives – moments of unfaithfulness.
- (d) So as we consider that (1) most persist in denying Him and believing not, and (2) even His elect initially deny Him and believe not, and then finally (3) even born again believers have occasions where they deny Him in unbelief, then you can see how because of who we are, (sinners of whom the scripture says in Romans 3, “...there is none righteous, no not one...”) this gospel is a faithful saying. It directs us to take no confidence in any work we might perform, (decision we make, etc.). It is a faithful saying, and worthy of our trust – for it fits our need as sinners in need of salvation by God’s pure unadulterated mercy and grace in Christ Jesus.
3. So, “Why is the gospel a faithful saying?” Well, as I just said it’s partly because of the reality of our nature – the gospel of grace fitting our need as sinners unable to save ourselves or commend ourselves unto God in anyway. But that would be of no avail if it weren’t for the glorious truth concerning the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ to whom believers are united – One who is able and has provided for His people that which they had no possibility of providing for themselves.

4. God through the Apostle Paul sums it up for us in the last part of verse 13 when he states, that even though you believe not, “...**yet he** <i.e. – Christ> **abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.**” Jesus Christ could not and did not fail at what He came to do. And He, the God-man, cannot lie. God is faithful to execute His threats and keep His promises. Otherwise, He is not God. His purpose shall come to pass.
5. For any who persist in denying Him as He is revealed, in unbelief of His gospel – refusing to believe and submit to the truth that Christ alone met every condition or requirement for their eternal salvation, and lacking the repentance from the notions of our first religious thoughts – that salvation must be conditioned at least to some degree on something that springs from me, the sinner (my faith, my perseverance, whatever) – then such a one shall be justly banished from the presence of the holy God. Why? Because God is just and cannot lie. He cannot deny His strict justice for He cannot deny Himself as a just God.
6. But likewise, there is good news for those who have fled to Christ, having been granted the gift of faith and repentance so as to believe God’s gospel. They see how God can be both a just God and a Savior by the virtue of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. Based upon the same truth, that God is just and cannot lie – that Christ abideth faithful and cannot deny himself – such believers are fully warranted to be assured of their salvation, having a good hope that cannot fail for they see how all of their salvation is conditioned upon the merits of the One who could not and did not fail – the Lord our righteousness. Believers, having His righteousness as their own, stand without fault before a holy God.
7. It is a faithful, trustworthy, “you can bank on it” saying because it sets forth that all of salvation is conditioned on Him and not on sinners such as you and me. God’s elect are called spiritual Israel and yet referred to as “sons of Jacob,” denoting their unworthiness as the name Jacob itself means supplanter or cheater. In Malachi 3:6, God says, “**For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.**” He abideth faithful and cannot deny Himself. All whom He purposed to save shall be saved. If even one sinner for whom Christ lived and died failed to behold Him by God-given faith, or if even one sinner for whom He died should perish in hell, God would have to deny Himself. But because He changes not – there is salvation for sinners, sons of Jacob, who, if judged on the very best they could offer, would deserve God’s eternal wrath.
8. And if you’ve been brought to the place to see your desperate need for this mercy – this unmerited favor of God by the satisfaction to God’s justice rendered by the sinless Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ, then you can rest assured that having placed your trust in Him that you are among the blessed of God to whom His righteousness is imputed – for faith is a gift of God that is exclusively granted to those for whom it was purchased by the blood of Christ on the cross.

9. It is a faithful saying, a gospel worthy of your trust – not because of any confidence in your own faith, but rather because this faithful saying directs us to place all of our confidence in Him. And that is a well placed confidence indeed! As Lam. 3:22-23 teaches us, ***“It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. ²³They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness”***

II. Closing;

Well, how about your gospel? Paul said “his gospel,” God’s gospel, was a faithful saying. Is yours?

Know this, if your hope for acceptance before God is based upon anything other than (or in addition to) Christ’s Person and work – the righteousness Christ established at the cross being imputed or charged to your account – then it is anything but faithful. Rather, such a misplaced faith will most certainly fail you for by default; it leaves you, the sinner, relying upon something that proceeds from you, a sinner. The scripture is clear that the very best that you and I as sinners can produce will not suffice before a holy God. A perfect righteousness is necessary for a sinner to be reconciled before a holy God. And, as we read in Isaiah, ***“...all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags...”*** (Isa 64:6).

Think about this: If the difference between going to heaven or hell is based ultimately on something that you do or don’t do, then Christ would not have needed to come into this world – for He came to do for His people what they could not do for themselves. Such thoughts deny the necessity of Christ even needing to come into this world to save sinners. So repent of such notions. Let us not dare presume to make the difference that only Christ, God manifested in the flesh, could make and has made. God will not share His glory.

But, what good news for those who now look to Christ alone for all of their salvation, having been granted spiritual life, faith and repentance so as to embrace God’s gospel – for it is indeed a faithful saying. It cannot fail for Christ cannot fail. You can bank on it!

It is a faithful saying because Christ abideth faithful and He cannot deny Himself. So look to Him for all of your salvation!

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God’s grace found in the only infallible source, God’s word itself – the Bible.