

In 2 Timothy 4.7, Paul makes this claim, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." Now, we might consider it out of place for any minister of the gospel to make such a boast. Shouldn't every preacher have sufficient humility to confess he might not have been faithful? The exact opposite is true! In 1 Corinthians 4 Paul wrote, "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." If a man has any doubt about his faithfulness, he should not enter the ministry or, if he has already entered the ministry, he should leave it.

Now, by "faithful" we do not mean perfect. Actually, Paul's claim describes the sort of faithfulness that is required. He had fought the good fight. Note that he does not say he fought "A" good fight. He was not boasting of the quality of his fighting. Rather, he was saying, "I did not waste my time in fights over lesser things. I restricted my fighting to the good fight of the spiritual warfare of the gospel."

Second, Paul boasted that he finished the race. He did not boast of being first, second or any other notable achievement. He simply says he made it to the finish line; he did not quit until his assigned task was done. (*edited out of audio version for time constraints: I must admit that I am puzzled by those who retire from preaching as though it is simply a job which one works until he reaches sufficient age to get his pension. God's ministers are not hirelings of the church; they are servants of God, lock, stock and barrel. God owns them and they are sent to their task and are to continue it until they are no longer able. It is true that the rigors of some*

ministries get to be too much as a man ages. But, if God has called a man into the gospel ministry, he should stay with it in one form or another until he is unable to continue.)

Third, Paul claims he kept the faith. The very same message he was given at the beginning is the message he preached to the very end. He did not make it up, try to improve on it or alter it in any way. He kept it. Paul did not change his message or even the focus of his ministry for all the years he was an apostle. Whatever Paul was preaching at the beginning is what he was preaching at the end. And why not? Had the God who sent him to preach changed? Had the nature and need of man changed? Had Christ and His work changed? Had the way of salvation changed? No, not at all, and until there is some change in these things, the ministry of every preacher is the same as that of Paul who said, "Necessity is laid upon me. Woe is to me if I do not preach the gospel!" Faithfulness in the ministry requires, first, knowing the gospel and, second, continually and faithfully preaching that gospel.

He who faithfully preaches the gospel is a faithful preacher. He may not be very good at some of the other aspects of what is called the ministry in our day. He may not be a great administrator. His manner of speech may not be captivating or inspiring. His personality may not be the easiest to get along with. But, if he faithfully sets forth the gospel - what Paul calls the whole counsel of God - then he has been a faithful preacher and we should be thankful for the grace of God which made him faithful for our sakes.

Let us look at a portrait of a faithful preacher by noting what he is supposed to be preaching. Any man who preaches these things is a faithful preacher whatever else he may lack; any man who does not preach these things is an unfaithful man no matter how good he may be in other things.

**First, a faithful preacher will tell you the truth about God.** All truth starts here. All wisdom flows from this fountain. To whatever degree a person does not know the truth about God, he does not know the truth about anything. To whatever degree a preacher leaves his people in ignorance about God, to that degree he is an unfaithful preacher. Some preachers do not preach the truth of God for they do not KNOW the truth of God. Some are simply liars. But, whatever the reason, he who does not tell the truth about God is not a faithful preacher.

God is holy! Holy means "set apart." When we say that God is holy, we mean more than the fact that He always does what is right and good, though that is included. When we say God is holy, we mean, as the apostle wrote, that He "dwells in a light to which no man can approach." He is beyond our capacity to understand, beyond our capacity to please, beyond our capacity change Him, beyond our capacity to appease.

When we say that God is holy, we mean exactly the opposite of what the Israelites had come to think of God. In Psalm 50, God accused the Israelites of thinking "I am altogether such a one as you." Those who thought that paid dearly for their error!

God's holiness is more than a singular attribute. Rather, holiness crowns all His attributes. His wrath is holy; His mercy is holy. When He loves, it is a holy love; when He hates it is a holy hatred. When He punishes, it is a holy punishment; when He forgives, it is a holy forgiveness. Paul exhorted us to behold the goodness and severity of the Lord: In both His goodness and severity, the Lord is holy.

We are prone to think of God's holiness in relationship to those who are notably sinful. But even Isaiah, the prophet, is made to

cry, "Woe is me, I am a man of unclean lips," when he is confronted with a vision of the holiness of God. The beloved disciple, John, is stricken to his core at the sight of the Holy One of God, so much so that he falls at His feet as a dead man. It was to professed believers and not notable sinners that the book of Hebrews says, "Our God is a consuming fire."

If men knew anything of the holiness of God they would not be so quick to use His name with such contempt. Big name preachers would quit using God's name to trade on the souls of men for their money if they had any inkling of the holiness of the God on whose Name they trade.

God is sovereign, decreeing all that comes to pass and working to insure that all He decrees does, indeed, come to pass. He works all things according to the counsel of His own will. In Isaiah 46, God says, "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, from the beginning I declare the end and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,'" I would be an unfaithful preacher if I did not tell you that all things are in the hand of God; all things happen as He has decreed them to happen. I would be unfaithful to you if I were to give you the impression that God has left your destiny in your hands. No, your destiny is in the hand of God. You are at His mercy; He will do with you as He pleases.

God is gracious, more gracious than we can imagine. A faithful preacher will preach a grace of God that is beyond natural belief. Once a person has come to grips with the holiness and sovereignty of God, the news of God's free and sovereign grace will be more than he can believe. But the faithful preacher will not soften the truth of God's grace anymore than he would soften the truth of God's judgment.

**A faithful preacher will tell you the truth about man.** We live in a day of excusing sin or making little of it. Sin is now called "a mistake". Preachers name certain sins and give folks the impression that if they stop doing those sins, they will be righteous in God's sight. Unfaithful preachers divide the works of men into good and bad and tell folks that God will be pleased if they stop doing the bad stuff. But, faithful preachers tell their listeners is that, not only have they done some bad things, they have never, in all of their lives, done anything good! Faithful preachers will be faithful to the Scriptures and their hearers by telling them the truth that there is none righteous, not even one, none who does good, none who understand, none who seek God. Faithful preachers will be honest with the souls of men and declare that there is no difference among men in the sight of God. God looks down on earth and sees the faithful husband of one wife and the perverse man married to another man - and He sees no difference. He looks on the abortion protestor and the abortion provider - and sees no difference. He looks on you and he looks on me - and he sees no difference. One of the most offensive statements in Scripture is found in Romans 3.22, "There is no difference..." But a faithful preacher will tell you that!

**Faithful preacher will tell you the truth about Christ.** They will tell you that He is God manifested in human flesh. That babe born in Bethlehem is not some sweet helpless thing who needs us; He is the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. He is God over all, blessed forever. Faithful preachers will tell you that Jesus did no sin, knew no sin and in Him is no sin. They will tell you that He went to Calvary's cross bearing the sins of a chosen multitude and there He suffered in their place and by that suffering exhausted the wrath of God due to their sins and He put those sins away. Those for whom Christ died will never be called into account for any of their sins. Faithful preachers will tell you that the will of Jehovah prospered in the

hands of Christ and that He shall lose none whom the Father gave Him but shall raise every last one of them in the last day. A faithful preacher will tell you that Jesus Christ is the one and only way into the blessed presence of God and he will not apologize for declaring all other ways to God are false. A faithful preacher will not present to you a take-it-or-leave-it Jesus - a welcome mat to be trod upon. A faithful preacher will present to you a Christ to whom you must bow - no, more than that - a Christ to whom you WILL bow in reverence and declare Him to be Lord!

**A faithful preacher will tell you the truth about salvation.** He will tell you that it is all of Christ. He will not place any of the work of salvation in the hands of preachers, priests, parents or church. He will plainly declare that there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. "He that has the Son has life but He that does not have the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God is upon Him." A faithful preacher will never direct your attention anywhere other than to Christ. A faithful preacher will tell you that salvation is all of grace, freely given to those who have no right to claim it. "Salvation is of grace and not of works," is his common theme and he will not waver from it.

A faithful preacher will tell you that salvation is received by nothing more or less than God-given faith. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. Every believer has the promise of God that He shall be saved. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved," says the Scripture. And so says every faithful preacher.

I tell you this day, on the authority of Scripture, that God is holy, sovereign, and gracious; that you and I are hopelessly and helplessly lost in our sin; that Jesus Christ is God's Son and has born the wrath of God as the Substitute for a chosen multitude; and that any and every sinner who looks to Jesus Christ and trusts Him

alone for salvation shall experience that salvation to the full. No exceptions.

God grant us grace to understand and believe that message to the saving of our souls.