

Faithful unto Death

Galatians 5:22; Revelation 2:10

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The wisest mere man that ever lived, King Solomon, asked a question that ought to stop every Christian in his/her tracks: “Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?” (Proverbs 20:6). You see, It is very common to hear men and women tout and draw attention to their own alleged goodness, but it is very rare to find one who is truly faithful—faithful in his/her duty to Jesus Christ regardless of the cost, and faithful in his/her duty to others regardless of the cost (whether to family, to fellow Christians, to co-workers, or to neighbors).

I love to hear the biblical account of Daniel’s miraculous deliverance from the lions’ den as God closed the mouths of those hungry lions throughout the entire night and brought him safely out of that pit of death. God turned what was intended by Daniel’s enemies to be a dungeon of fear and death into a sanctuary of praise and life. Yes, as Christians we need to trust more and more in such a trustworthy, faithful God, who according to Moses, rides upon the clouds in heaven to our help (Deuteronomy 33:26).

But do we only remember God’s wondrous deliverance of Daniel, while forgetting what it was that landed Daniel in the lions’ den? It was his uncompromising faithfulness to an ever faithful God. His enemies envied the gifts and position of Daniel and the favor Daniel had received from the king. Thus, they plotted together how they might destroy Daniel by accusing him of some crime before the king. They thought and they compared notes together, and concluded that the only way they would be able to find some charge against this faithful man was to propose a

new law before the king against Daniel's God. These crafty and wicked enemies knew Daniel well enough to know that he would be faithful to God first and foremost regardless of the consequences—even if it meant disobeying a commandment that would lead to his own death.

Thus, Daniel's enemies crafted a law to flatter the king's proud vanity in deifying him. The law required that prayer be only offered to the king himself for the next 30 days, and that any violators would be thrown into the den of vicious, ravenous lions. After the king signed the law, Daniel, knowing the consequences that would follow, opened his windows (as was his practice) and knelt in prayer three times daily, giving thanks to his ever faithful God.

Dear ones, it was Daniel's firm faithfulness to the Lord and His commandments that landed him in the lions' den. And there are consequences that we too will suffer for our faithfulness to the Lord. We will be in a minority. Our faithfulness to Christ in walking a narrow path will upset others, who will call us "narrow-minded", "intolerant", "holier than thou", "separatists", "legalistic", "trouble-makers", "fanatics", or even a "cult". Faithful witnesses and martyrs for Christ have been called such names throughout history. When we suffer for faithfulness to Christ (and not for our own sin), it is a badge of honor (just as the apostles rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for the cause of Christ, Acts 5:41).

We continue our study of the fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22 (with our focus upon the fruit of faith or faithfulness). The main points for the sermon this Lord's Day are the following: (1) A Command To Be Faithful (Revelations 2:10); and (2) A Promise Of Everlasting Life (Revelation 2:10).

I. A Command To Be Faithful (“Be thou faithful unto death” Revelation 2:10).

A. The final book in Scripture is the Book of Revelation. It is a book about God’s faithfulness in redeeming and rescuing His faithful bride, and God’s faithfulness in bringing judgment upon an unfaithful harlot (the Church of Rome and all who follow her). Jesus Christ who gives this revelation to the Apostle John is called “the faithful witness” (Revelation 1:5). Jesus is an absolutely faithful witness in fulfilling the Covenant of Grace established with His bride (He is the great Hosea who has gone out to redeem and restore unto Himself we who have been unfaithful to Him. Thus, when we read the Book of Revelation, let us always remember that this is book about faithfulness—Christ’s faithfulness to us, and our faithfulness to Him (regardless of the cost). If you miss that point in all of the prophetic events that occur in this book, you have missed what is central to the Book of Revelation.

1. In fact, the Apostle John writes as a faithful witness of Christ as he suffers exile on the Island of Patmos (in the Aegean Sea) by Emperor Domitian in the mid to late 90s of the first century. Why was John banished? For his faithfulness to Christ (Revelation 1:9: “for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ”).

2. In Chapters 2-3 of the Book of Revelation, the Lord Jesus sends through the Apostle John seven letters to the ministry of seven churches that existed at that time in Asia Minor (now Turkey), both to encourage them to continue in faithfulness to Him as Lord and to warn them to repent of their unfaithfulness to Him as Lord.

3. The second of these letters was written to the ministry of the Church of Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11). Unlike the other letters, there is no warning for unfaithfulness issued to this church at all. But there is warning about the cost of their sacrifice in being faithful to Christ: tribulation (attacks in various ways), poverty (confiscation of property),

slander (name-calling), and imprisonment (barely kept alive awaiting trial or awaiting death). It is in this historical context that the Lord Jesus commands these faithful witnesses: “Be thou faithful unto death”.

4. If we were in those circumstances, we would probably have rather heard from Christ something like, “Be thou faithful unto tomorrow when I will deliver you from all your tribulation, poverty, slander, and imprisonment.” But, dear ones, it is the nature of faithfulness that it endures for Jesus Christ and His truth whatever it must in order to be loyal, firm, uncompromising, and unbending to the pressure applied by others to us—even to the point of death.

5. I don’t know about you, but I have not faced death for my faithfulness to Jesus Christ (though Christians in various parts of the world do presently face the reality of death for faithfulness to Christ and His Word every day). But all Christians (who trust alone in Christ alone for their justification before God) have the fruit of faithfulness implanted and growing within them. And our faithfulness will be tested and tried every day and in many ways. How will our faithfulness to Christ be tested?

a. By means of pressure from others (through manipulation or through guilt or through reward) applied to conform to worldly standards in order to be accepted by others.

b. By means of threats to conform or else you will lose your job, lose a friendship ...

c. By means of isolation and feeling like you are all alone in standing for the Cause of Christ.

d. By means of name-calling from your family, the world, and even from other professing Christians.

e. By means of physical suffering in your own life or in the life of a loved one.

f. By means of heartaches in broken relationships.

g. By means of waiting and waiting upon the Lord for an answer to the prayers you have offered.

- h. By means of pleasures, goals, and dreams.
- i. By means of sins and lusts of the flesh.
- j. By means of compromise (a little at a time).
- k. By means of apathy and indifference.
- m. By means of prosperity and increase of wealth.

B. Faithfulness to the Lord is centered in two primary areas.

1. **Our faithfulness in the truth.**

a. “Buy the truth and sell it not” (Proverbs 23:23).

(1) This is not to imply that the truth is for sale and we receive it by our good deeds. It is a figure of speech much like the parable of the pearl of great price which a man seeks for and sells all that he has to obtain it (Matthew 13:45-46). What are you willing to sacrifice in order to understand and love God’s truth and in order to separate the truth of Christ from error? Do you expect the gold and silver of God’s Word in the gospel, the commandments, the doctrine, worship, and government of Christ’s church to be easily gathered like a child picking flowers? Many have not the truth of Christ because they expect it to fall out of heaven with no desire, prayer, or study on their parts. We all do not have the same gifts and abilities, the same calling, or the same amount of time that might be devoted to prayer and studying God’s Word, but we should all have the same desire, and the same hungering and thirsting, and each of us should be willing to turn from the many distractions in life that keep us from time spent enjoying the Lord.

(2) Once the Lord has led us to the truth, we must never sell it, compromise it, exchange it for error, rebel against it, grow weary in loving it and obeying it. Let us be faithful stewards of the truth entrusted to us by Christ in cherishing it and praising God for it.

b. “Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set” (Proverbs 22:28).

(1) The ancient landmarks are those scriptural attainments in history that our faithful forefathers have confessed and have been willing to suffer for and to even die for in order that the truth of Christ might be passed on to the next generation. This removing of the ancient landmarks of the faithful attainments of the covenanted reformation in Scotland and hearing the faithful preaching that came from the mouths of Covenanter ministers was a real temptation in light of the harsh punishment brought against those attending these meetings. A newspaper article from the London Gazette (dated May 9, 1685) outlines the punishment to be given to Covenanters for preaching or hearing the Word of God at field conventicles (field meetings).

Edinburgh, May, 9. Yesterday there passed two Acts of Parliament; The one declaring, that whereas the obstinancy of the Fanatical Party, notwithstanding all the Laws formerly made against them do persevere to keep their House and Field Conventicles; Which are the Nurseries and Rendezvous of Rebellion; therefore his Majesty with the consent of his estates in Parliament, doth Statute and Ordain that all such as shall hereafter Preach at such Fanatical house or Field Conventicles, as also such as shall be present as Hearers at field Conventicles, shall be punished by death and confiscation of their goods. The other declaring, That the giving and taking of the National Covenant as explained in the year 1638, or of the League and Covenant, so commonly called, or writing in defence thereof, or owning of them as lawful or obligatory on themselves and others, shall infer the Crime and Pains of Treason.

The faithful Covenanter minister, James Renwick, who was one of those ministers who fearlessly preached in the homes, fields, barns, hills, and meadows regardless of such wicked laws imposed by evil rulers, was finally captured and was hung with this testimony upon his lips (February 17, 1688).

Dear friends, spectators, and (if any of you be) auditors,—I must tell you that I die a Presbyterian Protestant. I own the Word of God as the rule of Faith and manners; I own the Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechisms, Sum of Saving Knowledge, Directory for Worship, etc.; Covenants, National and Solemn League; Acts of General Assemblies,—and all the faithful contendings that have been for the work of reformation.

Ye that are the people of God, do not weary in maintaining the testimony of the day, in your stations and places; and whatever ye do, make sure an interest in Christ, for there is a storm coming that shall try your foundation.

(2) This sin begins not by “removing” the ancient landmarks altogether, but by simply “moving” the ancient landmarks just a little, kicking those ancient stones of faithful attainment that our spiritual forefathers laid down in their confessions, creeds, catechisms, covenants, and terms of communion. This is not similar in any way to the position of Rome (as we have been recklessly charged with holding), but is simply maintaining Scripture to be alone our infallible rule of faith and practice, while scriptural confessions etc. are faithful subordinate standards in charting a straight path ahead of us for us and our descendants to follow (they are the form of sound and faithful words, 2 Timothy 1:13). The Lord has given to His church faithful pastors and teachers throughout history for our help and instruction. Let us not be afraid to use them, but let us at the same time always take them to the Scriptures (as did the Bereans in Acts 17:11).

2. Our faithfulness to the Lord is also centered in **faithfulness in practice**.

a. Loving Christ above all else (Revelation 2:4).

Faithfulness begins in our hearts and affections toward Christ, wherein we want to please Him above everyone, wherein He is our life and chief reason for living. Subtle enemies that will quench your love for Christ are lukewarmness, weariness, not making time for Christ every day, making excuses for why you cannot spend time with Christ, distractions and pleasures, guilt and sin.

b. A faithfulness to Christ that is not merely outward, but a faithfulness to Christ that is inward (Psalm 139:23-24).

c. A faithfulness to Christ that is not merely public, but a faithfulness to Christ that is private when we are alone and family members and friends do not see what we have watched with our eyes, or what we have heard with our ears, or have done with our hands (2 Timothy 3:5).

C. To speak of faithfulness or unfaithfulness implies that a covenant relationship has been established between Christ and the Christian Church (the faithful bride of Christ follows Christ and is a virgin in regard to other lovers in Revelation 12, whereas the unfaithful harlot follows her own lovers in fornication and her own pleasures in Revelation 17).

1. When in the First Commandment of the Ten Commandments God declares, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3), the words, “before me” emphasize that all our gods which we place before God (whether family/friends, whether possessions, whether the approval of others, whether our own gifts, our own will, our own pleasures, or our own lusts), all these are forms of idolatry which we perform in the presence of God (like an unfaithful husband or wife that commits adultery in the presence of his/her spouse). Dear ones, the commandments of God are structured upon the basis of a gracious matrimonial covenant between God and His church?

2. That is why in Ephesians 5, the covenant relationship between Christ and His church is presented by the Apostle Paul as parallel to the covenant relationship between a husband and a wife. Thus, the very language of faithfulness and unfaithfulness is necessarily based upon a covenant relationship, which means, dear ones, that when we do not take serious our sins against Christ, when we do not grow in our hatred for our sins against the Gospel of Jesus Christ and against the Law of God, and against our neighbor that we not only sin by transgressing a particular commandment of God, but that we also sin against the wondrous Covenant of Grace (or New Covenant) God has established with us.

3. That is also why we must honor the covenants and promises by which we are bound (whether the Covenant of Grace, whether our baptismal promises and those of our children at their baptism, whether our business contracts, whether our marital covenant,

whether historical covenants by which we are bound [Solemn League and Covenant, 1643], whether personal covenants with God or with one another. We show ourselves to be unfaithful when we violate all such covenants and walk in unfaithfulness to them (refusing to repent of our unfaithfulness and to fall before our Lord in humility, confession, and seeking His forgiveness). To walk in unrepentant unfaithfulness to our covenant duties is to make ourselves liars—our word is worthless; we are not trustworthy; we become covenant-breakers (rather than covenant-keepers who faithfully renew our covenant when we fall into sin and transgress our covenant with God and others).

II. A Promise of Life Everlasting (“I will give thee a crown of life” Revelation 2:10).

A. The promise to all those who are faithful unto death (not sinlessly perfect unto death) is that they will be graciously given the crown of life, which is simply a metaphor for everlasting life (i.e. forever free from all sin, all pain, all heartache, all tears, all temptations, all sin, and all unfaithfulness, and forever enjoying the greatest delights imaginable in communion and fellowship with God and fellow believers and elect angels without interruption). Only Jesus Christ who “was dead, and is alive” (Revelation 2:8) can make such a promise and keep it, because He alone overcame death for all who trust alone in Christ alone for their justification before God. There is no hope of everlasting life apart from trusting in a faithful Christ as your Savior from sin, its guilt, its punishment, and its power (John 3:16).

B. If you are saying within yourself today, “I have been so unfaithful to the Lord. I have been so unfaithful to others in my life. I am a wretched covenant-breaker. How can I ever wear a crown of life?”

1. Let me relate to you the account of King Manasseh, the

on of faithful King Hezekiah (a reforming king in Judah). There was not a king in all of Judah who was more unfaithful, more corrupt, more abominable in his idolatry, his lusts, and his corruption of the one true religion of God revealed in Scripture (2 Chronicles 33:1-10). For the idolatry and harlotry committed against God and God's people, the Lord brought the Assyrians against Judah, who led Manasseh into a humiliating and painful captivity (2 Chronicles 33:11). And then the God of faithfulness worked a mighty work in the heart of this unfaithful rebel with one of the most amazing conversions in all of Scripture (2 Chronicles 33:12-16). Dear ones, your unfaithfulness is curable through the faithfulness of Christ. Cast all of your unfaithfulness upon Him. Let your grieving and sorrowing be chiefly that of having been unfaithful to Christ and that you have left Him as your first love, and then repent of your unfaithfulness within your marriage and home, your unfaithfulness at work, your unfaithfulness within the church, and your unfaithfulness with your neighbor. As you do so, Christ will heal your unfaithfulness and will cause the fruit of faithfulness to blossom with brilliant colors in your life (just as He did with King Manasseh). Your hope is not in your faithfulness, but is always in the faithfulness of Christ to keep His covenant promises to you regardless of the trials you are presently facing.

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