

THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

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The word that came to me was the word “faithfulness.” That’s one of the great needs in our life. You don’t need to talk to anyone or yourself about faithfulness if everything is going well. If your emotional tide is up and you feel positive and life is going great nobody needs to say, Be faithful! Because your emotional tide is “I’m involved, I’m happy, I feel good.” Faithfulness is a word that’s needed when your emotions are at low tide and when something stronger in your life needs to kick in than your emotional state. When you’re well your commitment and your discipleship are involved faithfulness is an important vital aspect of your relationship with the Lord. It’s a vital aspect of the relationship within marriage, within family.

That’s the direction I was headed. As I continued to pray about this service I felt checked to speak about not our faithfulness which is really important and which the scripture asks for. But to speak instead on God’s faithfulness. Really it’s only when we understand and know and value and appreciate and praise the faithfulness of God that we can get some insight into how we ourselves can be faithful and we have a model of faithfulness to relate to in the person of God.

I took out my concordance and did a word study of all the words in the New Testament that meant “faithfulness.” There are five ways in which the word faithfulness is used to describe God. I want to share with you those ways.

The first way that the scripture speaks of the faithfulness of God is he will be faithful to strengthen and to protect us from the evil one.

1 Thessalonians 3:3 is the scripture that contains this reference. “But the Lord is faithful [that is he’s reliable. He’s constant. He can be depended upon. He’s there day in, day out, year in year out. He’s persistent. He’s available. He’s unchanging.] and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.”

All of us whether we’re aware of it or not are wrestling life on a spiritual battle with unseen hostile forces against us as well as for us. Those unseen spiritual forces align against us would inundate us and flood us and deprive us from knowing God and experiencing God and crush our very existence. But the Lord is faithful. He will strengthen and protect us from the evil one.

When Paul writes that to the young Thessalonian church they are undergoing persecution for the faith. They are appearing in trials before civil governors and magistrates. Paul is assuring them as they face that awesome moment before the courts that the Lord will be with them to give them strength when they must give an account of their life. And he will keep them from the evil one.

We know that the way the Lord kept some of them was not necessarily a physical preservation. For some of them died in the persecutions and as martyrs. So the promise of the Lord to faithfully protect us from the evil one may not always involve a physical safety. But it always certainly involves a spiritual security.

Some months ago I was awakened in the evening. About three in the morning I’d had a very vivid dream. In this dream some acquaintances of ours I saw this giant bolder descending upon their home. It was like a stone mountain and it was coming down out of the sky in the night

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hours to crush their home. That was the state of the dream when I awakened and I sensed it was the Spirit telling me to spend some time interceding for this family. So out of the bed to spend some time praying for a family facing a danger of which I did not know. To this day I do not know what it may have been. But as I reflected upon that imagery of that dream further it seemed to me that there were two aspects of it. In their case the stone did not land on the house. But even if it had landed on the physical structure I sensed in looking deeper into the vision that they were protected. Underneath all the rubble that would have been they would have emerged safe.

That seems to be to be very descriptive of God's faithfulness to us. That he doesn't always create a plastic bubble of protection over our existence so that nothing comes crashing through. But he will guarantee us that when all debris of the trouble and the wreck we've been wrestling with has been cleared away we've emerged safe, secure, strengthened, unscathed.

The scripture indeed assures us that. When we heard the scripture read this morning the words from Isaiah such as "Fear not for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you."

Stop for a moment on that wonderful phrase: I have called you by name. You are mine. He has promised to strengthen and protect us. Be faithful at that, to never let off the watch.

A second way his faithfulness is spoken to us in the New Testament is he will not let us be tempted or tested beyond what we can bear.

1 Corinthians 10:13 "And God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. [Notice the relationship of being tempted beyond what we can bear with the faithfulness of God. God will make sure that we're not tempted or tested beyond what we can bear,] but when you are tempted he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

This passage in Corinthians assures us that temptation will come. It's not unique. We'll all face it. Even pastors are not immune as some people think. That we who minister behind the pulpit somehow exist in this never-never world of spiritual isolation. Would to God that it were true!

But temptation comes.

Paul, in the verses that precede 1 Corinthians 10:13, talks about three ways Israel of old was tempted. They were tempted to serve other gods. That is have other loyalty than loyalty to God. We're tempted in that way. To put other things ahead of God. We don't call them idols as such but spiritually anything is an idol whether it's mental or metal that we put ahead of loyalty and service to the Lord.

The Israelites were tempted with immorality. Believers are tempted with immorality. The Israelites were also tempted with grumbling, complaining about the lot that had fallen them in life. I guess all of us have that. Young people, kids, teenagers especially can complain maybe about the way they look. The fact that like me as a kid you felt that you were left out when God was handing out handsomeness or beauty. But you are beautiful. Someday you may come to find that out. I even came to love red hair. Just when I came to love it, God took it away. Blessed be the name of the Lord who giveth and taketh away.

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We fall into grumbling when we compare ourselves with someone else's image or maybe a false image we should have of what we should be. What the Lord is telling us in life is that he'll not let us be tested or tempted beyond what we could bear.

There have been situations I've been involved in when I thought initially, Lord, you must have made a mistake on this one because I can't bear this. But then this scripture comes as a comfort and says to me, yes you can. You wouldn't be having this struggle, you wouldn't be having this test except I knew you had the strength to succeed in it.

Perhaps you can think of areas in your life where you've never been tested or tempted. I know I can think of such occasions in my life. I think the Lord because in his grace he has chosen not to have me face that because he knew that I did not have yet strength in my life to face that dimension.

Often a problem with a temptation is that we do not look for a way out. The Lord is assuring us that he will with a test also provide a way of escape. There is a sense in which often we've been compared when we're tempted to a moth that flies into the fire rather than away from it. We need to look for the way out. Someone has said that Joseph when he faced the temptation with Potiphar's wife learned to pronounce the most difficult word to pronounce in any language. The word "No!" He will not let us be tempted. Faithfully, he will not let us be tempted or tested beyond what we can bear.

A third way that he is faithful to us is he will remain faithful even when we are not.

2 Timothy 2:11-13 there is an early Christian hymn. We think it's an hymn, it's in poetic form. Paul quotes it. It's probably a sort of chorus that the early church sang just like we have our choruses that we sing now. "If we die with him, we will also live with him. If we endure, we shall also reign. If we disown him, he will disown us. if we are faithless, he will remain faithful for he cannot disown himself."

Verses 12 and 13 seem to be in contradiction. On the one hand this verse says if we disown him he will disown us. Then the next verse says if we are faithless he will remain faithful. How can he remain faithful if he's going to disown us? A paradox.

There is a reality being stated there beneath the surface we need to see. Sure if we disown the Lord by inevitable consequence of a relationship, when in a marriage proposal someone says "No," there's nothing the other person can do to get that person to say Yes if they're determined to say No. That is the sense in which we can use the word, then the relationship is disowned.

What the scripture is really saying is even when God has disowned, he is not going to change his own nature and himself become a faithless God.

I think I can illustrate it in this fashion. Periodically someone shares with me that they have had an experience in life where they have been burned. Maybe it was in a church situation where they were faithfully involved. They were to discover that whoever was in a leadership role was manipulating them and using them and things weren't right. They've said, and perhaps you've said this, "I'll never get involved again. I've been burned."

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Or maybe it is that you've really trusted someone and they've disappointed you. And you've said I'll never trust another person like that again.

God has that experience all the time. His people disappoint him. People in whom he's vested confidence and trust disappoint him. Is God going to say, "I'll never trust another person again." No. Scripture says "If we are faithless he'll remain faithful." He will go on trusting. He will go on caring. He will go on showing his unchangeable nature to the sons and daughters of men. To you and to me.

Knowing that God has this character of remaining faithful even when people have been disillusioning, gives us then the impetus ourselves to evaluate those moments in life when we've been burned or disappointed and determine in our own lives to seek the character of God who remains constant and unchanging when people have changed.

A fourth way in which the scriptures describe God as faithful is that he is faithful to forgive.

1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins..." Confess means say the same thing as, to say the same thing about our sins as God says about them. Some people who are not Christians are very offended by this word "sin" and the fact that all men have sinned. Frequently if we're a good moral person we're offended by that term "sin" as applied to us. But the biblical meaning of the word sin means to simply miss a mark. It's to not hit the goal that was intended for your life by either God or by yourself. It's to fall short. And ultimately then it is to err and transgress.

We've all sinned. Even as believers we have not hit the target. This scripture is written to believers. "If we confess as believers our sins he is faithful and just. Faithful – constant, reliable, can be depended upon, not up one day and down the next. He is constant and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." God is faithful to forgive.

Logically it would seem to make more sense if it were said that he is just to condemn but the scriptures say he is just to forgive. There is a cry for law and order in our country today that judges ought to get tough on criminals and put them in jail and throw the key away. They're not just if they let somebody go. Here is a scripture saying God is just when he forgives someone rather than condemns them. How can that be? How can you be just and forgiving? God is just in forgiving in that he can be totally depended upon to keep his word and he would be unjust if he didn't keep his word. And his word is though you're stained with sins you will be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool.

His word is that he will not turn aside the penitent, the person who asks him for forgiveness. He is committed and faithful to that. We can rely upon that. We must rely upon him because there are moments when we ourselves do not feel forgiven even though we've asked God for forgiveness. We may go out and seek to keep on living life with our own unforgiveness rather than living in the forgiveness that God has provided for us. My relationship with God and my standing with God is not based upon my feeling state. It is based upon the reliability of his character and his word who assures me that he is faithful and just to forgive me my sins and to purify me from all unrighteousness.

A fifth way that the New Testament speaks of God being faithful to us is that he will present us blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Blameless, without a fault. Without a need for improvement anywhere in our being. Completely whole.

Two scripture references that speak of this. 1 Corinthians 1:8-9 “He will keep you strong to the end so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Thank God the Corinthian church is finally going to be blameless! You read the Corinthian letter and you see a lot of need for improvement. But the word right off before Paul starts to correct anything with these people he guarantees them they’re going to be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God who has called you into fellowship with his son Jesus Christ, our Lord, is faithful.

Why is God called faithful there? Because he’s going to present us blameless. He’s going to keep at the job until it’s done.

Paul again writing in 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 echoes the same theme when he says “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.” Do what? Present you blameless on the day when we appear before Jesus.

Blameless. Anybody blameless? We in the church right now are working on a term I was never familiar with until about a month ago called the Punch List. It’s a term used in construction to describe when you’re in a building and little things going on all the time on this punch list. A building is so nice and everything but you find little things here and there that need to be corrected.

I got to thinking, People who know me probably have a punch list on me. I think my wife has one on me. I could have one on her. My kids have on me and I probably have one on them. It’d be neat to be without fault, to be perfect. Those closest to us see our faults most keenly and God who is closest to us of all sees them most clearly. But when I stand in his presence, what is going to be the response? Is God is going to turn to whoever keeps the books in heaven, “Get the file on George Wood. Get the punch list on him and see what needs yet to be improved in his life.”

There will be a day the scripture says when I stand before him and he will find me blameless. He’s not going to be looking at me and saying, “You satisfied me 60% or 40% or 95% but 5% you have to go.” But I will be complete in him.

Already positionally he looks at me in that way in justification because he has now declared me righteous. And he’s declared you righteous if you’ve put your faith in him. He has promised on that day when we stand before him to have us stand in his presence with supreme confidence that he will be faithful to present us to God our Father, blameless. No charge against us. No lists to go over.

I keep a pocket calendar. I don’t like calendars. I don’t like to be tied down. There’s a free spirit in me. I thought several years ago I would rebel against the growing of the organization that the growth of the church was forcing on me. One way I would secretly rebel is I wouldn’t keep a calendar. My secretary would keep a calendar for me so I would know what was coming up in the office. But I’d keep everything in my head. I just didn’t want a calendar.

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I wanted a calendar after I'd missed several important engagements! Now I keep a calendar kind of religiously and faithfully.

This little calendar in some ways controls me. But I realize when I put dates in here that there is a date I know not when. There is a calendar, a date, just as sure as I'm standing here when I will stand before God. And just assuredly there's a calendar date for you as well. The Lord is saying as you face that moment which is sure for every one of us, if you put your trust in me, I'll present you blameless in my presence.

Someone shared with me last week that they were in a difficult situation and they were doing their best to hold on. I said to them, Keep holding on. But remember God's got a stronger hold on you than you've got on him. If in your weakness you loosen your grip he's going to tighten his. He's promised to present us blameless before his presence.

He's a merciful and faithful high priest. That means he'll always keep his word. He's pledged to us, "Lo, I am with you always. Even unto the end." May the faithfulness of God bring a response of thanksgiving in your life and may with me it produce a response of faithfulness in our own.

Our heavenly Father, thank you for the magnitude of your love for us. You are faithful. There are some here, Lord, in this auditorium who have not found a faithful persons who have gone from one relationship to another looking for stability, reliability, and have not found persons in whom they can trust. You, Lord, are our trust. You will never leave us or forsake us. You are with us always. You will perfect what concerns us. You'll bring it to completion. There are others here, Lord, that are facing very big mountains in their life. Very big pressures, lots of stress, lots of trial. Adversities hidden from others. But in the heart, the issues of life are fought at a very intense level and you give us your word. You will never let us get under more stress than we can handle. You will with that stress and temptation allow a way of escape. Help us now to have the creativity in the Spirit to look around our life and see if there isn't a door somewhere where we can escape. Not an escapism. But an escape under the secure hand of God who leads us out of the place of bondage into a place of freedom and service. There are others, Lord, who have failed you in their own personal life. Who look to you and wonder if you can forgive them. You remind us in your word that we're to forgive one another seventy times seven. And if you require such an infinite degree of forgiveness in human relationships we know that in our relationship to you, you provide a constant attitude of forgiveness. Not looking for excuses to get rid of us. You are looking for ways to put your arms around us and love us and brush the tears from our eyes. Let these words from scripture and these meditations from our heart take deep lodging with in us and hold us steady and secure in you. In the name of the Lord we ask it. Amen.