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Teaching Sound Doctrine

Lord Teach Us Pt. 8

Be Thou Faithful

"Rev 2:10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

These words were addressed to the church at Smyrna, which was located on the arm of the Aegean Sea, by the apostle John near the end of the first century. Those to whom John said "Be thou faithful" obviously paid little attention to what he said, for they soon ceased to exist, and are no more. The Bible is overflowing with such admonitions to faithfulness. Did you know that at least 1500 such warnings against falling occur in the scriptures?

This verse, while addressed to Smyrna, has a message for three classes of people. (1) Non-Christians -They are told that they must become Christians and live faithfully if they are to have hope. (2) Unfaithful Christians - They are warned to correct their unfaithfulness, and be reinstated in God's family if they are to receive the crown. (3) Faithful Christians-These are admonished to remain faithful unto death. We need to remember that whatever situation we may presently be in, John was also speaking to us. It then behooves us to study what he said.

Exposition of The Text

"Fear not--The Christian's life is never promised to be a bed of roses. Nevertheless, here we have a plain command not to be afraid. Confidently, the Psalmist said *"I will fear no evil" (Ps. 23:4)*. And Paul said *"Heb 13:6 So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."* Instead of being promised exemption from persecution, the Christian is told *"all that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12)*. The prospective Christian ought to consider that he should count the cost, and should decide that he is willing to pay the price.

Origin of our trials - It should help us to overcome our trials and temptations

when we realize with whom they originate. The text says "the devil is about to cast some of you into prison." When we are prone to give up the faith and neglect our duty, remember that by doing so we are joining hands with the devil. Jesus said *"He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth"* (Matt. 12:30). At all times we are either an instrument of God or an instrument of the devil. The devil did not personally cast these brethren into prison. He used one of his agents, and this agent was a man. Anytime we are less than "faithful" we are one of the devil's helpers.

Purpose of trials - This imprisonment was to "try" these brethren. The Lord never tries to break us down. He promised that we will not be tempted above that which we are able. If we were tempted beyond our ability to resist, we would have no responsibility to overcome. The word "try" could properly be replaced with the word "test." When we encounter trials, we are being tested. On any test we should do our best. In these tests, it is imperative that we do our best. Most of us would like to think that our burdens and our temptations are greater than any others'. But Peter denies this. He says *"knowing that the same sufferings are accomplished in your brethren who are in the world"* (I Pet. 5:9).

All of us are tempted alike; either by the lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, or the pride of life. Paul says rejoice in your tribulations, because *"tribulation worketh stedfastness; and stedfastness, approvedness; and approvedness, hope"* (Rom. 5:3, 4). In the Peter's epistle he states that *"1Pe_4:1 Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin;* When one knows that he must suffer physically for his faith, he is not going to be half-hearted about it. If it costs him punishment, yet really means nothing to him, he will give it up. Is this why some turn back. This why some are waver.

Restart here

"Ten days" - John states that the tribulation will last "ten days." This indicates that the persecution will be full and complete, yet brief. It would not last forever. Pain is much more easily borne if we know it will last but for a moment. A woman can bear the pain of child birth because she knows they will last but a little while. Then there comes relief. The Christian knows the discouragements and hindrances of life are not permanent. They come in cycles. Peter says *"Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, ye have been put to grief in manifold trials"* (I Pet. 1:6). Paul endured far more than you and I ever have or will, yet he could say *"For our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory"* (2 Cor. 4:17). Paul could call his affliction "light" only by comparison: *"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us-ward"* (Rom. 8:18). We can and should

endure these present unpleasantries, knowing they will last but "ten days."

"Be thou ' faithful" - One must be both dependable, and true to the Book. "Moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (I Cor. 4:2). Zeal is not enough. Membership in the church is not sufficient. Faithful service is also required. Some brethren want to see how close to hell they can get, and still go to heaven. They want to see with just how little effort they can be admitted into heaven. Yet faithfulness requires just the opposite. It requires the whole of our energy and ability. The apostle commands: *"Be yet stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord"* (I Cor. 15:58). Faithfulness requires an abundance of work. We must try to go beyond the bare minimum.

In order for one to do his best, he must have adequate incentive. This incentive should be adequately supplied by two remembrances. First, our energies should be stirred when we look back to Calvary. Those heart-rending, agonizing hours were brought upon our Lord by sins-mine and yours. If we served a million years in faithful service, we would never have paid in full our debt to Him who suffered there. And secondly, though we are still in debt to Him, He has promised to pay us for our work. Our labor "is not in vain in the Lord." These two recollections should sufficiently stir us to activity.

"Unto death" - Our work for the Lord is not completed until our death. I know many preachers who have devoted their lives to the Gospel and they all will tell you They get weary and discouraged they will tell you there are times that they feel they can do no more yet, they continue on with their work. They will all tell you that they go back and read Rev. 2:10 again. It says "be thou faithful unto death," so they go to work on another project.

The expression "unto death" can be taken to embrace two ideas. It can mean until you die of old age, or unto the point of death, which seems to be its meaning in its context. Whether our death be natural or violent, we must be faithful to our Lord until it comes. Shortly after John penned these words, one of the members of the church at Smyrna was called upon to obey "unto death." Polycarp is said to have personally known John. During a persecution, Polycarp was commanded to say "Caesar is Lord," but he refused. The proconsul urged him, "Swear, and I will set thee at liberty, reproach Christ." To which Polycarp replied, "Eighty and six years have I served him, and he never did me any injury; how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?" They threatened to burn him, and he said: "Thou threatenest me with fire which burneth for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but art ignorant of the fire of coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. But why tarriest thou? Bring forth what thou wilt." And they burned him to death, but he refused to

blaspheme his Lord. The sting of death is removed by the hope aroused by dying faithful in the Lord.

We often think we have sufficient reason for our neglect and unfaithfulness. The Hebrew writer rebuked some brethren who were about to turn back by saying *"Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin"* (Heb. 12:4). Have you shed any blood for the Lord? I have not as yet. We therefore, have no reason to turn back. Regardless of what may have been the cause, if we become unfaithful short of death, we forfeited our hope of eternal life.

"The crown of life--Jesus said *"I know thy tribulation, and thy poverty"* (Rev. 2:9). He is not unaware of that which we undergo for Him. In exchange for our poverty and suffering, he will give us a crown of life. The crown referred to here simply embraces all the joyous provisions the Lord has made for His faithful servants. He said *"I go to prepare a place for you."* Heaven is a prepared place for a people prepared for it by faithful employment. Peter declares that elders who faithfully discharge their duty will receive a *"crown of glory that fadeth not away"* (I Pet. 5:4).

James states *"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he hath been approved, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to them that love him"* (Jas. 1:12). The crown is for them that love Him, but the crown is for the faithful, Therefore, the faithful are they that love Him. Consequently, the unfaithful are they that do not love Him. Though you may think your unfaithfulness is caused by some brother's weakness, the Bible teaches that you lack love for the Lord. Demas loved the world, and he forsook the work of the Lord (2 Tim. 4:10). You love something other than the Lord if you are unfaithful to Him.

John speaks of the righteous' reward when he says *"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord ... that they may rest from their labors"* (Rev. 14:13). He also says *"He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death"* (Rev. 2:11). Those who do not overcome will undergo the second death, which is everlasting banishment from the wonderful presence of God. The unfaithful brother, must return to the Lord, ask His pardon and the prayers of brethren in his behalf. Faithful brethren, remain "faithful unto death" that we might not taste the second death, but might receive the crown of glory which fadeth not away. His we are; His we ever shall be if we profitably serve Him "unto death."

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