

Teaching Sound Doctrine

Faithfulness

Thomas, one of the 12 apostles, was commanded, "be not faithless but believing." (John 20:27). Jesus taught, "He that is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much: and he that is unrighteous in a very little is unrighteous also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?" The Lord teaches here that it is quite impossible to give undivided worship and loyalty to two different commitments. He concludes, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Luke 16:10-13). God always requires undivided faithfulness to Him.

Another teaching of Jesus shows that there is a measurement by which faithfulness can be determined. He taught of two approved servants in the parable of the talents as "good and faithful servants" and one servant who was not approved as a "wicked and slothful" servant. (Matt. 25:26). Slothful is here used by our Savior as the opposite of faithfulness. Vine's Expository Dictionary of the New Testament says, "indolent, sluggish." He says it is a synonym of "dull." He adds that it means also, "shirking and irksome."

The rewards of the two are opposites. Whereas the faithful servant receives the blessing and approval of the Lord, the slothful servant is condemned. How anyone could hold me, to the doctrine of "once saved always saved" in the face of these teachings from Christ is beyond me. The Lord plainly teaches that His servants (not Satan's) are the ones who will be called into an accounting and judged according to their faithfulness. Jesus, to the church in Smyrna, wrote that some of them were about to be put to the test of their faith and added, "be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life." (Rev. 2: 10).

In Acts 16 there is the narrative of the conversion of Lydia, a seller of purple, who was in Philippi. The Bible says that she invited Paul and his companions to be her house guests, "if ye have judged me to be faithful." (verse 15). This provokes me to think of myself and all others who claim to be disciples of Christ. Would Paul and his companions judge us to be faithful? Faithfulness as judged by the apostles and Christ is an extremely important issue to everyone who claims to be a Christian.

The word in English for "loyal" very aptly describes the word "faithful." Anyone

who is faithful is loyal. This, we recognize, is the usage found in both the civic and domestic realms. A loyal American is one who is faithful to the principles on which America is founded. He is willing to defend this country in every way consistent with his conscience, to pay his taxes and vote for the man he believes in and will work for the best interests of America. Much more and in a higher sense, a citizen in God's kingdom, the church, is willing to defend the gospel (Phil. 1: 17), contribute of his money to advance the cause of Christ (2 Cor. 9:7-8), work untiringly in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58), and share in the responsibilities of the church, if he is a loyal Christian.

We often say that some man has been "unfaithful" to his wife or vice versa on the basis of their taking up with another partner and cheating on their mate in marriage. We mean by that that they have not been "loyal" to the vows they made to be "faithful until they part in death." Much more the members of the body of Christ are members of Christ's bride, the church. (Eph. 5:23-25). They are to be faithful to the bridegroom. But when members of the church become "unfaithful" they start missing services, fail to pray and work as they ought and sometimes "forsake" the church and take up with the world. The devil controls the passions and purposes of this old world. It is the only place where he can have a controlling impact on one's life. When members of the bride of Christ go back into the world, they become unfaithful to the bridegroom and are condemned to be lost unless they repent and return to their first love. (Rev. 2: 1-4).

There is another idea in the word "faithful." It is the idea of "steadfast." A faithful Christian is one who is not "tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine," (Eph. 4:14-15) but remains constant in the service of the Lord. He just keeps on doing what is right. He heeds the admonition Paul gave in the book of Galatians. "Be not weary in well doing. ." (Gal. 6:9). He remains faithful and constant in his work in the Lord. "Be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as ye know that your work in the Lord is not in vain." (1 Cor. 15:58). He is aware of the fact that he may help build an empire of power, based on money and worldly goods, he may amass a fortune on earth, may martial mighty armies of untold power, but it will all be in vain in respect to eternity. Only those things that amount to "your treasures in heaven" (Matt. 6:19,20) will benefit you when life is over. As Jesus said to the foolish and wealthy farmer in Luke 12:20, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee, and then whose shall all these things be?" Requiring the soul is what God is interested in-not bank accounts and full barns.

Robert Farish wrote the following. "Empty pews but crowded pleasure spots on the Lord's day, indifference of church members to the aggressive attacks of atheists, anxiety, hate, greed, envy, strife, vile sins of passion, wholesale

departure from the faith by many churches, etc., is evidence of lack of loyalty among those professing allegiance to Christ the King. Many church members are unfaithful to the Lord and according to the Bible they will be lost if they continue in their unfaithfulness. Citizens of the kingdom of heaven need to 'awake out of sleep . . . cast off the works of darkness ... put on the armor of light . . . walk becomingly, as in the day; not in reveling and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and jealousy.' (Rom. 13:11,13). This language is addressed to believers; hence the responsibility to put on the Lord Jesus Christ is a continuous exercise. "

One cannot but be impressed by this observation. It seems to be more difficult to get people to study the Bible and attend worship services than to get them into a sports stadium. In fact, the Orange Bowl has more difficulty-keeping people out of the stadium than they do trying to get them in on New Year's Day and any other time they have a football game there. The golf links are always crowded on Lord's Day morning and people even have to get an appointment so they can play. How many churches do you know that have to seat their constituents by appointment? The beer joints and honky-tonks have more patrons than all the churches of Christ in the world has. How tragic! Well, why don't we do something about this travesty on the love and mercy of God? What can we do?

Let me suggest that there are a few things we all can do to remedy such a situation and it begins with self. Here is what is involved in being a "faithful" Christian.

1. All of us can do some personal examination. Hear the words of Paul: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith: prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (2 Cor. 13:5). This was written to Christians. Stop, take a look at your life and refuse to say, "I'm doing the best I can." Be honest with yourself and realize that you and I are not what we ought to be.
2. Make a resolution in your heart to try -just try-always to be better. Resolve to try really hard. "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." (Col. 3:9-10). Keep on trying to do better, aware of the grand fact that you, as one who put Christ on in baptism, have not been what you should have been.
3. Do something for the Lord every day and actually practice the religion of the Savior. The religion of Christ is a "do" religion. Jesus said, "Not everyone that saith, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven." (Matt. 7:21). Are you willing to try these Biblical suggestions? If so, you will enjoy the greatest thing

anyone on earth can know--the peace that passeth all knowledge and understanding." There will be no more nervous disorders for you, no more anxiety, no more being upset and mentally disturbed. Serving God in all faithfulness is the very best remedy for all the "tip tight" maladies that grip the fives of so many.

Faithfulness is a life of challenge that brings one into a newness of life every day and ultimately provides the greatest reward imaginable. Let these few lines serve to encourage all Christians to more loyal and dedicated faithfulness to Christ and His great Church.