

November 11, 2007

“The Fruit of the Spirit: Faithfulness”
Galatians 5:22-23

FCF: Absence of and hunger for “faithfulness” in this world and in our lives

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because faithfulness is the fruit of the Spirit,
(magnet) we must look to the Spirit to cultivate faithfulness in our lives.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

We have a problem with faithfulness. Think with me as to why there’s been a mushrooming of laws in this country and, of course, the governmental bureaus to enforce them. Economists tell us prices are increasing all the while that businesses might cover the costs incurred from deals gone bad because of broken promises. Our relationships are a mess. Our families are in disarray. And why? We have a problem with faithfulness.

What’s the answer? It may surprise you – especially since it’s right before us. What makes possible the faithfulness of man is simply this – the faithfulness of God.

SCRIPTURE READING: Galatians 5:16-26

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

The movie, “Gods and Generals,” was chiefly about the rise and fall, the faith and faithfulness of General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson. The film makes clear Jackson was a devout Christian. During one particular battle, things were not going well for the Confederate Army. Rallying the troops, someone yelled, “*Look at Jackson standing like a stone wall.*” Jackson, sitting straight in his saddle with cannon fire exploding all around him, his left hand wounded by a musket ball, began to ride up and down the line, mobilizing his men. After the battle, another officer asked Jackson (**READ quote**):

General, how is it you can keep so serene and stay so utterly insensible with a storm of shells and bullets raining about your head?

Jackson’s response was priceless (**READ quote**):

Captain Smith, my religious belief teaches me to feel as safe in battle as in bed. God has fixed the time for my death – I do not concern myself with that, but to be always ready, whenever it should overtake me. That is the way all men should live. Then all men would be equally brave.

Jackson was a living embodiment of the faith of a man in the faithfulness of God.

Something had gone awry in the Galatian church. Paul had visited the region months before, preaching the gospel of justification, our standing with God secured by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. They had gladly received this. But it had been watered down and corrupted with a teaching including our efforts, our energies, our strength, and our striving. And so the vital nerve had been cut between their resting in Christ’s finished work on the cross – their faith in Him – and their faithfulness to Him. And to one another. The nerve had been cut. And so the church was in crisis.

Damaged doctrine damages people. The faithfulness of God is real. We’ve read some texts speaking to this already. Hear “the Song of Moses” (**READ Deuteronomy 32:1-4**). The faithfulness of God is real. And so too is the call to faithfulness among His people (**READ Matthew 23:23**). Such faithfulness is commanded by God. Yet it is also compelled by His love and carried by His grace. Commanded by God, compelled by His love, and carried by His grace. But how? By what? By whom? Again, we come back to the fact that faithfulness is the “fruit of the Spirit” – the result of His working in our lives. Our faithfulness flows from Him. It is the faithfulness of God that frees us and enables us to be faithful ourselves. Both to Him and to others. Both to Him and to others.

I. FAITHFULNESS TO GOD

First to Him. His faithfulness to us compels and enables ours to Him.

A) *Standing Firm for Him*

Compelling and enabling us to stand firm for Him. Think with me here.

1. His love for us

In view of His love for us, what else, can we do? ([READ Heidelberg Catechism Q:1](#)):

Question 1: What is your only comfort in life and death?

Answer: That I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood, and has set me free from all the power of the devil. He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, all things must work together for my salvation. Therefore, by His Holy Spirit He also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for Him.

You cannot miss the connection. His love for us leads to something in us.

2. Our loyalty to Him

Our loyalty to Him. The longing of the subjects to serve such a King – to exalt His Name, to promote His causes, to seek His will, His kingdom, and His righteousness.

A longing tested by the call today to relativism, pluralism, and inclusiveness. We are tempted if not told to pipe down. But Jesus is the “faithful and true witness.” And He has placed us now, each in certain arenas, to stand up and even speak up for Him.

Illustration:

And there have been times in history when that arena was not a metaphor. Consider the martyrdom of Polycarp. He was an associate of the apostle John and a bishop in Smyrna (in modern day Turkey). When he was 86 years old, midway through the 2nd century, he was apprehended and brought before the Roman proconsul. “Swear by Caesar and revile Christ. Then I will release you.” Polycarp replied ([READ quote](#)): “For eighty-six years I have been his servant, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?” Polycarp was then tied to a stake and burned.

The point? In His faithfulness to us, Jesus is worthy of such faithfulness to Him.

B) *Steady to His Call*

Standing firm for Him and then remaining steady to His call.

1. Aware of His purposes

Being aware of His purposes for us, knowing He has gifted us, granted us each unique experiences, laid certain desires upon our hearts, opened up opportunities for us. With what in mind? ([READ Ephesians 4:11-16](#)) See how vast are His intentions for us!

2. Wary of our temptations

We need to be aware of His purposes. And wary of our temptations – to discouragement as to how things are, to disillusionment as to who we are. Read through 1 Corinthians 12 and the special place of each member of the body. And our need to play our part.

Illustration:

([READ 1500 Illustrations](#)):

The story is told of an 11th century German king, King Henry III, who, having grown tired of court life and the pressures of being a monarch, applied to a monastery to be accepted for a life of contemplation. The religious superior of the monastery, Prior Richard, is reported to have said, “Your Majesty, do you understand that the pledge here is one of obedience? That will be hard because you have been a king.”

Henry replied, “I understand. The rest of my life I will be obedient to you, as Christ leads you.”

“Then I will tell you what to do,” said Prior Richard. “Go back to your throne and serve faithfully in the place where God has placed you.”

When King Henry III died, a statement was written: “The King learned to rule by being obedient.”

We may tire of our roles and responsibilities. But God has placed each of us in a particular place and time and called us to be faithful there and give ourselves to it.

Application:

Faithfulness in those callings is faithfulness to the One who calls. Which means a half-hearted effort in those callings reflects a half-heartedness that God can see and despises (**READ Malachi 1:6-14**). How does this apply to callings? The gifted athlete training just enough to get by. The “A” student content with “C” quality work. The believer who settles for giving a fleeting smile when a hug, a word of encouragement, or just time are needed. Faithfulness in our callings is faithfulness to the One who calls.

And it is the faithfulness of God that both frees us to be faithful and enables us to be faithful as well. First, in our faithfulness to Him.

II. FAITHFULNESS TO OTHERS

And then, flowing from that, our faithfulness to others as well. In what ways?

A) In Our Speech

Chiefly, two. First, in our speech. That is, what we say is true.

1. What it means

Every word we say, all our personal affairs, marked by Solomon’s words (**READ Proverbs 12:22**). Lying – what are we talking about here? Any deceit, any word or action, even our silence, any distortion of the truth to create a false impression. Any deliberate exaggeration or manipulation of the facts. Now think how far that reaches.

2. Why it’s important

Why is this so important to stress? Because of the world we live in. Some executives have gone so far as to say it is impossible to succeed in business today without compromising the truth. We’re called to be salt in such decay. We have to stress this because the world is looking for faithfulness here. And because we struggle with this so.

B) In Our Commitments

In our speech and in our commitments. Faithfulness to others demands that what we say is true. But not only that, but that we will do what we say we will do.

1. To certain things

Worshipping and serving an utterly dependable God, we are to be utterly dependable ourselves. Reliable, unswayed by what seems desirable or convenient (**READ Psalm 15:1-4**). With certain things, when a better deal comes along, we don’t just take it.

2. To certain people

Because we are committed to other things. And to people. We are to be utterly dependable and unswervingly loyal. Sticking with people through thick and thin. Especially those to whom we’ve made vows – whether they be spouses, children, or a congregation. Committed to people. In fact, so committed that we care enough to confront (**READ Proverbs 27:6**). All of this patterned on the care of God Himself for us.

What we say is true. And we will do what we say we will do.

Illustration:

In the first part of The Lord of the Rings, The Fellowship of the Ring, Frodo Baggins, a hobbit, is given the unenviable task of destroying a ring in the Cracks of Doom in a dark and evil land called Mordor. His task is fraught with mortal danger.

Gandalf the wizard understands such a journey could cause anyone to become discouraged. And so he enlists Samwise Gamgee to accompany Frodo on the trip, even eliciting a promise from Sam that he will never leave Frodo. At a point well into the

story, Frodo recognizes the danger he poses to those around him and decides to slip off and go the rest of the way on his own. He steps into a boat and pushes off from shore.

Suddenly, the branches on the shore begin to part and Sam appears, shouting, “Frodo! Mr. Frodo!” Frodo yells back, “Go back, Sam! I’m going to Mordor alone!”

Sam is not dissuaded. He keeps coming and splashes into the water. “Of course you are, and I’m coming with you!” “You can’t swim!” Frodo shouts. “Sam! Sam!”

Sam desperately tries to swim to the boat. Frodo watches as Sam begins to sink. Frodo then reaches down, grabs his wrist, and pulls him up into the boat. Sam, soaking and sputtering, blurts out, “I made a promise, Mr. Frodo. A promise. ‘Don’t you leave him, Samwise Gamgee.’ And I don’t mean to. I don’t mean to.”

At which Frodo embraces Sam. “Come on,” he smiles.

Application:

This is not to be isolated to the stuff of glorious fiction. It’s to be here, among us. Do we not see such faithfulness in Jonathan to David? In Timothy to Paul? And in Jesus to us? Love demands sacrifice – the interests of another placed ahead of ourselves.

This demands we ask ourselves some hard questions. What sorts of situations tempt you to leave? Or to deceive? Where have you forgotten the faithfulness of God? When have you needed to follow through on commitments and keep your word? How dependable are you? What kind of friend are you to one in trouble? Or in sin?

Again, it is the faithfulness of God that both frees us and enables us to be faithful as well. In our faithfulness to Him and in our faithfulness to others – it’s all grounded, all rooted, tied, and flowing from the reality that He is (**READ Deuteronomy 32:4**).

CONCLUSION:

Let me close with this, a rite of passage we could all learn from (**READ IV2**):

One tribe of native Americans had a unique practice for training young braves. On the night of a boy’s thirteenth birthday, he was placed in a dense forest to spend the entire night alone. Until then he had never been away from the security of his family and tribe. But on this night he was blindfolded and taken miles away. When he took off the blindfold, he was in the middle of thick woods. By himself. All night long. Every time a twig snapped, he probably visualized a wild animal ready to pounce. Every time an animal howled, he imagined a wolf leaping out of the darkness. Every time the wind blew, he wondered what more sinister sound it masked. No doubt it was a terrifying night for many.

After what seemed like an eternity, the first rays of sunlight entered the interior of the forest. Looking around, the boy saw flowers, trees, and the outline of the path. Then, to his utter astonishment, he beheld the figure of a man standing just a few feet away, armed with a bow and arrow. It was the boy’s father. He had been there all night long.

And the point was he would be. He had been and he would be. Now what would be the effect of the assurance of the father’s presence there with that young brave? Is he not then freed to take risks, emboldened to act in ways he would never dare if he were alone and on his own? Is he not then privileged, with the father’s presence, to be taught and trained, to benefit from a modeling of and molding into what maturity was to look like?

Dear ones, what we need to see here is that this is exactly what the faithfulness of God does for us. Knowing He has been, is now, and forever will be with us, we are then freed to live in faithfulness ourselves. And His Spirit’s active work within us, bringing forth this fruit, continuously and increasingly, is what enables us to be faithful as well. His faithfulness is what compels and enables our own. Let us go to Him now in prayer.

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