

## **THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST - Lesson #4: GOD'S FAITHFULNESS / OUR FAITHFULNESS**

### **The previous lessons of this series have focused on: GOD'S FAITHFULNESS:**

After the creation and fall of mankind, rather than rejecting creation, God begins a process of redemption. Abraham was selected to bring blessing to all nations. Genesis 12:1-3 "... in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." This was to be done through the Jewish nation. God himself enters his world through Christ: "though he was in the form of God, emptied himself, and became obedient to the point of death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him so that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." Philippians 2:5-9 God was faithful to what he intended to accomplish with his world even at enormous cost.

### **Today's lesson: OUR FAITHFULNESS**

The key passage for this lesson links GOD'S FAITHFULNESS with OUR FAITHFULNESS:

"Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David—that is my gospel, for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself." [2 Timothy 2:8-12]

God cannot be unfaithful. But we may either "live with him" and "endure," or "deny him" and become "faithless."

### **What does our faithfulness involve? At least these three concepts:**

**Belief**--an acceptance of what we know about God, who he is and what he has done. Romans 10:9: "...if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." The resurrection of Christ is not all we know and believe about God; but it is the climactic culmination of all he has done. Faithfulness is more than acknowledging what Jesus did since "the devils believe and tremble", [James 2:19]

**Trust**--confidence about God's intentions both in his past actions and in the future. 1 Peter 1:21: "you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory." Romans 5:1: "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God." ["Faith"and "faithfulness": are they the same?]

**Allegiance**--commitment to God: whether I will respond to Christ as Lord. When Thomas was confronted by the risen Christ, he confessed, "My Lord and my God." [John 20:28] Jude 4 speaks of Jesus in these terms: "our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." Accepting Christ as Lord through whom God has faithfully kept his promises means knowing that Christ has "all authority in heaven and on earth" and that we are his servants. [Matt 28:19] As Lord, Christ will

also be judge [Acts 10:42], before whom we will all appear [2 Cor. 5:10] to answer not just whether we believed but whether that faith moved us to follow Christ by feeding those who were hungry, etc. [Matt. 25:31-45] The issue is not whether a person once believed, but whether that person continued in allegiance or loyalty to Christ.

### **The two major points in today's lesson:**

#### **1> God's faithfulness, seen in his grace and love, is the cause or single source for the redemption of his creation.**

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us...."

Ephesians 2:8-10

#### **2> But faithful love like this stakes a claim on our lives.**

We are no longer free to do as we please. He has made us in Christ Jesus to do good works: Phil. 2:10

Thus, we must "work out" our salvation with "fear and trembling." [Phil. 2:12-13] Notice Paul did not say, "work for salvation," in order to pay for it. Rather he admonishes us to keep on working at being faithful.

We do this knowing that salvation is a gift and is not wages earned by sufficient work. [Rom. 4:4-5] It is a gift, though, that captures its recipient.

### **Questions we might ask about our faithfulness to God:**

#### **Are our faithfulness and God's faithfulness "equal shares" in our relationship to God?**

[Maybe God's share is larger, but ours is in there as part of the price?] What Christ accomplished on the cross was not merely to help lower the price so we could afford salvation. Rather, he did what we have always sung: "Jesus paid it all. All to him I owe." New life is not made available at a bargain basement price; it is a gift. But a gift that costs us everything. Sounds like we're all on charity, doesn't it? We are! How could we otherwise undo acts of ours that were unkind or selfish? Read Romans 4:4-8 and Ephesians 2:1-10.

#### **Does "faithfulness" mean perfection, never ever failing?**

The admonitions to remain faithful are there because of the danger that Christians might sin. [For example, Romans 6:12-13 and 1 John 1] Peter is an example of a follower who failed twice--he denied Jesus and later acted out of cowardice so that Paul rebuked him. [Gal. 2:11] If our sin were to persist into complete denial we would separate ourselves from Christ and his salvation: "if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us;" 2 Timothy 8:11. See also Heb. 10:26-31.

#### **What if we do sin?**

The Apostle John answers that question in 1 John 1:7-9: "[I]f we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin....If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." While "walking in the light"--that must mean while being faithful--we can sin, but if we do, Christ's blood keeps us clean. This is not talking about a

flipping between condemnation after each failure and renewed salvation after each prayer. Our immediate response on such occasions is to confess the sin and look to Christ for forgiveness--because we still "endure," we have not "denied him."

### **"Come follow me."**

Discipleship begins with death: Take up your cross and follow me. Matthew 16:24 2 Tim. 2:11: "If we have died with him, we will also live with him;" Gal. 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ;" The first public sermon by Peter on Pentecost ends by calling his hearers to repentance and baptism: Acts 2:36-47 In Rom. 6:3-7 Paul describes baptism as a union with Christ, his death, burial, resurrection. Paul's comparison of baptism with the death of Christ shows baptism is a burial in water and resurrection out of it. Repentance that precedes baptism is a decision to die to sinful ways: Acts 26:20

### **Disciples look back on their baptism as:**

A cleansing by God--not really something they did, but something God did for them. Ephesians 5:26: God makes his people "holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word,"

A time of forgiveness and reception of God's Spirit. Acts 2:38: "...sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

An entrance into a new life of discipleship and into the fellowship of Christ himself.

Romans 6:8-13: "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion ... but... present your members to God as instruments of righteousness." Good passages to read at the end this lesson to remind us of the joy of serving Christ: Rom. 8: 18-39. 1 Cor. 15:37-38 Later lessons in this series speak about continuing discipleship.

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