

Christian
Faithfulness

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But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23 NKJV)

I. Introduction

a. Review

i. The nature and purpose of the fruits of the Spirit

1. Reproduction of the life of God in the soul

a. Inner life – Perfection in simplicity

i. Holiness is the union of all perfections

ii. Indivisible simplicity

b. Outer life – Radiance beyond compare

i. The light must project outward

ii. The light shines in the darkness, whether the darkness likes it or not!

2. The stated purpose of God

a. By this my Father is glorified, **that you bear much fruit** and so prove to be my disciples. (John 15:8)

b. Your sanctification -- For this is the will of God, *even* your **sanctification**, that ye should abstain from fornication: (1 Thess. 4:3)

c. Conformance to Christ -- For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate **to be conformed** to the image of his Son

3. The requirement of holiness

a. Follow peace with all *men*, and **holiness, without** which no man shall see the Lord: (Heb 12:14)

b. But as he which hath called you is holy, so **be ye holy** in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, **Be ye holy**; for I am holy. (1 Peter 1:15-16)

4. Conclusion –

a. Given that holiness is necessary

b. And is not a distinct attribute per se, but rather the combination of all these moral attributes; holiness is the sum of all excellence and the combination of all the attributes which constitute perfection of character (see James Boyce, Abstract of ST, 92-93)

c. Holiness is the combination of all the fruits of the Spirit to a single fruit which, as the colors of the rainbow are refracted from the white light of the sun, all the fruits of the Spirit must be cultivated.

d. That means the fruit of faith/faithfulness cannot be ignored, even though it doesn't sound as luscious as the others. We

might think of reliable, dependable people as boring, and prefer spontaneous, exciting spur of the moment people. But, before you doze off, let's proceed to consider

- ii. The container in which the fruits grow
 1. the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and truth (Eph 5:9)
 2. three spheres of holiness
 - a. truth is related to the mind; knowledge.
 - b. righteousness is related to the will; commandment
 - c. goodness is related to the affections; motivations
- b. The particular fruit of PISTIS
 - i. Possible meanings of PISTIS
 1. The subjective understanding, belief and trust in the gospel of God.
 - a. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his **faith** is counted for righteousness (Rom 4:5)
 - b. Therefore being justified by **faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: (Rom 5:1)
 - c. For by grace are ye saved through **faith**; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: (Eph 2:8)
 2. The objective doctrines of the gospel
 - a. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were **obedient to the faith**. (Acts 6:7)
 - b. One Lord, **one faith**, one baptism (Eph 4:5)
 - c. Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly **contend for the faith** which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 1:3)
 3. Faithfulness
 - a. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and **faith**: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone (Matt 23:23)
 - b. For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the **faith** of God without effect? (Rom 3:3)
 - c. Not purloining, but showing all good **fidelity**; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things. (Titus 2:10)
 - ii. Faith and/or faithfulness
 1. In the OT – EMUNAH, AMAN (related to AMEN)
 - a. It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy **faithfulness**. (Lamentations 3:22-23)

- i. Lamentation is the work of the weeping prophet, Jeremiah, following the destruction of Jerusalem. Before and after this short section, the grim reality of God's judgment is set forth in gruesome detail. But then we come across this verse in the midst, like a diamond among lumps of coal, or a single ray of light streaming through great storm clouds.
 - ii. EMUNAH in this verse has the clear sense of steadfastness in conduct. "For I *am* the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal 3:6). The sense is of a lasting loyalty and trustworthiness in relationships.
- b. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but **the just shall live by his faith.** (Habakkuk 2:4)
- i. This is a key verse in the OT which is quoted 3 times in the NT, in Romans 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38.
 - ii. אמונה does not denote "an honourable character, or fidelity to conviction" (Hitzig), but (from 'âman , to be firm, to last) firmness (Exodus 17:12); then, as an attribute of God, trustworthiness, unchangeable fidelity in the fulfilment of His promises (Deuteronomy 32:4 ; Psalms 33:4 ; Psalms 89:34); and, as a personal attribute of man, fidelity in word and deed (Jeremiah 7:28 ; Jeremiah 9:2 ; Psalms 37:3); and, in his relation to God, firm attachment to God, an undisturbed confidence in the divine promises of grace, [Keil & Delitzsch, ad loc].
 - iii. The point to remember, then, after studying all the evidence for translating EMUNAH as "faith" or "trust," is best stated by H. S. Bryant: "It must be carefully maintained that neither the Old nor the New Testament separate faith from its fruits of faithfulness. The distinction between faith and faithfulness is somewhat artificial, for ... in the long run they are the same thing. The Bible knows nothing of a true faith which does not hold fast its confidence to the end. (Ps. 64:10)." [Kaiser, Jr., Walter C.. The Preacher's Commentary, ad loc]
 - iv. The "just man" is the opposite of the "proud man" because humility is the characteristic of true saving faith. Those who tremble at God's word are those who understand and believe in Him, and this involves the understanding, the will and the affections, since these are all united in the fear of the Lord.

- v. Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name. (Psalm 86:11)
 - 1. This verse brings together the ideas of believing, walking and fearing – of righteousness, goodness and truth.
- c. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness. (Genesis 15:6)
 - i. Habakkuk based the phrase “the just will live by faith” on the language in Genesis 15:6.
 - ii. Hebrew scholars wonder why the verb for “believe” is in the stem which generally has a causative force. The traditional explanation has been to assign to this form of this verb a sense of entering into a certain condition and, further, the remaining in the same. Abram “became steadfast (or firm) in Yahweh.” This emphasizes the certainty and the sureness of the believer, rather than the certainty of the object or statement in which faith was placed. What prompted Abram’s faith was certainly the promise of the Lord, but also requires his belief in the faithfulness of him who promised.
 - iii. It is also evident from the context that our passage treats of the relation between man and God, since the words themselves speak of a waiting for the fulfilment of a promise, which is to be preceded by a period of severe suffering. What is more natural than that life or deliverance from destruction should be promised to that faith which adheres faithfully to God, holds fast by the word of promise, and confidently waits for its fulfilment in the midst of tribulation?
 - iv. This brings to mind Jesus’ words in Luke 21:19, “By your patience possess your souls.” This is not a matter of works righteousness but an expression of the idea that patience under persecution and steadfastness in trials is the kind of faith that saves. The saving faith that really understands and trusts in the Lord is the kind of faith that bears patiently under persecution and procures for us the possession of our souls.
 - v. James wrote, “Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain” (James 5:7).
 - vi. This is the kind of faith that saves – because it is faithful unto the end. As Christ prayed for Peter, “that his faith

fail not” so He prays for every one of His own, and their faith does not fail. Peter later wrote that we are “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:5).

2. In the NT, PISTIS and PISTOS

a. It is illuminating to consider the three references to Hab 2:4 in a row because it highlights the two aspects of this word.

i. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. (Romans 1:17)

1. This reference of Habakkuk preserves the ambiguity of the original. The righteousness of God is the main theme of the book of Romans. And Paul makes the clear distinction between justification through faith alone and the outworking of that saving faith in terms of sanctification.
2. However, the righteousness that is by faith is not to be seen as contrary to the righteousness of the law, in the outworking of saving faith in the life. Paul asks the question, “Do we then make void the law through faith?” That is, does our justification by faith mean that we don’t have to obey the commandments? He immediately answers his own question, “God forbid: yea, we establish the law” (Romans 3:31). That is, those who are justified by faith are the only ones who are able to keep the law because the law is written on the heart in regeneration (Heb 8:10; 10:16) and He causes His people to walk in His ways (Ezekiel 36:27).
3. Romans 8:4 says that the righteousness of the law is to be fulfilled in His people, “That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”
 - a. That is not speaking of justification but of sanctification but the outworking of righteousness in the life.
 - b. It is still a part of the revelation of the righteousness of God because it is only by union with Christ that the righteousness of the law can be fulfilled in us. The same righteousness that

clothes us also is manifest in the life and ultimately fulfilled in us when we stand in glory, in perfect righteousness.

4. So, Rom 1:17 includes both justification by faith and sanctification by faith in the meaning of the “just shall live by faith.”
- ii. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, the just shall live by faith. (Galatians 3:11)
 1. This reference is clearly and unambiguously related to forensic justification because “the just living by faith” is set in opposition to “being justified by the works of the law.”
 2. This reference takes it right to the heart of the matter. The justification is the heart and soul of the verse from which faithfulness flows.
- iii. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. (Hebrews 10:38)
 1. This verse sets “the just shall live by faith” in opposition to “if any man draw back,” and so this usage leans more toward the idea of faithfulness. Obviously, the man who draws back is not faithful, since his loyalty is not to God but to something else, pleasure, wealth, worldly honor, etc. If it was not so, he would not have drawn back.
3. The meaning of PISTIS in the local context.
 - a. Pistis occurs many times in Galatians in the sense of faith in God and/or Jesus Christ (2:16, 20; 3:2, 5, 7–9, 11f., 22–26; 5:5f.). Here, however, where ethical qualities in relation to holiness are in view, the word does not primarily signify that basic principle of the human relationship with God, justifying faith, though that cannot be altogether excluded. PISTIS here apparently means “faithfulness”, or “fidelity”, that is, loyalty and consistency and trustworthiness.
 - b. But Gill comments that “for though fidelity, both in words and actions, which is very ornamental to the Gospel, and a profession of religion may be meant; yet faith in Christ is not to be excluded, as it is generally by interpreters; [Gill, ad loc] etc.

II. The Faithfulness of God

- a. The centrality of the covenant

- i. The only way in which God deals with men is through covenant. To put it another way, there is no aspect of the relation of God and men which is not covenantal.
 - ii. God imposed covenant obligation on Adam and he broke the covenant.
 - iii. God obligated himself to satisfy the conditions of the covenant
 - 1. And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. (Genesis 15:17)
 - iv. This is a voluntary obligation on God's part and so it is the centrality of the covenant which makes the faithfulness of God such a glorious revelation of His nature. The significance of the passing between the cut animals is the pledge, "may I become like one of these if I fail to be faithful to the covenant." That's why we speak of "cutting a covenant" because it is the cut animals which gives the solemnity to the pledge.
 - v. And so, by virtue of the cutting of the covenant, for God to fail to faithfully fulfill all that is needed to bring souls into a state of eternal blessing, then His own life is forfeit – but He is the eternal God, so the possibility of His unfaithfulness is simply out of the question.
 - vi. But how can we benefit from God's faithfulness when we are already covenant breakers? God's faithfulness in bringing the guilty to justice is also God's faithfulness and it is all we really have a right to expect for ourselves. But the beauty of the New Covenant is that God set forth a Surety, a Mediator of the Covenant who perfectly satisfied the commandments and suffered the full penalty for breaking those commandments. Thus, when we are brought into union with Christ, we are accounted as one who has perfectly satisfied the covenant.
 - vii. One of the promises of the new covenant is that the law is to be written on the heart and this is an active principle which works out in the life.
 - viii. Another promise of the New Covenant is the Holy Spirit who leads us in paths of righteousness.
 - ix. God's purpose starts with election and ends with glorification. His perfect faithfulness is such that not a single one is lost, for no one can pluck a man out of His hand.
- b. OT verses
- i. God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? (Numbers 23:19)
 - ii. Thy mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reaches unto the clouds. (Psalm 36:5)
 - iii. O LORD God of hosts, who is a strong LORD like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee? (Psalm 89:8)
 - iv. To shew forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness[H530] every night, (Psalm 92:2)

- v. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth. (Psalm 119:90)
- vi. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:23)
- c. NT verses
 - i. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)
 - ii. But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil. (2 Thessalonians 3:3)
 - iii. That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: (Hebrews 6:18)
- d. The Extraordinary Faithfulness of God
 - i. The faithfulness of God in the big things is dependent on God's faithfulness in the little things. God works out the big things through seemingly insignificant details. Through a series of marvelously intricate providences, all the prophecies concerning Christ's first coming were diligently fulfilled.
 - 1. God did not just fulfill the promises of Christ's coming with miraculous interventions but through the outworking of His continuous detailed faithfulness.
 - ii. God works all things according to the counsel of His own will and that means **all things**. The Lord upholds all things by the Word of His power and that means **all things**. Not one star in a distant galaxy, not one speck of dust on this planet is ever out of place.
 - 1. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth. (Is 40:26)
 - 2. Thus saith the LORD; If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; Then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne; and with the Levites the priests, my ministers. (Jeremiah 33:20-21)
 - iii. God's perfect faithfulness in the continuance of day and night serves as the ground of His faithfulness in the fulfilling of His particular promises.
 - 1. I the LORD do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day. (Isaiah 27:3)
 - 2. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. (Psalm 121:3-4)

III. The Fruit of Faithfulness

- a. Faith and faithfulness
 - i. There can be no doubt that all the Scriptures make a distinction between the possession of saving faith and the necessary outworking of that inner principle of life. True saving faith is an active principle and works its way out into the life. We must be clear that justification is a legal matter and not an ethical one. That

is, justification is the declaration of God that the perfect righteousness of Christ is covering the believer. The person is judicially righteous in God's sight, by virtue of the union with Christ. Saving faith is the reaction of the regenerate soul in response to the conviction of sin and the free offer of grace in Christ. True saving faith puts its belief and trust in Christ as Lord and Savior.

- ii. There are not degrees of justification. Though we talk about strong faith and weak faith and about being justified by faith, it is not our faith that justifies us. Faith is instrumental in that it apprehends Christ, flees to Him and rests in Him, by grace. It is union with Christ that justifies. Faith may appear weak or strong to us in our sense of ourselves but ultimately it is the object of the faith that matters. That is, we must never think that the strength of our faith means that there are degrees of Christ that we possess. A person is either "in Christ" or "outside of Christ" – there are no halfway positions. A man is either dead or alive and there is nothing in between.
- b. God's faithfulness in us
- i. Given that the covenant is the ground of our understanding of God's faithfulness, how does our understanding of the covenant affect our faithfulness?
 - 1. Abraham staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. (Romans 4:20-21)
 - 2. Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. (Hebrews 11:11)
 - 3. This faith in the faithfulness of God does not "stagger through unbelief" but continues on – the persistence of the faith is the faithfulness.
 - ii. It is our continued connection to God's faithfulness in the covenant through faith in Christ that makes us faithful.
 - 1. Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:5)
 - 2. Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ: (Philippians 1:6)
- c. The practical nature of faithfulness
- i. We naturally think in terms of big events that mark milestones in our lives. We celebrate birthdays and anniversaries; we recognize holidays and look forward to them. In church life, we have weekly events, we celebrate communion once per month, and celebrate baptisms every so often. It often seems like we spend our time remembering and reliving the past or looking forward to future events.
 - ii. We may tend to think of the uneventful part of our lives as a form of drudgery which needs to be endured so that we can make it to the next event.
 - iii. In the parable of the sower, we read of two soils which are both unable to bring forth fruit for seemingly different reasons. The stony ground has its blockage below the surface whereas the thorny ground has its inhibitors above the surface.

1. The roots in the stony ground are unable to go down into the earth to find water and so when the sun comes up and scorches the plant, it withers and dies. There is a lack of faithfulness when trials come because there is no root. This is a lack of faithfulness at a moment of testing.
 2. The plants in the thorny ground are choked out by the thorns and never bear fruit. This amounts to a lack of faithfulness in many little things because the cares of this world are given priority over the things of God. The lack of bringing forth fruit follows from neglecting the little things on a daily basis – there is little to no reading of the Bible, little to no prayer. There may be inconsistent or sporadic attendance at worship, failure to pay attention, e.g. sleeping through Bible studies, or only half paying attention while thinking about other things. Lack of faithfulness in the little things accumulates and there is no fruit in the life.
 3. The fourth soil is called the good soil because it brings forth fruit with patience. There is diligence in breaking up the rocks and clearing away the thorns. It is the faithfulness in the little things which brings about the faithfulness in the big things.
- d. Encouragement against fainting
- i. But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. (Isaiah 40:31)
 - ii. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap if we faint not. (Galatians 6:9)

Fainting is the opposite of faithfulness. We faint when we don't have the strength to do what we know we should do. We can only reap the harvest if we do not faint – we can only bear fruit if we are faithful. What should we do when we find ourselves ready to faint? Should we dig deep within ourselves to find the strength to carry on? Isaiah 40:31 says that those who wait upon the LORD renew their strength.

The whole chapter points to the majestic strength of the LORD and to His absolute faithfulness in every detail. We also read that all forms of natural strength fail – even the choice young men faint and grow weary. But those who wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength.

In conclusion, let us exalt God's faithfulness in our minds and stand in awe of His faithfulness in the little things. Let us not scorn faithfulness in the little things but seek to cultivate this fruit of faithfulness. Let us not stagger at the promise but be strong in faith, giving glory to God as did our father Abraham. The road to hell is paved with good intentions but a lack of faithfulness in the putting them into practice. But may we grow in our faithfulness in the little things by waiting upon the LORD and renewing our strength – not neglecting times of prayer, times of reading and meditating upon the word, times of worship and fellowship with those of like precious faith. And may we all one day hear the blessed Lord say to each of us, "Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things