

The Unshakeable Faithfulness of God

Galatians 5:22; Romans 3:3-4

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We live in a disposable, throw-away society where products no longer are supposed to last 15, 20, or more years. In fact, in many cases it is cheaper (or at least no more expensive) to simply replace a product than to have it repaired. We have become accustomed to using disposable plates, disposable razors, disposable diapers, and disposable contact lenses. No doubt, these are handy items to have around, and they can make life a little easier in various ways. After all, there is no maintenance on disposable items—you use them and then throw them away.

In a society in which we grow accustomed to easily throwing various products away because they are disposable, people are also easily cast aside. Employees may be viewed as disposable by employers, who keep as many part-time employees as possible so that they can avoid paying more than minimum wage without any benefits. A husband or a wife may be abused, and viewed as disposable, an item to be thrown away in one's mind if not in actual practice. Most significant of all, Jesus Christ may be embraced for a season, but when He does not meet the unbiblical expectations of our sinful hearts, we recklessly cast even the Lord Himself away (in our hearts, if not in our words and deeds), as if He was a disposable item that we can do without.

You see, dear ones, the issue here is one of faithfulness and loyalty to God and man. Without faithfulness and trustworthiness, not only will our relationship with God Himself suffer greatly, but our relationships in all of life will suffer greatly. For what holds together a family, a church, and a society is faithfulness and trustworthiness. If you cannot trust one in any given relationship (whether in the family, at work, in the church, or in society), that relationship will crumble; for faith and faithfulness, trust and trustworthiness are the bedrock of any relationship we have in life. Where that is absent, we will withdraw, and either go elsewhere or withdraw from all relationships (as a safety net—as a way to protect ourselves).

Thus, as we approach the next fruit of the Spirit—faith or faithfulness—let us at the outset understand its necessity within a Christian's life if we are to enjoy communion with God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and communion with one another in Christ. As has been our practice through this series of sermons on the Fruit of the Spirit, we must begin with a serious look at the fruit of faith (or faithfulness) as it is manifested not only in Christians, but also as it exists in the very character of God. With that in mind, the main points for our sermon this Lord's Day are the following: (1) The Meaning of Faith as a Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22); and (2) The Unshakeable Faithfulness of God (Romans 3:3-4).

I. The Meaning of Faith as a Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

A. We now proceed to consider the seventh of the nine fruit of the Spirit listed by Paul: faith. At the very outset, some clarification is necessary in order to understand whether Paul is here speaking of faith in terms of the Christian's subjective trust and belief in God and in what He has promised, or of a Christian's faithfulness in terms of being trustworthy, reliable, and loyal.

1. Obviously, both of these ideas are related, for one who is truly faithful to Christ and to others (in the home, church, or world) is one who first has faith alone in Christ alone for his/her justification. Moreover, we see the relationship between trust and trustworthiness (or faith and faithfulness) by noting that we will not trust one who is not trustworthy (i.e. deserving of our trust). So we see that we cannot absolutely

separate faith from faithfulness (faithfulness will follow faith in the life of a Christian, and faith in the life of a Christian will be placed in one who is faithful—whether divine faith in God or human faith in others).

2. It seems that the location of “faith” in the list of the fruit of the Spirit (i.e. the seventh fruit) would point toward the use of “faith” in this case as referring to faithfulness (loyalty and fidelity to God and others) in the life of a Christian, rather than specifically faith (trusting in God and His promises). When faith (in the sense of trusting and believing in Christ and His promises) is in view, it would typically be mentioned at the top of the list (if not first in order), because it is through faith in Christ that all other fruits of the Spirit flow. Note the typical order when faith means trust in the following few passages: 1 Corinthians 13:13; Ephesians 1:15; Ephesians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:8; 1 Timothy 1:14.

3. Finally, in our Authorized Version (KJV), “faith” is used on other occasions where “faithfulness” is the sense intended: Matthew 23:23; 2 Thessalonians 1:4; Philemon 5; Romans 3:3. Thus, with most sound biblical commentators I understand the fruit of faith here in Galatians 5:22 to refer to the fruit of faithfulness or fidelity.

4. Luther wrote in his commentary on this passage saying:

When Paul reckoneth faith among the fruits of the spirit, it is clear that he speaketh not of faith which is in Christ, but of the fidelity ... of one man towards another.

5. Calvin preached in his sermons on this passage saying:

Likewise, the word ‘faith’ here means faithfulness and integrity.

B. Like all of the other fruit of the Spirit, faithfulness is implanted within the heart of every Christian at regeneration. This is just another family resemblance of God’s family and having the DNA of Jesus Christ. In the life of every Christian is growing the fruit of faithfulness to God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and faithfulness to others (in the home, in the church, at work, and in society in general). Faithfulness may be at different stages of growth, but it is manifested in all Christians. A Christian is to be characterized by being faithful, being trustworthy, being reliable, being loyal to Christ, to the truth of Christ, to the love of Christ in all the relationships that he/she has in this world.

1. Backsliding, compromise, giving up, being undependable, and betrayal are all contrary to the fruit of faithfulness that the Spirit of God has implanted and is growing in our lives as Christians.

2. Faithfulness is a firm resolve and persevering commitment to be faithful to God and others even unto death. And when we fail to be faithful, faithfulness does not continue on in unfaithfulness, but repents, seeks God’s forgiveness, and rises again to renewed faithfulness. Faithfulness in this life is not sinless perfection, but is persevering loyalty, constancy, and fidelity to Christ, to His gospel, and to His commandments (first and foremost), which then leads to a steadfast fidelity to be faithful to others. We will in future sermons be focusing attention upon faithfulness in various relationships that we as Christians bear to God and to one another, but for the remainder of the sermon, I would have us turn our gaze to the origin of faithfulness in the nature and character of God Himself. We as Christians are only faithful because God is faithful. There is no room for boasting on our parts about our own perceived faithfulness—all glory for the faithfulness in our lives is due to the grace and faithfulness of God alone.

II. The Unshakeable Faithfulness of God (Romans 3:3-4a).

A. Here Paul establishes the only hope that we have of eternal life: the faith (or rather the faithfulness) of God.

1. That God is faithful to His own word, to His own nature, to His own covenant, to His own

promises is not left to mere deduction in Scripture, but is expressly stated in both the Old Testament and the New Testament: Deuteronomy 7:9; Psalm 36:5; Lamentations 3:22-23; 1 Corinthians 1:9; 1 Corinthians 10:13.

2. Because God is infinite, there is no boundary to His faithfulness. Because God is immutable (unchangeable), there is no variation to His faithfulness. Because God is eternal, there is no end to His faithfulness. Because God is omnipotent, there is no weakness in His faithfulness (whatever your need or circumstances). Because God is omniscient and wise, there is no chance that He will overlook even one instance to show forth His faithfulness (in blessing or judging).

B. Paul states in Romans 3:3-4a that even the unbelief and unfaithfulness of Israel (with whom God had engaged Himself in a gracious covenant), even Israel's idolatry, rebellion, abominations, and unbelief in God and His covenant promises will not make God unfaithful to Himself, to His Word, or to His people.

1. Romans 3:1 begins with questions (whether questions from an unnamed objector or hypothetical questions which Paul frames himself in order to make his point). Paul had just finished discussing the Old Testament sign of God's covenant—circumcision. Circumcision was a means of God's grace to those who in faith looked to the promises of the gospel in Jesus Christ (as did Abraham [Romans 4:11] and as did Isaac, who was circumcised at eight days old). But circumcision as a sign and seal of the gospel in Christ Jesus proved not to be a blessing but a curse to those who believed not the gospel presented to them. Circumcision actually made the Jews more accountable and aggravated their sin because they trusted in the mere outward sign rather than in the gospel of Jesus Christ to which the sign of circumcision pointed (which is true of baptism as well).

2. So if circumcision did not benefit the greater part of the Jews in leading them to trust in the gospel of Christ, what was the benefit of being a Jew or of receiving circumcision (Romans 3:1)? Paul responds it was a great advantage (Romans 3:2). Even if the vast majority who were circumcised (whether converts coming from outside Israel, or whether infants who were circumcised) did not receive by faith the gospel of salvation, it was a great benefit (even to the infants) because it pointed the Jew to the gospel of Christ and to their need of a new heart (which is likewise true of baptism today).

3. The chief benefit which God entrusted to the Jews were His oracles—God's revelation through His inspired prophets (which were committed to writing in the Scriptures). But note that Paul does not list the other benefits that God bestowed upon the Jews in Romans 3, but reserves that list for a later time in Romans 9:4-5. Dear ones, have you carefully weighed out the benefits that God has entrusted to you who are within the Visible Church (children and adults alike)—especially the Scriptures? The chief benefit we have been entrusted to guard and appreciate.

4. But now a question is raised about the faithfulness of God. Is God unfaithful to the Jews because of the vast unbelief among them in not believing the "oracles of God" which (like circumcision) pointed God's people to the gospel of Christ and faith in Him for the remission of sin? No, God is not unfaithful, for God has faithfully saved His elect people from among the Jews through the "oracles of God" (Romans 11:5), and is also faithfully judging from among the Jews those who reject their Messiah (Romans 11:7). Moreover, the faithfulness of God is demonstrated in that though the nation of Israel is presently under the judgment of God for their sin of disbelieving Christ, nevertheless God will restore the nation of Israel unto Himself through faith in Christ and bring them into the Visible Church of Christ (Romans 11:25-27). God is not yet finished with Israel.

C. God has given us a living, breathing illustration of the greatness of His faithfulness, so that we might flee to Christ for mercy (making no excuses like, "my sin is too great for the faithfulness of Christ to save me").

1. Perhaps one of the greatest displays of God's unshakeable faithfulness is found in the account of Hosea the prophet being called by God to marry a harlot, named Gomer, and to make her his beloved wife in about 750 b.c. (Hosea 1:2). This Hosea faithfully did and was a loving husband in caring for and providing for all her needs (both spiritually and materially). And yet unfaithful Gomer returned to her former lovers and begat children by them while yet married to Hosea. The third child is named by Hosea (according to God's command), Lo-ammi (you are not my people—you are not my children—you are the offspring of my wife's harlotries, Hosea 1:9).

2. Gomer leaves Hosea and becomes destitute and dependent upon whatever she can receive from her lovers. She is then abandoned by even her lovers and finds herself upon the slave block—filthy, penniless, unpitied, unwanted, and brought to shame and degradation.

3. But then the Lord commands Hosea to do that which is beyond comprehension: namely, to go and purchase unfaithful Gomer from the slave market (Hosea 3:1a). It would have been very natural for family and friends to have sought to dissuade him from buying Gomer unto himself ("she's unfaithful"; "she will only bring you more heartache and pain"; "she doesn't deserve another chance after having "spat" upon you and your kindness to her").

4. But how could Hosea show such faithful love? The answer is given in the words, "according to the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine" (Hosea 3:1b). Hosea defies the depths of mere human love and in faithfulness to an unfaithful and shameful bride, Hosea goes forth to buy her out of the slave market of sin and shame, in order that Gomer might be a faithful wife to him from that time forward (Hosea 3:2-3).

D. Dear ones, God was not inflicting the pain of an unfaithful and adulterous wife upon Hosea in order to be cruel to Hosea. This was a living, breathing re-enactment of the faithfulness of God in spite of the unfaithfulness of Israel.

1. God had joined Himself in matrimonial covenant to the nation of Israel to be a God to them and for them to be His people. God had not taken a pure people unto Himself, but a nation that upon being delivered from 400 years of Egyptian bondage fell into the sin of idolatry (worshipping God by means of the image of a golden calf). And yet the Lord joined Himself in a matrimonial covenant (a Covenant of Grace).

2. The Lord loved His people and gave to them such blessings as no nation had ever been given: His gracious covenant, wondrous promises (both spiritual and material), good commandments by which to walk in faithful obedience to the Lord, holy ordinances to encourage their faith in turning to Christ (circumcision, Passover and other feasts), and the tabernacle/temple as the place of God's gracious presence wherein was the ark of the covenant and the mercy seat (Amos 3:2).

3. God was a faithful husband to Israel, but Israel turned from the Lord throughout the history of the Old Testament to one god after another and even despised her Heavenly Husband (Jesus Christ) that called her to Himself, and rather put Him to death when Christ came to her. In return for faithfulness, Israel throughout her history gave to her Heavenly Husband time and time again unfaithfulness.

4. The Lord in faithfulness then sent Israel, His bride, into bondage (Assyrian captivity for the northern kingdom of Israel, and Babylonian captivity for the southern kingdom of Judah, and the dispersion by the Romans, Hosea 3:4). But the Lord went out in faithfulness to restore Israel to Himself and to return her to her land and to restore her temple worship to her (Hosea 3:5, which ultimately points to the yet future restoration of Israel as a nation to the Lord Jesus Christ—Zechariah 12:10; Romans 11:26).

O to see the sight, next to Christ's Coming in the clouds, the most joyful! Our elder brethren the Jews and Christ fall upon one another's necks and kiss each other! They have been long asunder; they will be kind to one another when they meet. O day! O longed-for and lovely day-dawn! O sweet Jesus, let me see that sight which will be as life from the dead, Thee and Thy

ancient people in mutual embraces (Samuel Rutherford, *Letters of Samuel Rutherford*, Letter 50, pp. 122-123).

E. Dear ones, the Lord Jesus Christ is our faithful Hosea (in Hebrew, Hosea=Hoshea=salvation, just as Jesus=Yeshua=Jehovah is salvation).

1. We were all like Gomer by nature, guilty of spiritual harlotry with our own gods whom we served: our lusts and pleasures, our approval before man, our fortune, our education, our own lives etc. We loved those gods and gave ourselves to those lovers—we devoted our time, our energies, and our dreams to them.

2. But our Hosea, Jesus Christ, loved us with an everlasting love. Why? Because He loved us and chose us in Christ Jesus before the world began (according to Ephesians 1:4). The sinless Son of God left the glories of His Father in heaven, and became flesh and dwelt among us to call out His bride unto Himself, and He paid the price with His own life in suffering the infinite wrath of God in order to redeem His bride from that slave market of sin unto Himself and to be a faithful Husband and Lover to His redeemed Church. He wooed and effectually called us to Himself in giving us faith when there was no faith in Him within us; in giving us love when there was no love for Him within us; and in giving us faithfulness when only unfaithfulness lived and reigned within us.

3. And after all the great faithfulness of our Hosea to us, we are still prone to wander, prone to leave our Heavenly Hosea, Jesus Christ, who has redeemed us by His own precious blood. We lust and covet for that which we want but do not have (which is idolatry, Colossians 3:5). We still leave our first love by going after our own pleasures and lusts, by becoming preoccupied with the things of this world (in fact every sin and every violation of God's commandments is an unfaithfulness on our parts to Christ). And yet in our unfaithfulness, the Lord in His great faithfulness seeks us out and draws us back unto Himself (Song of Solomon 2:8-10).

4. If our faithful Hosea has given us Himself, shall He withhold any good thing from us? Absolutely not! His faithfulness is our salvation, our sanctification, and everlasting life. Flee not away from this Hosea as He calls out to you today in your heart and conscience. Run, run, run as fast as you can to the feet of Christ and receive by faith Him who is ever faithful.

5. Whatever your pain, whatever your heartache, whatever your trial, no matter how unfaithful others have been to you, come to Him who is ever faithful, who is absolutely trustworthy, who will keep everyone of His promises (for it is impossible for Him to be unfaithful). It is the faithfulness of God that upholds you that you perish not in the fiery furnace that you face. Though He faithfully discipline His own, He will also take you up in His arms to succor and heal the strokes that His faithful love has brought into your life.

6. Turn not away, and let no obstacle keep you away from this ever faithful God, who gives Himself even to us who are in so many ways unfaithful to Him. Let His faithfulness heal your unfaithfulness today. After hearing the biblical account of Hosea, you can never have a just reason not to flee to such a faithful Savior. Cast away all of your vain excuses and lying rationalizations. Come to the God who is faithful. He will in faithfulness to His promise receive you (1 John 1:9). Amen.

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