

“FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: Faithfulness”

Deuteronomy 7:6-13 • Matthew 25:14-30

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

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We are now getting close to the end of our study of the fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” Today we are looking at faithfulness. The idea of faith, which is what the word in Galatians literally means, is at the very center of Christianity. It’s simple enough that everyone here should have a clear understanding of what we mean by faith. But the word faith is also such a complex, rich word that we could study it in Scripture for our entire lives without ever exhausting the meaning.

The word faith basically means complete trust in something or someone. Now everyone has faith. When you drove here this morning you had faith that your car would start and stop. You had faith that the other drivers would stop for red lights. When you turn on a light switch you have faith that there is electricity passing through the wires and the light will turn on. You can’t see the electricity. But you have faith that it’s there, which is why you are so careful around it.

So the question is not whether you have faith or not. The question is really where you put your ultimate faith. Maybe you put your complete trust in your banker or lawyer or doctor. And yet you sometimes hear about bankers, lawyers, or doctors that have violated the trust of their clients or patients. Maybe you put your complete trust in your elected officials. If that’s the case there may not be anything any of us can do for you.

The only person that makes any sense for you to have faith, to place your complete trust, is in God himself – in the crucified, risen, and reigning King Jesus, the one who created the entire universe. In John 14 Jesus said, “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe therefore in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you

that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going.’ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” In the New Testament, faith refers to putting your complete trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

The thing is, as we study God’s Word, we see clearly that this kind of faith is actually a gift from God. In Ephesians 2, Paul points out that because of sin you and I were dead. But the Holy Spirit came in and united you to Christ Jesus. He says, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.” God does all the work of salvation. You and I don’t add anything to it except for the sin that makes it necessary.

Then Paul says, “By grace you have been saved *through faith*. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” This word “faith” is the same word as “faithfulness” in the fruit of the Spirit. So it’s clear that if you are saved by grace through faith, that faith is not something you have created in yourself. It’s the gift of God. Part of the work of the Holy Spirit is to convince you of the truth of Christ. The problem is that you are able to resist that for a while and as a result you miss out on some of the good things God wants you to experience.

Another way to read that verse from Ephesians 2 would be like this: “By grace you have been saved through *faithfulness*.” Whose faithfulness? The faithfulness of Jesus who lived a sinless life but willingly went to the cross to

take your place and my place. You and I are the beneficiaries of Christ's faithfulness that saves us. Our part is to respond with belief and trust.

There's another aspect to faithfulness, though. It's not enough simply to believe the right things or to say the right words. James chapter 2 reminds us that genuine faith requires action. To be faithful means that you are then reliable and trustworthy.

Jesus tells the parable we read earlier saying that the Kingdom of Heaven will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them." Most of you are familiar with this story, I'm sure. But sometimes familiarity can cause us to miss the shocking truths in the parables. Jesus said, "To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability." We don't have a sense of how much money a talent is so it doesn't shock us. An accurate translation would be something like this: "To one slave he gave five million dollars, to another two million, to another one million, each according to his ability."

When the master returns he calls his servants to settle accounts with them. He wants to see how they have used the talents he entrusted to them. He wants to know if they have been faithful. The first one, the one who had received the five talents, reported that he had invested the money and had doubled it. The master says to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master." The second servant comes, the one who had received the two talents, and he reports that he, too, has doubled his master's money. It's important to notice that the master praises him with the exact same words. It didn't matter that he didn't have as much as the first servant to begin with, and it didn't matter that he didn't have as much when he was finished. He was faithful with what he had been given and was praised by his master for it.

The third servant came and he had not invested the one talent he had been given. He hid

it and returned it. The man who received only one hid the money in the ground. He refused to use his gifts. Why is that? Perhaps he was afraid of losing money. That's the excuse he gives. Perhaps he wasn't smart enough. But Jesus said that the master gave each one according to his abilities. You don't give someone a million dollars if you think they can't handle it. The real answer, I think, is that unlike the first two, this man hated his master. He resented him and refused to do anything that would benefit him. The first two men seem to love their master. You can almost hear the excitement as they come to show what they've accomplished. But the third one comes with accusations and complaints against the master. He says, "I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed. Here is what belongs to you." The first two recognized the generosity of the master and the opportunity they had been given. The third one couldn't see past his hate and it resulted in his punishment.

In the parable, Jesus is the man going on the journey. Not long after he tells this to his disciples Jesus will be crucified, raised again and will ascend to heaven. While he's gone he is entrusting his earthly work to his servants, the church. He's entrusting that work to you. The point Jesus is making is that God is extremely generous in His gifts to each one of us. Even the one who received the least received nearly 20 years worth of pay. The truth is that God has entrusted each one of us with his treasure. Everything we have has come from him. That includes our money but it also includes our natural abilities, our careers, our families, our time, our interests, everything. Remember, you and I don't own anything on our own. Over and over the Bible is clear that we are God's servants or slaves. What he expects is for us to be faithful in using those gifts for his kingdom. Each of you has unique abilities from God that the church needs to function. If one of us doesn't do our part the whole body suffers.

So what does it mean to be faithful? It means to love the Lord your God with all your heart,

mind, soul, and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. It means to trust Jesus completely with your life, even if things don't seem like they are going all that great at the moment. It means trusting in the faithfulness of Jesus. But it also means recognizing that God has given you resources – time, talents, and money – and he expects you to cultivate those gifts and be

productive with them. He expects you to take risks and to step out in faith. He expects you to be faithful with what he's given you. And when you are, he will trust you with more. And when he returns you will hear, "well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master."

Amen.