Fruit of the Spirit

Lesson 7: Wednesday May 4, 2022

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**TEACHING NOTES**

**Fruit of the Spirit: Faithfulness**

Galatians 5:22-23a But the *fruit* of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self- control;

It has been a real blessing to focus on the fruit of the Spirit in this midweek series and I hope you all are benefiting from it as much as I am. Tonight we are going to focus in on God’s faithfulness and how that characteristic is displayed in us by His Spirit.

Before we begin, let’s pray.

**Faith and Faithfulness**

Anytime I get the opportunity to teach I always like to begin with definitions. I would encourage you in your own study time to use a good dictionary like the 1828 Webster’s as well as a Greek/Hebrew lexicon to get a little more insight to the original meaning. Language has a way of changing with the culture and over time we can adopt an understanding of words that does not rightly reflect their true meaning or the fullness of what they mean. This obviously matters much more when you are reading words that were written centuries ago.

So let’s look at the definition of faithfulness in Webster’s 1828 dictionary.

FA'ITHFULNESS, n.
1.  Fidelity; loyalty; firm adherence to allegiance and duty; as the faithfulness of a subject.
2.  Truth; veracity; as the faithfulness of God.
3.  Strict adherence to injunctions, and to the duties of a station; as the faithfulness of servants or ministers.
4.  Strict performance of promises, vows or covenants; constancy in affection; as the faithfulness of a husband or wife.

Simply put, faithfulness is the quality of being true. Faithfulness is a noun that names the act of being faithful. A person is faithful when they are true to what they are supposed to do, whether by duty, design, or by personal promise.

The Greek word used here in Galatians 5 is pistis and it is defined as both faith and faithfulness. It is used to convey belief, trust, confidence and fidelity.

We see the same greek word pistis in Ephesians 2:8 where it says that we are saved by grace through faith (pistis).

We tend to think of the words faith and faithfulness as meaning two entirely different things. If we think of faithfulness strictly as meaning only performance of duty and then bring this understanding into Ephesians 2:8 you can quickly see how that idea would undermine the entire testimony of scripture that we are not saved by works, by our performance, or our ability to be depended on, but by our faith – our trust in the finished work of Jesus alone.

My hope is to help you see clearly that faith and faithfulness are not to be pitted against each other as though they are opposite in meaning. While they do not and are not meant to have the exact same meaning, they are related and fit together. The principle of interpretation used by the reformers sheds light on this in a helpful way.

**The Analogy of Faith**

This principle of interpretation is articulated in each of the reformed confessions. The London Baptist Confession of 1689 says this in chapter 1 paragraph 9;

*The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which are not many, but one), it must be searched by other places that speak more clearly. ~ LBC 1689*

What it’s saying is that the Bible is to be understood as one unified body of God’s word, and that when we come to a passage that is difficult for us to understand, we must not allow our interpretation or understanding of that passage to contradict any of those passages that are more clearly understood. It’s not that every passage of Scripture will always have an interpretation for us somewhere else in Scripture, but that Scripture can and should always be used to help us eliminate wrong interpretations.

This principle of interpretation was popularly referred to by theologians as the “analogy of faith”. This phrase “analogy of faith” is taken from Romans 12:6 where it says

**Romans 12:6** Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith;

The word proportion is the from the Greek word analogia, hence analogy, or proportion of faith. What’s being said here is that those who are given the gift of proclaiming God’s word (which includes preaching and teaching God’s word), are to do so according to the faith that has been given, that is, the truth that has been revealed to them. They are not to proclaim their own thoughts and ideas, but only those things that God has revealed to them through faith. Faith here does NOT mean a sincerity of belief. Biblical faith is not grounded in the believer’s sincerity of belief, it’s grounded in the truth of what’s being believed. A person can sincerely believe a lie, but faith has to do with believing God who cannot lie.

Hebrews 11:1 says that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Again, we have to understand that faith is not an assurance that we have from our own commitment to believe, it’s an assurance that comes from having been convinced or persuaded by God through His Spirit.

**1 Corinthians 1:10-12** these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 11 For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.

So just as the prophet is not to exercise his gift in a manner that goes beyond the truth that he has been assured of by God, we also, when interpreting scripture are to do so according to the truth that has already been revealed. We don’t interpret scripture in a way that contradicts the truth that has already been established by scripture. We don’t let go of the assurance that we’ve already been given because we read something that we don’t immediately understand.

God is so gracious that He even assures us in His word of the truth that we will read things that are difficult to understand. It should be an encouragement to know that struggling to understand some things in scripture is normal.

**2 Peter 3:15b-16** …Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, 16 as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

We have the assurance from God’s word that there are some things written in it that will be difficult to understand, but we are to remain faithful by not being unstable and ignoring the truth that we already know through what we have been taught by the Spirit of God through His word.

Our faithfulness to God is directly related to the proportion of faith we’ve been given. We’ll unpack this more in a bit but before we do I want to start by establishing what the Bible says about the faithfulness of God.

**God alone is Faithful**

Our faithfulness is completely dependent upon God.

**Exodus 34:5-7a** The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. 6 The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty,

This is the name of the Lord. Here we see that He is known by His faithfulness, and His faithfulness is seen most vividly in the gospel. It is in the gospel that we see God keeping His steadfast love for thousands, forgiving sin, and punishing the guilty. God is true to His word. His speaking is His doing. He doesn’t have second thoughts, he doesn’t change His mind, He doesn’t adjust His plans in reaction to some unforeseen bump in the road.

Many English Bible translations use the word truth in this verse rather than faithfulness. Both translations are accurate. The Hebrew word makes truth and faithfulness synonymous. In the context of this passage, saying that God is abounding in faithfulness is the same as saying He is abounding in truth.

**Numbers 23:19** God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?

God is not like man. We know what it is to break our promise or to change our mind. God is not capable of either, just as He is incapable of sin. God’s truth is not something that is unfolding in time. God dwells in eternity- outside of time - so when He makes a promise, it is not as if He says something one day and then fulfills it at a future date. For God, there is no period of time between when He says something and when He fulfills it.

God doesn’t make promises in order to bind Himself to something or to intensify His commitment to it the way man does. God is incapable of lying. He cannot say something and then not do it. He doesn’t have to promise to do something, He doesn’t have to make a covenant in order to be trusted. God is gracious to reveal His purposes to us in the form of covenants and promises but remember - when we speak of God’s promises we include ALL of God’s word, not just the passages where He says “I promise”. We can rightly take everything that God says as a promise from Him.

We were created with the obligation to believe God. God has revealed Himself in ways that leave us with no excuse NOT to believe. The truth of God is plainly displayed in creation, revealing His faithfulness and trustworthiness as He upholds the universe by His word.

**Romans 1:18-20** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

To not believe God is an unrighteous act of suppressing the truth. This failure to believe what is true is heinous to God and brings His righteous wrath. God’s invisible attributes, the characteristics that define who He is are not things that we need to be convinced of, they are plain to see. To suppress the truth is to consciously choose to deny what is plain.

Christians, why are you so amazed when people deny that men are men and women are women, or so many other obvious truths about how His world works. Not all unbelievers deny these basic truths, but all unbelievers suppress the truth that God alone is the source of truth. All unbelievers hold their own will as supreme. They choose to believe whatever they want to about God. They are their own standard of truth and they have no real desire to conform to a higher standard than themselves.

As men persist in this suppression of the truth, God turns them over to the natural consequences of their sin. As they continue in their disobedience to the truth they become more and more deceived, making way for more and more depravity. When you read the rest of Romans 1 that is what Paul is describing.

It is utter foolishness to disbelieve God, but if it were not for His amazing grace, every one of us who have been saved would still be suppressing the truth in unrighteousness. We know from what God has revealed to us in His word that we did not come to believe the truth on our own. Our faith was gifted to us through the regeneration of our spiritually dead heart by the Holy Spirit.

**2 Timothy 2:11-13** The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; 12 if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; 13 if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.

When the Bible uses the term faithless, it doesn’t simply mean unbelief, it’s referring to a refusal to believe, refusing to be convinced by God. If we refuse to believe, if we deny the truth of God, He remains faithful – for He cannot deny Himself. Does God have faith in God? Yes, of course He does – not in the same way we do, but perfectly. God’s faith is not in the unseen because He sees all things, but He is full of faith in the sense that He always and only believes what is true. Faithful here is the opposite of faithless. It’s not a denial of the truth but an affirmation of the truth. The literal meaning of faithful here is fullness of faith. It’s a loyalty to faith.

In 1 Corinthians 13:7 when it says that Love “believes all things”, that word for believes is from the same Greek word for faith. It’s not saying that love is gullible and believes everything including lies. It’s saying that love is faithful. It believes all that pertains to faith, to the truths of God. It is consistent with the truth. And of course this ties back to the fruit of the Spirit starting with love. True love is motivated by the truth, more accurately, by the truth that it is believing. Once again we see how the fruit being produced by the Spirit is singular and how the various characteristics all work together in unison. You can’t have one characteristic without the others.

God remains faithful because He is God. He cannot lie and He cannot believe a lie.

**God guarantees His faithfulness to us**

God’s grace is seen in His accommodation of our failure to take Him at His word. As stated earlier, we are obligated to believe God and it is a sin for us not to, and yet in His mercy and grace He accommodates our weakness by confirming His word to us with promises and covenants. He does this for our sake alone.

**Hebrews 6:17-18** So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, 18 so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.

God doesn’t need to give us a guarantee. His purposes are unchanging, He always does His will and His will never changes. But because we are prone to forget and prone to doubt, God graciously confirms His will to us in the form of an oath. He makes a promise, He reveals His will to us and gives us a guarantee that we can hold onto.

When God established His covenant with Noah and promised that He would never again destroy the earth with a flood, He sealed it with the sign of the rainbow so that when we see it we will be reminded of God’s faithfulness to keep His word.

As wonderful as the rainbow is for us who believe, we have something even better. The seal He gives us as the guarantee of our salvation is His Holy Spirit.

**Ephesians 1:13-14** In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

We know that our faith is more than just cognitive assent that something is true, it’s more than just believing facts. In Hebrews 11 we read that faith is the assurance of things hoped for.

This assurance is not like the guarantee or warranty that comes with a new car. The guarantee you get when you buy a new vehicle is not the assurance that the car won’t break down, it’s the promise that if does break down they will fix it at no cost to you for the repair. That guarantee has its benefits but it really doesn’t help much when your car breaks down on the way to the airport and you miss your flight because of it. What we want is a guarantee that the car will always do what it is supposed to do, start when we turn the key, go when we hit the gas, and stop when we hit the brakes. The guarantees we get with purchases do not give us any assurance that the products we’ve bought will never fail. But the guarantee that God gives us by His Holy Spirit assures us that our inheritance is secure. It’s not a money back guarantee, it’s a guarantee that our salvation – our inheritance cannot be lost, broken, or forfeited, even by us because we are not the ones who secured it in the first place.

The assurance that comes with the faith spoken of here in Hebrews 11 is based on the reliability and unchangeable nature of God.

Our faithfulness to believe God is not what makes the promises of God come true. The promises of God are true whether we believe them or not. But it is through faith in the promises of God that we experience the truth of those promises. The promises are for all who believe. For those who remain in unbelief, it is proven that the promises were never meant for them.

**What does faithfulness in action look like?**

There is a real sense by which the faithfulness produced in us by the Holy Spirit manifests itself as the quality of being dependable, reliable, honest, and trustworthy. These are qualities we should be looking for when we examine ourselves to see if we are really in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5). As Christians we are to be faithful in our marriages, faithful in our employment, faithful in our word - letting our yes be our yes and our no be our no. If we examine ourselves and see that these qualities are missing, we must be very careful not to assume that the problem is simply our lack of effort.

If faithfulness is lacking, our FIRST question should be “what am I failing to believe?” How am I being faithless? Repentance starts with a change of thinking.

**Romans 12:2** Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

To rightly discern God’s will, to know what is good and acceptable and perfect, is to know the truth, it is to be filled with faith. It is this renewing of our mind that causes us to be transformed into people who display the qualities of God, including faithfulness.

What’s critical to see here though is that our faithfulness is not a record of perfect obedience, it’s a progression of ongoing repentance. We practice faithfulness by constantly repenting of our unfaithfulness and acknowledging our desperate dependence upon God and His faithfulness.

Any faithfulness that flows from us is not owing to anything in us but is a reflection of God’s faithfulness.

When a watch is dependable and keeps time it might be called faithful and that actually does fit within the definition of faithfulness right? We said “a person is faithful when they are true to what they are supposed to do, whether by duty, design, or by personal promise. “

We might call a watch faithful because it is true to its design - it does what it is supposed to do, but the watch is just an inanimate object doing what it was designed to do. Should the watch get any praise for that? No, the watchmaker is the one who truly deserves the praise. The watch is nothing without the will and design of its maker. Now we are not inanimate objects but we do have a creator and if I wanted to make this an even better analogy for us, I would say that the will of the watch is to bring praise to the watchmaker by doing what it was designed to do. The watch would have a satisfaction in doing what it was made to do and a joy in seeing how that brings praise to its maker.

In our flesh we have a tendency to make everything about us. In sin, our failure to be and do all that God has called us to makes us think about ourselves, about how we are failing to live up to some burdensome standard. This in turn causes us to try harder to live up to that standard so that we will feel better about ourselves. But when we are walking by the Spirit, we’re not concerned about our own lives. We only want to die to self and live for Christ. The Spirit fills us with the fruit of a love for God that finds joy in His glory, peace in His sovereign power, and patience in His perfect timing. The truth that we know about God – our faith - motivates us to live lives that want to do what God created us to do. Our obedience is not motivated by selfish fear or prideful accomplishment but by a desire to glorify Him and see Him glorified. Our Spirit empowered faith causes us to be faithful and obedient.

Everyone who has been given the Spirit should bear the fruit of the Spirit. We should all be bearing the fruit of faithfulness, but there will be different levels of faithfulness required depending upon what God has chosen to give us. If you have your bibles turn with me to:

**Matthew 25:14-30** 14 "For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. 15 To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. 16 He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. 17 So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. 18 But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. 19 Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. 20 And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more. ' 21 His master said 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. ' 22 And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more. ' 23 His master said 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. ' 24 He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, 25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours. ' 26 But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? 27 Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. 28 So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. 29 For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. 30 And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. '

Notice that the Master is the one who determined the servant’s ability. He gave each one according to their ability. The Master represents God and we know that He is perfect and so there is no mistake in His assignment of stewardship. Each servant was given an amount to steward that was in accordance to God’s perfect determination of what they could handle. The servant given 2 talents was not expected to do as much as the servant who was given 5. Their faithfulness was based on their stewardship of what they had been given.

We need to be faithful with what we have been given. We are not to be concerned about what others have been given or about how our gifts compare to someone else’s.

Notice that the wicked and slothful servant is being held accountable for what he knew. His own words condemn him when he says “I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, 25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground.”

He knew what was expected of him but rather than even attempting to do what was expected of him, he did nothing. He may not have had the skill set to double the return the way the other two servants did but the implication is that his master would have counted him faithful if he had sought the help of others, who he knew did have the skill set such as the bankers. He was not condemned for his lack of knowledge or ability, he was condemned for his laziness and not doing anything with the knowledge and skills he DID have.

See that what the wicked servant believed about his master was evil. He saw his master as a hard, unjust man. He did not see his master as a good man who hated wickedness, he saw him as a hard man who was intolerant of his own evil desires. He was afraid of the consequences of his wickedness but he had no desire to do his master’s will. What he believed about his master did not motivate him to work at pleasing his master. He wasn’t a faithful servant because he had no love for his master. He found no joy in being a servant in his master’s house.

Our faithfulness to God is empowered when we rightly see and believe the blessing it is to be a servant in God’s kingdom. Our faith in His faithfulness, His goodness, His love for us is what will motivate us to serve Him faithfully.

**Application**

So what does all this mean practically? What does it look like for us to be faithful Christians? What is our duty to God?

**Ecclesiastes 12:13** The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

To keep is to preserve, to watch, to guard. There is a carefulness that is diligent and steadfast. It’s not a casual commitment that we keep whenever we remember to, - it’s a diligence to not forget. It’s our highest priority. Not only do we obey His commandments but we strive to know them and to weigh everything we do in light of them.

A few years back there was a popular trend to ask “what would Jesus do?” Remember that? WWJD. That’s a great question, there’s nothing at all wrong with that question. Unfortunately it seemed that most people who were promoting the movement didn’t really know what Jesus would do because they weren’t answering the question according to His word. Many who liked the exercise of asking what Jesus would do were assuming that the answer was simply that Jesus would always be nice. But we don’t have to guess or assume what Jesus would do. We know all that we need to know in His word, in the Bible. And that is what we will be held accountable to.

The principle of wanting to do what Jesus would do is good when we rightly understand that we KNOW what Jesus would do based on His word. It’s not a subjective thing we guess at where we just try to imagine what Jesus would do based on our own thoughts.

**John 8:31-32** So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

**John 8:54b-55** It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God. ' 55 But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word.

So the question “what would Jesus do?” is really “what does Jesus tell me to do in His word?”

**James 1:22-25** But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. 24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. 25 But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

…being no hearer who forgets. We cannot and will not keep God’s commandments if we forget them as soon as we close our Bibles. Faithfulness is not just affirming that God’s law is good when we hear it, it’s remembering what God’s law is when we are tempted by sin. When temptation comes and our flesh wants us to believe that we will find satisfaction in ignoring God’s law and disobeying Him – by faith we are convicted and encouraged to remember what God says is good, and then we experience the blessing that comes from doing it.

It seems that every generation believes they are living in unprecedented times. Part of what it means for us to be faithful Christians is that we are not tossed to and fro by the constant winds of change that blow through the world around us. God has given us everything that we need to know in His word and nothing has changed in regards to how we are called to live in this world today from how the first century Christians were instructed to live. The church is to be the church no matter what is happening in the world around us. We are to be faithful, firm and true. We are to pick up our crosses every day and follow Jesus.

**2 Timothy 2:3-4**Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. **4**No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.

Church, we have a mission and it has never changed. Let’s be faithful to the end and not get caught up in civilian pursuits – looking for ways to join the world in its mission, no matter how much it might sound like it fits with ours. It doesn’t! The world is all about self preservation but we know that this world is passing away. The church has a global mission to make disciples of every tongue tribe and nation unto the glory of God. We have all been given a portion to steward and it is not insignificant. Let each of us be blessed in our doing as we see God glorified through our faith in action.

If you are feeling anxious as you think about the ways you have failed to be faithful, let me remind you again. No one is faithful but God! But that is why we have hope. Our desire to be faithful is not so that we can obtain or maintain His love for us, it’s because of the faith He’s given us to KNOW that we are loved by Him and that He is faithful to complete what He has begun in us (Phil 1:6). Christian, do you believe that? God is at work in you! Don’t let your past, your imperfect record, or your fear of failure distract you from the truth. “If we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.” (2 Tim 2:13)

I want to close by reading these encouraging words from:

**Philippians 3:12-16** Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. 16 Only let us hold true to what we have attained.