

The Fruit of the Spirit (8): Faithfulness

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Date: 23 August 2020

Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 00] Let us read now from the Word of God, in the first instance from 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. 1 Thessalonians chapter 4.

This is the Word of God. Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living.

Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more, for you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

It is God's will that you be sanctified, that you should avoid sexual immorality, that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable.

Not in passionate lusts like the heathen who do not know God. And that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you.

[1 : 09] For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man, but God who gives you his Holy Spirit.

Now about brotherly love, we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia.

Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more. Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your hands just as we told you.

So that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody. Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep or grieve like the rest of men who have no hope.

We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

[2 : 25] For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

Therefore, encourage each other with these words. And then we shall read in 1 Corinthians chapter 10.

1 Corinthians chapter 10, from verse 1 through 13. 1 Corinthians chapter 10, verse 1 through 13.

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[4 : 12] 1 Corinthians chapter 10, verse 1 through 13. 1 Corinthians chapter 10, verse 1 through 13.

Hang on. 1 Corinthians chapter 11, verse 2 through 13. 1 Corinthians 3. 1 Corinthians 3. 2 Timothy 4. 2 Timothy 5.

3 Timothy 5. 1 Timothy 5. 2 Timothy 6. 4 Timothy 6.

1 Timothy 5. 2 Timothy 6. 2 Timothy 6. 1 Timothy 6. Please turn with me to Galatians chapter 5, Galatians 5.22, where we read, But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness.

Faithfulness. Toward the end of the 18th century, the great French mathematician Laplace said to the Emperor Napoleon, Do you believe in God?

[5 : 53] I have no need of that hypothesis. I have no need of that hypothesis. Set in the context of mathematical equations, Laplace saw no need to involve God in his calculations.

In his view, one plus one equals two, whether God existed or not. Now naturally, of course, as Christians, we choose to disagree with them. And along with Albert Einstein, maintain that the only thing that we cannot understand about the universe is that we can understand any of it at all. However, moving from mathematics to morality and from science to discipleship, supposing someone was to assess your life, your character, and your behavior, would they say of you what Laplace said of mathematics?

Do you believe in God? I have no need of that hypothesis. In other words, can they see God in you? Can they explain your love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control? In any other way than to admit that God is at work in you?

[7 : 26] Without God, we would be none of these things. When others see your life, and your character, and your behavior, can they say of you, the only possible explanation for this person's love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, is that God must be at work in them.

When it comes to the way they are, God needs to be my hypothesis. To put it at an even more basic level, the greatest defense of the truth of the gospel is the life and the character and the behavior of the Christian who is consciously expressing and demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit. It cannot be explained in any other way than that a supernatural God is at work in them. It's not natural to be kind to those who provoke us, to be good to our enemies, to be joyful in painful circumstances.

The Christian who is these things is a light shining in the darkness, a light drawing others who want to know Jesus for themselves, a clear evidence of God's work in the heart of a man or woman. Well, faithfulness is the seventh fruit of the Spirit. When we use the word faithfulness, we're most often thinking about God's faithfulness to us, the way he keeps his promises. That's not surprising because all the fruit of the Spirit find their source in God, the God who is loving and patient and faithful.

[9 : 19] In Proverbs 20 verse 6, King Solomon asks, a faithful man, who can find? It's not normal or easy to be faithful like God is faithful.

In fact, it is supernaturally hard, which is why as Christians, when we're faithful, we're shining like lights in the darkness and pointing to the reality of the Holy Spirit who lives within us.

Now, some commentators describe faithfulness here in Galatians 5, 22, in terms of our rigid belief in the truths of Christianity.

Others want to talk more about faithfulness in terms of our relationships with one another. Now, of course, these two things are related to each other. We cannot live the right way unless we believe the right things.

Unless our relationship with God is right, our relationships with others will not be right. However, on balance, it seems to me that in Galatians 5, 22, the faithfulness of which Paul speaks is that in which, that which we demonstrate in our relationship to other people.

[10 : 34] The way we are toward those we may like or dislike. The way we are toward Christian and non-Christian alike. And therefore, this evening, I want us to consider together four areas in which God is calling us as Christians to be faithful.

Faithfulness and integrity. Faithfulness and truth. Faithfulness and promise. And faithfulness and friendship. Let me remind you that putting this virtue of faithfulness into practice in your life, this fruit of the Spirit, may well be the best way you can demonstrate the reality of the gospel this week to your family, your friends, and your workmates.

First of all then, faithfulness and integrity. Integrity. According to the dictionary, integrity means the state of being whole or undivided.

The state of being whole or undivided. It means to be the same inside and outside, to be pure, to be sincere. Who you are on the outside is who you are on the inside.

You're not pretending to be something that you're not. We say of someone with integrity that they are true to themselves, or even that they are faithful to who they are.

[12 : 06] This is the first pillar of faithfulness as a fruit of the Spirit, that we are men and women of integrity. Now, integrity has always been an incredibly rare virtue.

Our second pillar of faithfulness is going to concern telling the truth, but there's a sense in which this first aspect of faithfulness is more living the truth.

Living the truth. In the ancient world, a hypocrite was an actor who wore masks in the course of playing different roles in a theatrical production.

Literally, that hypocrite lacked integrity because he was always wearing a mask. He was pretending to be someone else for the benefit of that production.

And as a consequence, you never really knew who that person was. He might have played the gentleman, but inside, he was evil.

[13:10] A person of integrity is the same inside as outside. He doesn't pretend to be something he's not. He doesn't project an alter ego. He's not Mr. Hyde on the outside, Dr. Jekyll on the inside.

A person of integrity is true to himself. Our Lord Jesus was a man of an absolute integrity.

He refused to play games with his appearance in order to change people's perceptions of him.

Neither did he wear a mask of invulnerability. When he was betrayed, you could see the hurt in Jesus' eyes.

When he was filled with wonder, at the faith of those he dealt with, you could see the amazement in his eyes. There's a difference between being a person of integrity and someone who wears their heart on their sleeve.

But there's also a difference between being a person of integrity and also pretending to be something that you're not. I find it very difficult to trust people I can't read.

[14:23] What I mean by that is that there are some people who, for their own reasons, don't let you go beyond the surface. Thanks, Mitchell. They use a mask to hold you at a distance.

And I'm not talking about one of these coronavirus masks. I'm thinking of a person like that in my mind right now. He was highly respected. He was very well-spoken.

He was handsome. He was courteous. He was charismatic. But I never once saw him shaken or disturbed. To all intents and purposes, he was the consummate professional.

But he never let me or anyone else get behind that mask. This man, a serving minister, not in Scotland, has secrets.

I didn't know then what they were. I only knew he had them. He played the part of a priceless antique. But look deeper.

[15:27] You began to realize, this is a part he's playing. He's just a counterfeit. And although to all the world around him, he looked like a decent man, I just knew that he lacked integrity.

Experts can tell the authenticity of ancient pottery using a process known as luminescence. Shine a luminescent light onto this man and he'd come up a fraud.

But of course, such a man as he would never have allowed himself to be tested by allowing anyone to get close enough to him to know him. And whenever anyone did get close enough to him to expose him, he became as slippery as a needle with them.

Well, in time the secrets all came out. Financial irregularities. An addiction to internet porn. The lesson for us, don't make it difficult for other people to read you.

Don't wear a mask, which to all intents and purposes hides you from others. You don't have to wear your heart on your sleeve to be a man or woman of integrity.

[16:46] Just be sincere and allow others to see the real you. See you when you're joyful. See you when you're hurting. To see you when you're succeeding.

To see you when you're failing. I don't believe that Jesus made it hard for people to read him. In many ways, the whole of the Sermon on the Mount is directed against those who choose to wear religious or social masks before others and before God.

The fruit of the Spirit is faithfulness, which consists, firstly, in integrity and being true to oneself.

Basic Christian Ethics 101. You will be amazed by the impact your Christian integrity has upon your colleagues.

Second, faithfulness and truth. Faithfulness and truth. Faithfulness and truth. Faithfulness and truth.

To be faithful doesn't just mean to be a person of integrity. It also means to be a person whose word can be trusted as true.

[18:00] In recent years, scholars have coined a new phrase. They call it a speech act. A speech act. Incredibly important phrase.

It's a recognition that our words do things. We talk about our thoughts and words and deeds as being separate from each other, but in reality, our words are deeds.

We do things when we speak. Our words are speech acts in that they are designed to do something and to have a discernible effect.

Let's remember that next time we open our mouths to speak. What is it we want the words we use to do? To achieve? Now the faithful man aims at truth in all his speech acts.

He aims to tell the truth and nothing but the truth. She wants exactly what she has said to be understood in exactly the way she said it and not misinterpreted.

[19 : 13] I guess it could go without saying, should it not? But the Christian refuses to lie, to deliberately distort the truth. The Christian refuses to deceive, to deliberately mislead his hearer.

The Christian refuses to exaggerate or to flatter, to say things which they know to be embellishments of the truth. I have a friend who is a bit of a flatterer.

But the net effect of his flattery is that I can't tell whether or not he's ever telling the truth or whether he's just massaging it to win friends and influence people.

One of the chief marks of the purity of Jesus, according to the apostle Peter, is that he had no deceit in his mouth.

No deceit. The way we speak about each other and to each other is of primary importance in the life, behavior, and character of the Christian. The book of Proverbs and Psalms are filled with examples of how Christians are to use their words wisely.

[20 : 25] The book of James, especially chapter 3, which we'll be returning to in a few months, highlights the crucial importance of speech acts in the life of the Christian. James goes as far as to say in James 1, 26, if anyone thinks he is religious but does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives his heart.

This person's religion is worthless. The one who lets his tongue run away with him is not a faithful person.

He is neither loving in what he does nor self-controlled in his speech acts. Back in the mid-1990s, we came across an altogether new word in the English language, spin doctor.

Spin doctor. Spin doctor is a political press agent or publicist who is employed, and I quote, to promote a favorable interpretation of events to journalists.

To all intents and purposes, the aim of the spin doctor is to misdirect, to massage the truth, to promote a misinterpretation of events.

[21 : 48] He plays fast and loose with what really happened. He emphasizes one thing and de-emphasizes another to present an altogether new truth. Just like we used to say that someone who was telling a lie was spinning a yarn, so now we have an entire profession devoted to spinning the truth.

The evangelical church is far from blameless in this respect. We have our own brand of spin doctors who focus on style, not substance, and present to everyone an extremely one-sided version of the truth.

Successes are highlighted and failures are hidden. as we increasingly move into a digital age where a church is first encountered online, an image is all important.

It is vital that we are true to who we are as Glasgow City Free Church and do not spin ourselves to be anything other than we are. Being faithful to the truth in an age of social media is harder than ever, and I don't envy our children growing up unable to tell the difference between fantasy and reality online, between style and substance online.

But as we leave this subject of faithfulness and truth, let me do so by making a heartfelt plea to us all. Let us use our speech acts intentionally to encourage one another.

[23 : 29] To encourage one another. Let us carefully consider what do I want the words I use to do, to achieve? Is it to build the other up or to tear the other down?

Is it to lead her toward Jesus or to lead her away from Jesus? Is it to tell the truth or allow the lie? Faithfulness and truth.

Third, faithfulness and promise. Faithfulness and promise. We most readily use the idea of the faithfulness of God in terms of the context of how he keeps his promises to us.

He was faithful to his covenant with Abraham. He is faithful to us through Jesus Christ. He says what he's going to do and he does what he says. He promises that all who put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ shall be saved.

He keeps his promise. He promises that he shall never leave us nor forsake us and he keeps his promise. God always keeps his promises. He is faithful and he is true.

[24 : 41] So to be faithful means to keep the promises we have made. In Psalm 15 verse 4 we read of the faithful person that he keeps his oath, he keeps his promise even when it hurts.

We don't make many promises but we do agree to do things. Someone asks us will you do something for me?

And we say yes I will. Yes I'll do it. We promise. Then something gets in the way we end up not doing it at all. Maybe our own forgetfulness. Maybe our laziness.

Maybe something else which we had not expected. But whatever it is it gets in the way of our faithfulness. I'm sure we've all been at the sharp end of someone who's been unfaithful to us in this way and I'm pretty sure that we have all been unfaithful to each other in this way.

None of us are immune. Well faithfulness to God in the nitty gritty of this life consists in this that we say what we are going to do and that we do what we say we're going to.

[25 : 57] Another friend of mine is faithful of saying it's not rocket science. This is basic Christianity that when we're given a task to complete as much as it stands within our power to complete it we do it.

Many as a person talks a good talk but doesn't walk the walk. Throughout his life Jesus told his disciples that he was going to die on a Roman cross and to give his life as a ransom for many he told them that he loved them and that he had come to wash their sins away.

He told them what he was going to do and then he did it. He could be trusted to do what he said he was going to. Now as I think of us all this evening I'm sure we all want to do great things for Jesus. We do. But can we all make a start here namely that if we're given something to do and we agree to do it we do it to the best of our ability.

Supposing it's to be on the sound rota at church do it to the best of your ability. even though it seems to you to be such a mundane task beneath you.

[27 : 28] Supposing you've been asked to be on and you've agreed to be on the cleaning rota for the church do it to the best of your ability even though it seems like such a common task.

Supposing it is bringing your children up in the training and instruction of the Lord do it to the best of your ability even though it seems like such a normal task. When you're given an essay to write in university write it.

When you're given an assignment to hand in do it. When you have a project complete at work don't make excuses do it.

And as you faithfully do these things those who work with you those who study with you those who live with you will see the difference the gospel bakes in your life. They will not be able to explain your diligence and faithfulness in any other way than that the God you're always telling them about must be at work in your life.

And they definitely will not be able to save you. I have no need of God in that hypothesis. And then lastly faithfulness and friendship faithfulness and friendship.

[29 : 00] I'd hate to be a politician not because the politics themselves disinterest me but because loyalty and politics don't always seem to go hand in hand.

Friendship and self-interest don't seem to belong together in the political world. Your biggest supporter politically can turn on you in an instant for no other reason than that they see political advantage to be gained by condemning criticizing or ostracizing you.

Whether you agree with them or not there are times you have to feel desperately sorry for senior politicians who have been hung out to dry. People like maybe Teresa May. If there is one area in which the Christian is to show faithfulness it is in the area of loyalty and friendship.

We're going to be good to each other unfaithful to each other through thick and thin through good times and bad through ups and downs.

They say laugh and the whole world laughs with you cry and you cry alone. In my experience I've generally found that to be true. However it cannot and must not be true in the area of Christian friendship.

[30 : 28] For the Christian faithfulness in friendship is expressed when things are going well and bad when things are going bad. Now we have some wonderful examples of friendships in the Bible.

For example the friendship of David and Jonathan. The friendship also perhaps between Jesus and John. They're both summarized in this one word loyalty.

They're friends who are loyal to one another. Though it cost them their lives they won't be true of confidence and they won't make a scapegoat out of the other. They'd go the extra mile for their enemies but they'd circumnavigate the globe for each other.

There's nothing too much. In fact in 2 Samuel 1 26 and 27 when David hears of Jonathan's death he sings a lament.

I am distressed for you my brother Jonathan he sings. Very pleasant you have been to me. Your love to me was extraordinary surpassing the love of woman.

[31 : 45] Men don't always make good friends but men need good friends. I'm happy to admit as most of you know that my wife is my best friend.

friend. But I'm also happy to admit to you that I need male friendship outside my marriage. My wife needs female friendship outside our marriage.

friendship but what's important in these friendships is loyalty and faithfulness. Sometimes friends have to forgo their own rights and advancements in order to be loyal to a friendship.

Friendships can be messy but in the mess this one thing is true loyalty commitment faithfulness. If you want to see the ultimate demonstration of that faithfulness in action consider the Lord Jesus Christ who at any stage in his earthly mission could have returned to heaven and saved himself the pain of the cross.

And yet he remained faithful he remained loyal to us. Though it cost him his life and more beside he cried for us and he died for us.

[33 : 06] He did not hang us out to dry rather he allowed himself to be hung out to dry for us. He exposed himself to the ridicule and the ostracism and the mockery to the pain and to the torture and all the time he had you in his heart.

He said I must go to the cross if I'm to save her. I must die there if I'm to rescue him. And when the world around us considers our Christian friendships they cannot square the circle of how it's possible for two people to be so different to be so loyal to one another without including God in the equation.

we all admire I hope faithful people, people of integrity, people of truth, people who can be trusted, people who are loyal friends.

Ultimately I want to close by asking you this question. without God's work of gospel grace in our hearts, is it possible that we can truly be any of these things?

Do you want to be a man of integrity? Do you want to be a woman who is known for telling the truth at all times? Do you want to be a man who can be trusted?

[34 : 39] Do you want to be a loyal friend? can I urge you to do something life-changing? Ask Jesus to be your Lord and Savior.