

Faithfulness and Fellowship

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Date: 02 December 2020

Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0 : 0 0] to shine in their lives. But as we know, they weren't a perfect church. There were a lot of issues and problems in that church. There were divisions. There were different things that Paul addresses within this chapter. But what I like about it is that Paul, while recognizing that they're not a perfect church, he still gives thanks for them. And I think that's very important for us to emphasize and to hold on to. Because sometimes we tend to be looking, and I know we should always be striving for the very best that we can. And perfection is something that we long for.

But we know that perfection is not something that we can ever attain in this world. Christ alone was perfect. Paul himself says, not that I have already attained or have become perfect. One day we will.

One day we will mirror and reflect the perfection of Jesus Christ. But we are not there yet. And it is important that we give thanks for where we are and for the many different gifts that God has equipped his people with. And it's important for us to realize that God gives the great variety of gifts to his people in order that it will be collectively used for the good of his church.

So that one person has this and another person has that. And so that when we all come together, all these gifts are used for the good of the church. And that is what Paul is thanking the Lord for. And then in verse 7, Paul shows that they're waiting for the return of Jesus. And this word here, the waiting, has the idea of eager anticipation. Now, you'll find that quite regularly in the New Testament church that they were waiting with eager anticipation. There was this real urgency for the return of Jesus. You remember in the church in Thessalonica, they had some of them had stopped working. They were so convinced that Jesus was just about ready to return, that they had stopped working. And Paul says, no, come on, get back to work.

[2 : 1 3] So the church in Corinth, they were waiting for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it's always a good sign for the church to be living in that way. We are to be working. We are to be engaged in life, involved in life, but always with one eye, waiting, a spiritual eye, an eye of faith, waiting for the return of Jesus, because he's going to come one day. And he's going to come, he tells us, when we don't expect it.

When you think not, he says, the Son of Man will return. And if we ever find that the church saying, oh, well, he won't come just now, that is just the very kind of time where he is saying, it is when you least expect it, that he will return. So a healthy church is looking for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, at the same time as living life, as it were, to the full. And then in verse 8, the apostle uses these wonderful words where he says, who will sustain you to the end?

And this captures the great idea of what God does with his people. He keeps us. That great word kept. One of the great words in the Bible, kept. We are kept, kept by the power of God unto salvation, ready to be revealed at the last time. We can't keep ourselves.

But the wonderful thing is that despite every stumble, every trip, every straying, every bit of waywardness, everything, we are still kept. But notice the wonderful way that we are kept. And as I was reading through this chapter, I was saying, well, this is a whole sermon in itself, because who will sustain you to the end? And notice the next word, guiltless.

[4 : 1 3] So that at the end of the day, when the return of Jesus, we will be guiltless. Now, that is quite extraordinary. Just to be kept is amazing, but to be kept and in the end presented as guiltless.

And if you and I know ourselves as we do, the one thing we do know about ourselves is that we are constantly guilty before God because of our sin, because of how we think, because of how we speak, because of what we do, our attitudes, everything. Guilt is all over.

And we know that throughout life, we're constantly being accused. Our own heart accuses us. Satan is constantly accusing us. So that guilt is there. But the wonderful thing is that Jesus Christ

has dealt with our guilt and he will present us to the Father on that day, guiltless. And that's how he's keeping us.

So it really is. It's quite extraordinary when we stop and you think of what Jesus has done for us and continues to do for us and is still going to do and what is yet ahead of us.

And so this is part of the wonderful thing that on that great day, our sins will not be looked for. They won't be required of us. Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect, as Paul says in Romans?

[5 : 48] Nobody. Nobody. As we said, we have been accused over and over. Maybe your heart has been accusing you today. Maybe of sins of today, but maybe of sins of 20 years ago.

Very often it's amazing how often things are dragged up from the past, isn't it? And they just flood before your mind and you say, oh. Oh, but it's there. But the Lord says, who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?

And that's the wonderful thing. And we'll never again say, as the psalmist says, my wounds do stink and are corrupt. My folly makes it so. These kind of statements will be forever gone.

So on that great day, we will be guiltless and we will be blameless, pure, without spot or blemish.

And then in verse 9, we have these great words, God is faithful.

Now, God in his word is always revealing many things about himself to us. Of course, the creation speaks to us about his eternity, about his power, about his Godhead, about these things.

[7 : 00] But his people, that's one of the things that God's people speak about, is God's faithfulness. It is something that God's people discover more and more about God.

Yes, God is revealing it right throughout the word. Great is thy faithfulness, it tells us, for instance, in Lamentations. Thy mercies are new every morning.

So God's faithfulness is great. And it's something that we find over and over and over in the Bible. But we discover it, not just through the written word, but we discover it in experience.

And as we look back, despite all the knocks and all the problems and all the hurts and all the sorrows, the one thing we know about it all is that God remains faithful.

And so he declares that and he makes us aware of that. And you'll find, say, for instance, when Israel were going into the Lamb of Promise, God reminds them that he had chosen them and that he had set his love upon them.

[8 : 10] And then he gives them this wonderful promise. And he says, know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love.

What a promise. As they're preparing to go into the Lamb of Promise. That's what he says to them. You'll find that in Deuteronomy. And that's one of the wonderful things about the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, is that God is faithful.

And the wonderful thing about it is that Jesus is the foundation of the covenant that God has made. You see, if God had made the covenant with you and with me, with us, it would have been shattered.

It would have been in tatters long ago. But it has been made with a son. And so his son, the father and the son have entered into this covenant.

And the son has entered into that covenant on our behalf. So he is the basis of this covenant and the basis of our salvation.

[9 : 20] So undergirding our whole salvation is this truth that God is faithful. And that is a pillow that we can rest on every night.

It is a comfort that we have every day. This wonderful thing that God is faithful. And his faithfulness is the actual, I suppose, if you were to work through it, the word faithfulness is very much attached to the word truth.

And, of course, God's faithfulness and God's truth are so tied up together. Because God is absolute truth.

We live in a day where people change the truth. And people will say the truth is whatever you think it is. That whatever your situation, that things change.

And they don't believe in the absolute truth. Well, we do. And God is absolute truth. And whatever people may think, whatever ideas or philosophies people may have, that doesn't alter the fact that God is absolutely faithful and true.

[10 : 34] And his word cannot change. Because he cannot change. God cannot deny himself. And God cannot lie. With him there is no variableness nor shadow of turning.

He is free from change. Whatever he has been, he will continue forever to be. And that is part of the wonderful thing.

So his word is true. And what he says, he does. There is a keeping between everything God says and everything God does.

God cannot say one thing and then do another. God is not a man that he should lie nor the son of man that he should repent. What he has said he will do.

The word makes it very clear. Jesus said, I am the way, the truth and the life. So God's word is absolutely, he is absolutely faithful and true in everything that he says.

[11 : 37] And so this is part of the wonderful thing that we know, that God won't change his mind. That God won't alter his plans.

Can you imagine if God operated the same way as you and I? Because when you go through life, one of the things you will discover is your attitudes change.

Your ideas change. Things that you really held to maybe when you were younger, you kind of changed a wee bit on it. There are obviously there's fundamentals in your life that don't change. But you'll find that many things change, opinions that change, plans change, things you were going to do, things that you were completely set upon doing.

And it's something else. Well, God doesn't operate that way. And how thankful we are that he doesn't. That he doesn't change his mind with regard to salvation, that he doesn't change his mind with regard to his commitment to us.

[12 : 43] Imagine if he decided that he was going to change his mind. That God decided that his will was to change with regard to who he was saving and who he wasn't.

Along the way, imagine if he decided to give up with us. But that's the beauty we have. At no point do we think God may abandon me.

Now, I know that there are times we can go down in our mind and in our heart and sometimes fear. What if I have never been saved at all? I will find it surprising if there's any Christian that will ever go through their whole Christian life with ever at any point doubting their salvation.

They don't for one moment doubt the ability of Christ to save them. But they sometimes have doubts in their own mind and they think, have I really come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?

And you see, when we look into our own heart and we see what's in there, that will sometimes bring us to that conclusion. And of course, Satan can have a field day if we begin to think along these lines.

[13 : 53] But the Lord will bring us back and he will bring his word to bear and he will reassure us. And the spirit will again reassure our own spirit that we belong to him, that we are sons and daughters and such like.

But we don't doubt his faithfulness, his commitment to us. We don't say, I don't know if he will keep going with me. He will because he has said he will.

And so God is faithful to every word and all his work. And as we said, there's no variableness nor shadow of turning. And you see, God has committed to giving his son a people.

And the son has been totally committed in giving himself for these people. That's the wonderful thing. You know, we live at a time when we often hear leaders, not just in our own nation, but in the nations of the world.

And they will say something. And then a while later, they will say, well, that's not actually, I know that's what I said, but that's not what I meant. What I meant was actually this, which might be something totally different.

[15 : 10] And so they play with words and they play with ideas. And sometimes when you listen to people, you just say, well, I don't really know where I am. Well, it's never, ever like that with the Lord.

He doesn't mess us up. He doesn't lead us down wrong. He doesn't try and trick us. His word is as clear and as direct as possible.

And as I say, he is altogether faithful. And of course, Jesus, as a good shepherd, he is altogether faithful. And he is totally committed to saving every single one that was given to him.

You will never find or hear Jesus at the end of the day saying to the father, I've lost a couple of the people that you gave me.

I don't know what happened. I can't understand. That sort of talk will never, ever, ever be part of whatever takes place. Because Christ will save every single one that has been given to him.

[16:20] There's a security and it's all undergirded by this wonderful faithfulness. And then Paul shows us that God's faithfulness is seen in our call.

God is faithful by whom you were called. Now, again, as you and I know, we were strangers and we were enemies and we were lost and we were on the wrong road.

But God was faithful. Because there came a day when you heard his voice as you had never heard it before. There might have been tongues on your heart along the way.

There might have been things in providence that shook you here and there. But there came a day when the voice of God was different in your experience. You heard.

And you heard because an irresistible power accompanied that word. And God, who was faithful, enabled you to believe. And so this is where this call came.

[17:23] And you gave your heart to him. That's what it tells us again in Romans. Whom he calls, then he also justifies. And whom he justifies, then he also glorifies.

But you'll see that what we've been called to. God is faithful by whom you were called into the fellowship of his son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

And the word fellowship is to have in common. To have in common. You know, that's a beautiful thing. That's what happens when you become a Christian.

You, all of a sudden, have something common with Christ. Prior to that, you didn't. Prior to that, you were running away.

Remember how in Eden, at the very beginning, there was the walk with God. Through the sin, that walk stopped.

[18:22] In fact, the walk turned into a run in the opposite direction from God. Adam ran away from God. Until God called after him in mercy.

Adam, where are you? And the wonderful thing is that in Jesus Christ, the walk is restored. We begin to walk with Jesus.

It tells us in the Bible, can two walk together except they be agreed? We don't go for a walk with a stranger. Don't go for a walk with an enemy. You walk with a friend.

And so it is that Jesus has become our friend. Because God is faithful. Who has called us into this fellowship. Into this friendship.

Into this having in common. So it is now our joy and delight. We no longer run away. We look back now and say, why was I running away?

[19:23] Because this is the last thing now I want to do. We now are walking with him. And we're at peace with him. We're sharing with him.

We have this fellowship with him. The word communion, we know, we have the word union, first of all. Union with Christ. And union with Christ leads then to communion with Christ.

We have fellowship one with another in him. And that's part of the beauty of what we are doing. And it's great to be able to get back. Although we were just in the prayer saying that.

There's this sense of joy of being back. And yet we're still limited. But it's just there's this sense of belonging to one another. Because we're family. But we ultimately are family.

Because we belong to him. This is the beauty of it. We didn't used to belong to one another. But we do now. Because we belong to him.

[20:28] And so we give thanks that tonight. God is faithful. Let us pray. Lord, we give thanks for your great faithfulness. And even although so often we are faithless.

And in fact, we confess, Lord, our faithlessness before you. But we give thanks for your great mercy. And that you're a God who delights in mercy.

Great is your faithfulness. We're told these things together in Lamentations. About your faithfulness and your mercy. And we give thanks that it is so. And so we pray that you will be with us.

And that you will part us with your blessing tonight. And that you will do us good. Cleanse us, we pray, from our every sin. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. Our final item of praise is from Psalm number 68.

Thank you.

[21:36] Thank you.