

Understanding Faithfulness Part 2



1. Faithfulness (*not perfection*) is what Christ *has always required* to receive and remain in a saving relationship w/Him.

(IOW): to receive Christ as Savior, a person must vow faithful (not perfect) obedience to Him as Lord (LBS). Once they have gained that saving relationship (thru baptism – 1Pe 3:21), they must (then) fulfill their former vow by living in faithful (not perfect) obedience to Christ if they hope to maintain it and its promises. This is true under the New Covenants just as it was under the previous covenants (e.g. Old Covenant). The mechanics of salvation have remained the same (Deu 30:16 w/Mat 19:16)¹.

2. Other ways Scripture identifies faithfulness or people who have been faithfully obedient: they are called the righteous, or practicing righteousness, are blameless, without blemish, holy, godly; they are considered those who fear the Lord, love God, are humble, are repentant, continue to bear fruit, possess a clear/good conscience.

3. That salvation requires faithfulness:

3.1. Does not negate faith in Christ (since faith in Christ that saves always includes/implies faithfulness)

The nouns “faith”, “faithfulness” and “belief” share the same Greek word (πίστις - e.g. Mat 9:2; Rom 4:5; Gal 2:16//Mat 23:23; Rom 3:3; Gal 5:22//2Th 2:13). As such, what (all of this) tells us is that when the Bible calls us to put faith in Christ for salvation, there is no negating (or contradiction) to what the Bible teaches in regard to faithfulness since this is what biblical, saving faith always includes/implies. Where you have faith – there must also be a commitment to faithfulness (and vice versa). Otherwise what we have as faith is not what the Bible/God recognizes as faith. It is a faith that will not save (Jam 2:14-26)².

3.2. Does not mean we are earning or meriting our way to heaven.

It is a marriage relationship/covenant we enter into w/Christ not a contest. As such, the blessings/promises (including salvation) given at the time we made covenant (again thru baptism – 1Pe 3:21), remain abundantly ours as long as we maintain faithfulness to Christ (Eph 5:25-33; Jer 31:31-33; the bible begins w/a marriage [Gen 2] and ends w/a marriage [Rev 21] and all the language in between is marital in nature – Eze 16:8; 2Co 11:1-2; “[Thru the Law] Yahweh facilitates the ongoing enjoyment of the relationship. The place of law [therefore]...is simply to ensure that the enjoyment of what God has already given can continue.” [JGM] = IOW: the blessings are already ours - not something to be merited [only maintained]).

3.3. Is completely reasonable given the fact that we can be faithful in our marriage to Christ (Deu 30:11-20).

3.4. Is consistent with final judgment which is always according to our deeds (Joh 5:28-29; Rom 2:6-11; 2Co 5:9-10; 1Pe 1:17; Rev 20:11-15).

3.5. Is consistent w/the warnings and possibility of apostasy which is also related to our deeds (e.g. Heb 10:19-30).

3.6. Means that our initial justification by faith (i.e. right standing before God granted thru faith in Christ) is not enough.

Unless we maintain our initial standing or state of justification thru faithful obedience, it was lost and we were eternally condemned. Contrary to the erroneous thinking of Martin Luther, Paul and James were in agreement on this issue (See Rom 2:13 w/Jam 2:24; “There is also a delicate balance between acknowledging the inheritance of Israel even in advance of the conquest, and [yet] insisting that their obedience must be open-ended, as the possibilities of fulfillment of promises stretch off into the future [IOW: God’s promised inheritance at the time they came into covenant was conditioned upon their obedience in the future]. This sounds remarkably like the New Testament assertion that while Christians already have been given all things in Christ now [we are declared justified the moment we put saving faith in Christ - yet] the full implications of that remain hidden in the future [that justification must still be there by the end of our lives if we are to get to heaven]. In both cases, the future which awaits God’s people is the ultimate ethical incentive.” [JGM] = IOW: knowing that our justification/salvation in the future is dependent on our obedience is what should motivate us to be faithful).

¹ In regard to the mechanics of salvation remaining the same between the two testaments, J. Gary Millar writes, “Perhaps the two crucial issues in the [Old Testament] view of covenant and its relationship to ethics are the relationship between law and grace on the one hand and the relationship between partial and complete fulfillment of promise on the other. I would suggest that both the issues and the [Old Testament] answers would not look out of place in the pages of the New Testament. [The Old Testament] insists on the priority of grace. Israel’s religion...is a religion of grace from beginning to end. Yahweh initiates the relationship, and Yahweh facilitates the ongoing enjoyment of the relationship. The place of law...is simply to ensure that the enjoyment of what God has already given can continue. There is also a delicate balance between acknowledging the inheritance of Israel even in advance of the conquest, and insisting that their obedience must be open-ended, as the possibilities of fulfillment of promises stretch off into the future. This sounds remarkably like the New Testament assertion that while Christians already have been given all things in Christ now, the full implications of that remain hidden in the future. In both cases, the future which awaits God’s people is the ultimate ethical incentive. While one would hesitate to ascribe Pauline soteriology and eschatology to [the Old Testament], it is hard to resist the temptation when the correlation between [the Old Testament] and the apostolic teaching is so close!” (*Now Choose Life*, p.66)

² Because of the close and symbiotic relationship between faith and faithfulness, Matthew Bates argues for replacing both terms with the word - allegiance. “Our contemporary Christian culture often comes prepackaged with the functional ideas and operative definitions of belief, faith, works, salvation, heaven and the gospel that in various ways truncate and distort the full message of the good news about Jesus the Messiah that is proclaimed in the Bible. For example, the gospel cannot be accurately summarized by saying, ‘I trust that Jesus paid the price for me, so I am saved,’ or ‘Faith in Jesus’ death for my sins saves me as a free gift apart from my works,’ or even ‘I am saved because I am trusting in Jesus’ righteousness alone.’ Although these statements do contain important partial truths, they confuse the content of the gospel, the true nature of ‘faith’ (which is not even the best term to use), the direction in which ‘faith’ must be exercised, the proper interfacing between grace and deeds, and probably also what we are ‘saved’ into and for. Surgery is necessary...Although the Greek word *pistis*, the word that most often stands behind our English translations of ‘faith’ or ‘belief’ in the New Testament, can and does frequently involve regarding something as true or real, akin to how we might say ‘I have faith that God exists’ or ‘my beliefs are different from yours,’ the word *pistis* (and related terms) has a much broader range of meaning. This range includes ideas that aren’t usually associated in our contemporary culture with belief or faith, such as fidelity, faithfulness, commitment, and pledged loyalty...The needed surgery [mentioned above therefore] involves not just an excision of ‘faith’ language but also a transplant. With regard to eternal salvation, rather than speaking of belief, trust or faith in Jesus, we should speak instead of... allegiance to Jesus the king. This, of course, is not to say that the best way to translate every occurrence of *pistis* (and related terms) is always or even usually ‘allegiance.’ Rather it is to say that allegiance is the best macro-term available to us that can describe what God requires from us for eternal salvation. (*Salvation By Allegiance Alone*, p. 5)

3.7. Means that making faithfulness (in all things) our number one priority and focus is the wisest thing we can do (Deu 4:6; re: temporal “salvation” - Pro 28:20).

3.8. Means that God has provided the necessary criteria by which we can accurately assess whether or not we are being (or have been) faithful to Christ.

Hence the reason we have recorded examples of several people who (in assessing their lives) knew they were faithful and as a result were confident they were on their way to heaven (e.g. David – 1Ki 14:8; Paul – 2Ti 4:6-8. BTW neither of these men considered themselves to be perfect. Ironically, both represent men whose past [while in covenant w/Christ] included serious sin [David had been guilty of adultery and murder, Paul had been guilty of murder and blasphemy].

4. Obedience to God’s Word must be what characterizes our covenant life if our obedience is to be recognized by God as faithful³.

That God does indeed see faithful obedience as obedience that is the majority behavior of our covenant lives is made apparent:

4.1. Through the examples of those in Scripture whose lives we know and whom God recognizes as faithful or righteous.

Though they were not perfect, what can be said is that their covenant lives did demonstrate an obedience that was predominate during their covenant lives. As a result, they are identified as faithful (or other related terms) (e.g. Paul – Act 23:1; 2Ti 4:6-8; David – 1Ki 14:8, Moses – Jer 15:1; Mat 17:3, Job and Noah – Eze 14:14, 20).

4.2. By considering the meaning behind those words/phrases used by God’s Word to communicate faithfulness.

4.2.1. Faithfully obey (Deu 28:1) (שָׂמַע וְשָׁמַע) [im-shama...shama - literally, “if to listen, you listen”] = Common Hebrew idiom (“listen”) and construction (participle, infinitive or nominal form of a word coupled with the same word as a verb) used to indicate/emphasize that a person’s obedience be the continual and predominate pattern in their life (Exo 15:26; Deu 6:17 – “to keep you shall keep”; Isa 21:6-8 – listeners they shall listen w/much attention –notice verse 8, “continually”; Isa 55:2 – “to listen, listen!”; Jer 12:16 – “if to learn they learn”; Zec 6:15 – “if to listen you listen”).

4.2.2. Diligently keep (Deu 6:17) = Understanding what is meant by this phrase can be discerned thru the specific instruction given in the prior verses as the means to fulfilling diligent discipleship in re: to our children (Deu 6:7-9 – “diligently” = “when you sit...when you walk...when you lie down, and when you rise...bind them as a sign on your hand...between your eyes...write them on the doorposts and on your gates”= It w/ the predominate theme/thing; the object/action occurring or existing the most; This no doubt is also the idea being communicated elsewhere in Scripture when the word diligent (or one of its various forms) is used – e.g. Psa 119:4; Deu 4:9 w/Pro 4:23 = give attention to your mind, will and emotions more than anything else since everything that we do flows from it [and will be part of our final judgment – e.g. Mat 12:33-37]; Deu 19:18 = our investigation must produce a preponderance/majority of evidence to convict a person of wrongdoing – see prev. verses 15-17; Pro 13:4 = the person who spends the majority of their time in work versus the person who spends the majority of their time dreaming or doing nothing. The idea of majority or most occurring action is also implied thru the word “keep” – e.g. 1Jo 2:1-6 = Given John’s reference to reality of sin [1-2], it is clear that what John intends by using Jesus as the example of what it looks like to “keep his commandments” or “keep his word” is faithfulness or obedience as the dominate behavior of our covenant lives since this is the only common ground between Jesus and us [though Jesus possesses such behavior par excellence!].

4.2.3. Practicing righteousness (1Jo 3:7-10) = Again, what John is referring to is behavior that is the majority of predominant pattern in our lives since becoming a Christian. This is confirmed by the morphology of the word translated “practice”. It is a present active participle (versus a verb of the same nomenclature) communicating therefore action so common and continuous that it has now become a part of the person’s identity (versus simply an action of the person in the present – which is what would be the case were it a verb).

4.2.4. Bearing fruit (Joh 15:1-5; Heb 6:1-8) = Bearing fruit is not a sign that we are saved (or maintaining our relationship w/Christ) unless that fruit is the predominate pattern or is contributing to what is becoming that. Never does Jesus offer salvation/eternal life to people simply bc they bore fruit or improved on their spiritual state (i.e. grew spiritually) unless those things amounted to them being considered faithful (1Pe 2:1-2 w/1:1-9, 13-17 = Notice Peter says “grow up *into* salvation” NOT in your salvation; see also 2Pe 1:5-10 = Bearing the fruit of the various virtues of obedience listed by Peter in these verses are only valuable if they are “increasing” – i.e. are becoming the predominate behavior/pattern in our lives. It is for this reason, Peter makes the assurance of our calling/salvation dependent upon their “diligent... practice” – both words [as already noted] indicating the idea of faithfulness or obedience that is the dominate occurrence in our life).

CLOSING: WHAT TO DO IF FAITHFUL OBEDIENCE HAS NOT BEEN THE CASE THUS FAR IN OUR CHRISTIAN WALK or WE HAVE LEFT THAT PATH BEHIND (by currently living in unrepentant sin – i.e. a predominate pattern of sin in a certain area of our life) = (2Co 6:1-2).

³ Characterize = the behavior that most occurs, is the typical or predominate pattern of your life since becoming a Christian. If you are not sure, then ask those who know you best and will be honest with you.