



Summary of previous discussion (what we've already learned from God's Word) (Points 1-3):

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 not only trust in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, but also vow faithful (not perfect) obedience to Him as Lord. Once they have gained that saving relationship (thru baptism – 1Pe 3:21), they must (then) fulfill their former vow by living in faithful obedience to Him if they hope to maintain it and its promises.

*What the Reformers seemed to have missed in their promotion of faith alone for justification/salvation = (Jam 2:20-24).

(20) = Faith [F] that does not require Faithful Obedience [FO] does not justify/save.

(21) = Abe was justified/saved b/c of also possessing [FO].

(22) = Abe's [F] needed [FO] to be complete/legit unto salvation.

(23) = Abe's initial [F] therefore included a promise/obligation of [FO]

This is why James can say Gen 15 – the acct of Abe rec'g salvation - was "fulfilled" in Gen 22 – the acct of Abe offering Isaac. If no promise/obligation to [FO] was made in Gen 15, then hardly could James say it was "fulfilled" in Gen 22. Fulfillment implies a prior promise/obligation (πληρώω = to bring to completion something formerly promised; See Mat 5:17 w/Exo 24:7).

(24) = The biblical equation for gaining justification unto salvation is: JUST/SALV = G([F] + promise of [FO]) + M([F] + [FO]) -----
NOT JUST/SALV = [F] alone = [FO]¹

4. Obedience to God's Word must be what characterizes our covenant life if our obedience is to be recognized by God as faithful².

5. The obedience that characterizes our covenant life must also possess certain attributes if it is to be recognized by God as faithful. Or put another way, it is our commitment to these attributes that is the key to achieving the faithfulness God requires in our obedience.

5.1. Careful [Question being addressed: Can I take risks and be sloppy in my practice of God's Word and still be considered faithful? *No, you must be careful in both your lifestyle and obedience.*] **(Deu 28:1b) – "If you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments."**

5.2. Comprehensive [Question being addressed = Can I be selective in what I choose to faithfully obey as commandments necessary to salvation? *No, you must comprehensive in your submission to God's Word.*] **(Deu 28:1b) – "If you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments."**

5.3. Confirmed [Question being addressed = Can a person be considered faithful whose obedience has never been tested or when tested, fails? *No, faithful obedience refers only to that which has been confirmed through testing.*] **(Deu 8:1-2) - "You shall remember the whole way the Lord your God had led you...testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not."**

5.4. Cheerful [Question being addressed = Can I be faithful and yet possess a bad attitude or be unhappy in my obedience? *No, you must serve God with cheerfulness.*] **(Deu 28:47) - "Serve the Lord your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart."**

5.5. Confident [Question being addressed = Can I question the character and competency of God and remain faithful? *No, faithfulness requires complete confidence in God.*] **(Deu 1:21-36) – "wholly followed the Lord".**

5.6. Communal [Question be addressed = Can I achieve faithfulness independent of the covenant community? *No, faithful obedience is never personal or private. It instead must be learned and practiced by spending time w/the covenant community.*] **(Pro 18:1)**

"isolates" (פָּרַד) [paw-rad] = separate from close relationships with others (e.g. Gen 10:5, 25:23; Est 3:8; Rut 1:17; Psa 22:14; Hos 4:14; LXX – Mat 19:6; 1Co 7:10).

"own desire" (תַּאֲוָה) [taavah] = a selfish, greedy or shameful want (e.g. Num 11:4).

(LXX trans. of Pro 18:1) = "A man wishing to be separate from friends/loved ones w/his time, seeks what is shameful."

It sb obvious from this single verse that not being committed to - or spending time w/others in the covenant community, is a path that does not end in faithfulness. It is instead exposes one as selfish, greedy or shameful. That being said, support for possessing a communal mindset as it relates to our obedience goes far beyond one verse. The New Testament (especially) is filled w/teaching that directly supports the necessity of communal obedience – (or as stated earlier) an obedience that is *learned and practiced by spending time with the covenant community*.

¹ The biblical equation for justification/salvation is also not Roman Catholicism which wb: JUSTIFICATION/SALVATION = [F] + [FO] unto perfection.

² Characterize = the behavior that most occurs, is the typical or predominate pattern of your life since becoming a Christian. IOW: YOU ARE WHAT YOU DO (Eze 18; Rev 20).

5.6.1. Our dependence upon the covenant community as the place where - and the people from whom, we learn what faithful obedience is – and looks like, is supported by the fact that:

5.6.1.1. The interpretation and understanding of Scripture was given to the church/covenant community – not the individual (Act 15:22 w/28 = Notice the voice of the covenant community is viewed as the Holy Spirit; see also Deu 17:9-12).

If our ability to interpret/understand God's Word - or know what and how God commands us to obey, were something everybody could do on their own, then what we would expect w/ references to individuals doing just that – or commands calling for us to personal enlightenment (something common in other religions). No such references however, exist. Correct understanding/interpretation for the individual is instead dependent on the covenant community (e.g. Gal 2:1-2). Not only that, but were we able to go it alone - we would also expect the Scripture to be addressed to us as individuals. Once more however, such is not the case. It is written instead to the covenant community (e.g. Rom 1:17; 1Co 1:1-2; 2Co 1:1; Gal 1:1-2; Phi 4:1:1 w/4:15; Col 4:16; 1Th 1:1; 2Th 1:1). That Scripture is indeed intended for the plurality of God's people/covenant community – versus the individual attempting to learn on their own, includes the instruction given to such individuals as Adam and Eve, Noah, and Abraham since their recorded accounts were written by Moses for use with the (Old) covenant community (see Deu 4:8 – given to the nation/covenant community NOT individuals). Even the book of Philemon in the New Testament was a community message. Though given the title of one of its recipients, it was ultimately addressed to the entire church (Phm 1:2). Furthermore, before the 15th century, it was near impossible for a person to learn what God required outside of the covenant community. Two reasons: 1) before this time most people were illiterate 2) before this time bibles were a rare and very expensive commodity. They were produced by scribes (or later, monks) copying everything by hand. Time to create one bible would be between 10-12 months and cost between \$16-30k (in modern day dollars). The only ones therefore possessing bibles were the covenant communities/churches. What changed all of this in the 15th century was the invention of the printing press. The availability of books to read (especially the bible) also motivated people to learn to read. Lastly, it sb mentioned that it is only b/c of the covenant community that we know what constitutes God's Word since it was the early church who together determined what documents were divinely inspired and worthy of being recognized and included in the Scriptures. Hence the reason we are told what we are in (Act 2:42) = The early church spent time w/each other b/c there was no other practical way to learn God's will and word than thru being around the covenant community – the plurality of God's pastors and people working together to interpret and understand. This is the reason (no doubt) Paul says what he does to the Colossians (Col 3:16 -17) = How we "do everything in the name of the Lord" is predicated – or dependent upon, "the word of Christ dwelling in [us] richly – which comes thru the "teaching and admonishing" of the covenant community. That Paul is indeed speaking of the covenant community is made clear by the previous verse (15).

5.6.1.2. God commands us to spend our time w/the leaders and the mature in the covenant community.

When it comes to learning, God calls us to spend time with the leaders and mature of the covenant community (i.e. her diakonos members). And that b/c these are the people the Holy Spirit uses to show us how God's commands are applied or lived out in our current, cultural context (Heb 13:7-9; Phi 3:17, 4:9; Tit 2:1-6).

Our dependency on the covenant community to learn God's will and word is how the Protestant Reformer John Calvin understood the early church leader, Cyprian's reference to the church as our Mother ("You cannot have God as your Father if you do not have the church as your Mother."),

"Because it is our intention to discuss the visible church, let us learn from the simple title of 'mother'. How useful, how necessary it is that we should know her. For there is no other way to [not only] enter life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, [but also], nourish us at her breast... [and] keep us under her care and guidance until, having put off this mortal flesh, we become like the angels"

BOTTOM LINE = You can't know *what* or *how* to faithfully obey unless you are committed to – and spending time w/the covenant community. Our obedience therefore must be communal in nature.

"Spiritual formation [or growth in learning] occurs primarily in the context of the community. People who remain connected to their brothers and sisters in the local church almost invariably grow in self-understanding, and they mature in their ability to relate in healthy ways to God and their fellow human beings...In spite of [this], people in crisis frequently insist on going it alone – following their individualistic, often self-destructive pathways." – Joseph Hellerman (*When The Church Was A Family*)

CLOSING CONTEMPLATION/CHALLENGE = Are you spending enough time w/the covenant community/your Christian brothers and sisters – most especially those who are leaders/mature, learning and growing in your faith? Remember, it is impossible to do those things w/o them!

The minimum requirement = (Act 2:42 -46 – "day by day"; Heb 3:12 – "as long as it is called 'Today'") = Both phrases are idiomatic references to connections/fellowship that is taking place frequently during the week. In the case of both passages, it is important to also note that such connections/fellowship is being actively pursued (versus waiting for others to connect w/you) and is in relation to those outside our immediate home or comfort zone (they were "together" "breaking bread in their homes"). In summation then, connection w/the covenant community on Sunday only or rarely any other day, is not enough! We are commanded to be characterized by actively pursuing regular and frequent contact w/others in the covenant community outside our immediate home (or comfort zone).