

Reading: **Revelation 2:10**

We've just completed a study of the 7 letters written by Jesus to the 7 churches of Asia Minor. Only two of those churches, Smyrna & Philadelphia, were so faithful, Jesus had only good to say about them. However, for one of those churches ~ **Smyrna** ~ life was extremely hard. They faced pressure from Rome because they wouldn't engage in Caesar worship. They faced pressure from unbelieving Jews who slandered them & turned people against them. And, they were poor because nobody would give them work. And, as if that wasn't enough Jesus then said, **Rev. 2:10**, **"Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, & you will have tribulation ten days..."** So, the devil was going to put them through a period of intense persecution & imprisonment, where some no doubt would die, & all would have their faith tested. But Jesus comforted them with these words: **"Be faithful until death, & I will give you the crown of life."** I like to think that those words from Jesus gave them the courage to face & accept the suffering that came to them, & if history is any indication, they did. This is the same church where **Polycarp**, an elder, was burned at the stake for refusing to curse Christ.

Now, as you think about those words from Jesus, **"Be faithful unto death, & I'll give you the crown of life"** you realize that He intended them for us & every Christian who's ever lived. Certainly, this is one of the great challenges we all face as Christians...staying faithful to the Lord until death. If I could number all the Christians I've known over the years who've become unfaithful, it would be comparable to any of the largest congregations in our brotherhood!

So, let's talk about the need to **"be faithful unto death"**, & as we do let's consider **4 questions**:

1st ...Does the Lord demand our faithfulness? The answer, of course, is a resounding 'Yes!' When we become a Christian, we're committing our lives to Christ... we're saying, **"I want to follow Jesus all the days of my life!"** And there are scores of Scriptures which show the Lord does

demand our faithfulness. In **Matt. 6:33**, when Jesus says, **"But seek first the kingdom of God & His righteousness..."** He's telling us to be faithful. In **Matt. 10:22** when He says, **"He who endures to the end will be saved,"** He's telling us to be faithful. In **John 8:31**, when He says, **"If you abide in My word, you are My disciples,"** He's saying be faithful. And, we find even more admonitions from the **apostles**, where we're told **'If'** we live a certain way, **'Then'** we'll be eternally blessed. Like, **Rom. 8:13**, where Paul says, **"If you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."** Or, **Col. 1:23**, **"...if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded & steadfast, & are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard..."** they'd be holy & blameless. Or, **1st Jn. 1:7**, where John says, **"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, & the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."** All of these are exhortations to be faithful to the Lord until death, or until He comes!

You see, being a Christian doesn't mean we just come to worship to sit on a pew a few times a week; being a Christian means that every moment of every day, we're going to do our best to abide in Christ & continue in the faith. When Paul says in **Rom. 12:1**, **"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service,"** he's saying this is what the Lord has a right to expect from us. Since He shed His blood to redeem us from eternal death, isn't it "reasonable" that we should give ourselves to Him in faithful service? Of course, it is! So, yes, Jesus demands our faithfulness.

2nd...What will hinder us from being faithful? A "hindrance" is anything that blocks our way & keeps us from doing our best. And, of course, **SIN** is our greatest hindrance...that covers everything I can say on this point. But let me give some examples:

Think about **Judas**. Was he just a 'bad apple' from the beginning when Jesus chose him as an apostle? No, I'm sure he had some good qualities, but he let sin enter his life. When he saw Mary anoint the feet of Jesus with the costly oil, he became critical saying, **"Why wasn't this fragrant oil not sold for 300 denarii & given to the poor?"** Then the Bible says, **"This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief,**

& had the money box; & he used to take what was put in it," (Jn. 12:5-6). So, as Judas kept the money box for the apostles, he let the sin of greed & avarice come into his life, until finally he **"sold out"** the Lord for **30 pieces of silver!** That's what SIN does, it hinders faithfulness!

Think about **Simon, the sorcerer**, in **Acts 8**. Simon was a magician who tricked people by slight of hand; & he was good at it because the people claimed he was **"the great power of God"**. So, Simon got a lot of attention that way, & people gave him money for his tricks. But, then Simon heard the gospel preached in Samaria, & he was baptized to become a Christian. However, when Simon saw the apostles (Peter & John) come & lay hands on some, imparting supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit, he offered them money. He wanted the ability to perform real miracles, probably, to get more attention & make even more money. But Peter saw that his heart was not right; he said, **"Repent therefore of this your wickedness, & pray God if perhaps the thought of you heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness & bound by iniquity," (Acts 8:23).** Simon did ask Peter to pray for him, but this is what SIN does, it poisons us, & binds us, & makes our "hearts" unacceptable to God.

You know, Simon's problem was a heart problem. Peter told him, **"Your heart is not right in the sight of God."** We must never forget that GOD sees & knows what's in our heart. And while we might be able to fool one another, we can't fool God. We might **look, act & talk** like a Christian on the outside, but if our heart isn't right ~ if it's full of hate, envy, jealousy, greed, or bitterness ~ the Lord knows it. And if we should die with those feelings still in our heart, Jesus won't be able to say, **"Well done, good & faithful servant,"** but will instead say, **"Cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness."**

Another example of how SIN hinders faithfulness is **Demas**. We read about him in **2 Tim. 4:9**, but it's not complimentary. Paul said, **"For Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world..."** At one time, Demas was a faithful servant of God; he was useful to Paul in his mission work. But Demas got caught up in the pursuits & pleasures of this world & became unfaithful. And that's always been a problem for

Christians...getting too close to this world. James put it this way, in **James 4:4**, "Adulterers & adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." Though we're *in the world*, we can't let *the world in us!* Think about where your heart is today. Jesus said in **Matt. 6:24**, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Where's your treasure? What do you most value? Temporal things of this world or eternal things above? If our "treasure" is in the world, we'll have a hard time being faithful. But if our "treasure" is in heaven & seeking those things above, we'll have an easier time being faithful.

Another example of how sin hinders faithfulness is **Ananias & Sapphira** in **Acts 5**. Here was a Christian couple who sold some land & received a certain amount of money for it. Then, they brought part of their earnings from the sale, & laid it at the apostles' feet. And there was nothing wrong with that - giving some & keeping some for themselves. However, Ananias & Sapphira lied about it, saying, "Here's **ALL** we received from the sale of our land." Apparently, they were motivated by a desire to please men...they wanted to hear people say, "Oh, how wonderful you are for what you've done!" And they were willing to lie to God to get it! So, God caused them to drop dead on the spot!

It doesn't matter what the sin is...lying, worldliness, greed, an evil heart... it will hinder our faithfulness to God & His church. Let's remember Paul's words to the Christians in Rome, "God be thanked that though (we) were slaves of sin, yet (we) obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which (we) were delivered. And having been set free from sin, (we) became slaves of righteousness," (**Rom. 6:17-18**). When we obeyed the gospel, we chose our Master...not sin, but righteousness! Now, we have an obligation to obey & not let sin hinder us from being faithful.

3^d...In what ways does God want us to be faithful? When Jesus told the Christians in Smyrna, "Be faithful until death..." what exactly did He mean?

1) I believe He meant for them to be unwavering in worship. It's not the only way to gage faithfulness, but it's certainly one way. In **Psalm 122:1**, David said, "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord.'" If we're going to be faithful, shouldn't that be our attitude? I

was "glad" not sad...or mad...but glad to be able to go into the Lord's house to praise His name. Why? Because He's worthy! He deserves it! Worship isn't an option; it's an opportunity to show God that we love Him with "all our heart, soul, mind & strength," (Mk.12:30).

And our greatest example is Jesus. In Lk. 4:16, as Jesus traveled about, it says, "So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, & stood up to read." Jesus worshipped according to the Jewish tradition where they were expected to read through the OT, publicly, in one year's time! That'd take an average of 5 hours a Sabbath, but Jesus attended those worship assemblies faithfully! And if we understand that the Lord is our Maker, & that His church was purchased by the blood of His Son, we'll understand why we too should have the "custom" of assembling each Lord's Day to worship.

2) To be "faithful unto death" means to be devoted to Bible study. 2nd Pet. 3:18 says to "Grow in the grace & knowledge of our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ." I don't know anything that will make our faith stronger than growing in our knowledge of the Word. 1st Pet. 2:2 says, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby." What a joy & blessing it is to see our children so excited about their Bible classes, we have to tell them 'slow down, don't run'! Why are they like that? Because they love to hear the stories about Jesus! They love to study about God in their Bibles! And Peter says that's how we should be too! We should "desire the pure milk of the Word" like hungry babies & children! Job had this attitude; he said in Job 23:12, "I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food." Is that how we feel about the Word of God - treasure it more than food? I know most of us treasure meal time! We don't want to miss that, do we? That makes us grouchy & irritable! But how much do we value the word of God? Listen, if you want to be faithful unto death, develop an appetite for God's Word. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger & thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled," (Matt. 5:6). Get involved in Bible study; we have a class for every age group & it's the best way to develop your faith.

3) To be "faithful unto death" means to be active in service. Jesus said, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, & to give His life a ransom for many," (Mark 10:45). If this was Jesus' attitude it ought to be ours too. When we become Christians, we should say, "I want to use my time... abilities...energy...& money in service to God, working to build up His kingdom." In fact, that's how Jesus gauges our faithfulness. In the parable of the talents, the Lord said to those who used their resources for Him, "Well done, good & faithful servant, you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many. Enter into the joy of your lord," (Matt. 25:21, 23). Find out what you can do; volunteer your time & services; get involved using your abilities in the work of the church. This is part of what it means to be "faithful" unto death.

4th ...What should motivate us to live faithfully for God every day?

Certainly, there are many things that motivate us. (a) One is the love of God. When we think of all that God has done for us in giving His Son to die for us, that ought to motivate us. And that's what Paul said in 2nd Cor. 5:14-15: "For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus that if One died for all, then all died; & He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them & rose again." (b) Another motivator is Judgment. It should be sobering to all of us that if don't live as we should, we're going to stand before God & give an account. In Rev. 20, we have a picture of the Great White Throne of Judgment, & the dead, small & great are standing there before God, & the books are opened, & each one is judged "according to their works" by what's written in the books. Then another book is opened, called the Book of Life, & the Bible says anyone not found written in that book is "cast into the lake of fire". That ought to be a motivator to live faithful! But finally, the greatest motivator of all is (c) the hope of heaven. Paul writes in Rom. 8:18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Paul had suffered greatly for the cause of Christ. But he says to us, "Look at your life as a Christian. You think it's hard? Listen, no matter how hard it is...how much you have to go through... how much you suffer as child of God, it does not begin to compare to the glory that's yours in heaven." Heaven is going to be worth it all! In Rev. 21, where heaven is described, we learn that there will be no

graves there, for nobody dies; there's no hospitals there, for nobody gets sick; there's not even going to be any need for Kleenex Tissues, because nobody will have any tears, unless they're tears of joy. Because God's going to wipe away all tears! Don't you want to go to a place like that?

I'm sure you do! But here's the reality. If you really want to go to heaven, decide now to give your life to Christ by obeying the gospel. Repent of your sins, confess your faith in Jesus, & be baptized for remission of your sins. Then, as a Christian, make up your mind that you're going to do whatever it takes to remain faithful to the Lord until He calls you home. If you need to come for any reason, we urge you to come now, as we stand & sing!