

FAITHFULNESS

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!” (Matthew 23:23-24).

“Woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, & yet disregard justice & the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others” (Luke 11:42).

This morning we are going to discuss our fourth and final weightier provision of the law—faithfulness.

1. What is faith?

A. Hebrews 11:1, “Now faith is the assurance of [things] hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (NASB). “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (NKJV).

B. This passage either defines faith or explains its basis.

C. And not merely religious faith. No, any kind of faith.

D. Regarding things past and present, since our own personal experience is so limited, everyone has to constantly act on faith, on conviction based on evidence provided by others, and not on what we have seen for ourselves. For example, Franklin, Columbus, and Lincoln; the condition of our child’s ears.

E. Regarding things future, since they have not yet happened, everyone has to constantly act on faith, on assurance based on what we hope will happen, and not on what we know will happen. For example, crossing the street; allowing a doctor to put tubes in our child’s ears.

2. Faith can and should be rational.

A. Contrary to what many people think, Christians are not irrational simply because they walk by faith.

1) Everyone constantly walks by faith. Life is impossible without it.

2) People think faith is rational in every aspect of life but religion. For example, our whole judicial system is based on faith, on the evidence of things not seen by judges and jurors. In fact, in cases where they have seen evidence, they cannot serve as judges or jurors. They can only be called as witnesses.

3) What makes something rational or irrational is not the presence or absence of faith, but the quality of the evidence for faith.

a. If I accept Anthony’s word that he has a grandson or take medicine prescribed by a doctor I am living by faith. Am I irrational? No. Why? Because my faith is based on strong evidence.

b. If someone thinks Elvis is still alive or drinks and drives he is also living by faith. Is he irrational? Yes. Why? Because he is living by faith? No, because his faith is not based on strong evidence.

3. Christian faith is rational.

A. If people have a problem with Christianity it should not be because it is based on faith, but because they do not believe the evidence is strong enough for people to put their faith in it.

B. Again, contrary to what many people think, Christianity is not a system of blind faith. Jesus does not ask us to believe in Him in spite of the evidence, but because of the evidence. Jn 5:33, 36, 39; 1 Cor 15:3-8, 14-19.

C. The difference between Christianity and other systems of belief—and even atheism is a system of belief—is not evidence, but the interpretation evidence. Consider, for example, the origin of man.

1) In spite of what many people falsely assert, the evolution of man from a Big Bang to an incredibly complex creature, is still just a theory. It has not been proven by the evidence.

2) Christians do not hide from the evidence. Rather, we embrace the evidence. In fact, we believe creationism fits the evidence far, far better than Darwin’s general theory of evolution.

3) For example, it takes an infinitely greater leap of faith to believe that DNA evolved by chance than to believe it was created by God. DNA is as much an intelligible language as English, and it is as irrational to believe that a fully functioning and totally automatic assembly line which produces complex products happened by chance as it is to believe that we evolved by chance.

4) The only way to explain how otherwise rational people can so “religiously” believe in evolution (Psalms 14:1A) is that they are either ignorant of the evidence and its meaning or they are absolutely unwilling to answer to God.

4. Faith is essential to salvation. To be saved, we must:

A. Believe that God exists and that what He says is true. Hebrews 11:6.

1) The evidence for such faith is so strong there is no excuse for disbelief. Romans 1:18-20.

2) But, salvation by faith is much more than a mere intellectual exercise. James 2:19. To be saved, we must also ...

B. Trust in God for salvation.

1) Jesus is our only hope for salvation. Rom 3:23; 6:23A; John 14:6; Acts 16:30-31; Eph 2:8-10; Lk 18:9-14.

2) We trust in God for salvation when we believe and obey what Jesus says we must do to be saved. The faith that saves is the faith that obeys!

a. Illustrations:

i. The walls of Jericho. Hebrews 11:30A; Joshua 6:2-5; Hebrews 11:30B.

ii. The woman with the flow of blood. Mark 5:34, 28, 27, 29.

b. Application to salvation. Galatians 3:26; Romans 10:9-10; Acts 2:38; John 12:42-43; Matthew 10:33; Luke 13:3, 5; Galatians 3:27. Believing and obeying is not only how we trust in God to be saved, it is also how we trust in God to remain saved. Colossians 1:21-23.

C. Be faithful. Galatians 5:22-23.

1) The Greek word translated "faithfulness" in this passage is *pistis*.

2) *Pistis* has two meanings. First, "conviction of the truth of anything, belief" (Thayer). Second, "fidelity, faithfulness, i.e. the character of one who can be relied on" (Thayer). "What *pistis* here means is faithfulness; it is the quality of reliability, dependability or trustworthiness which makes a person someone on whose faithful service we can utterly rely and on whose word we can unfailingly depend. Trustworthiness is a quality Jesus looks for in his followers and it is one of the most valuable qualities they can possess" (Barclay adapted).

3) This is the sense in which God is faithful (1 Corinthians 10:13; etc.) and Paul was faithful before he trusted in God for salvation (1 Timothy 4:12-13).

4) The Holy Spirit speaks of many things that are faithful in this sense of the word, among them servants (Matt 24:45), armor (Luke 11:22); mercies (Acts 13:34); stewards (1 Cor 4:2); children (1 Cor 4:17; Titus 1:6); ministers (Eph 6:21; Col 1:7; 4:7); brethren (Col 1:2A; 4:9A; 1 Peter 5:12); words (Titus 1:9; Rev 21:5; 22:6); sayings (1 Tim 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim 2:11; Titus 3:8); High Priests (Heb 2:17); witnesses (Rev 1:5); martyrs (Rev 2:13); God the Father (1 Cor 1:9); Jesus the Lord (2 Thess 3:3); Paul the apostle (1 Cor 7:25); etc. According to Thayer, in at least 45 of 62 passages, or no less than 73% of the time, *pistis* has this meaning.

5) Why is faithfulness important?

a. God has entrusted us with the gospel. 1 Thessalonians 2:4A.

b. God and everyone else, the lost, our church, our family, our neighbors, etc., are relying on us to live it (1 Tim 3:11B; Titus 1:6B); exemplify it (Titus 2:9-10); share it (2 Tim 2:2); and defend it (1 Tim 6:20-21).

c. No matter what it costs, God fully expects us to be faithful to the promise we made to Him when He saved us from our sins. Revelation 2:10.

d. This is our work, our time, our church, our family, our neighborhood, our soul.

e. Let us all step up and be the dependable men & women God and everyone else are trusting us to be.

f. The blessedness of being a reliable servant of God and man will far exceed its losses. The cursedness of worthlessness because we prefer laziness over dependability will far exceed its gains. Which will it be—trustworthy or unreliable, the joy of the Lord or weeping and gnashing of teeth—the choice is entirely up to us!

g. I hope we all now fully understand why faithfulness truly is a weightier matter of the law!