

## Fruit of the Spirit. Faithfulness

Where would we be if God were not faithful? If God did not keep to His Word, did not keep on loving us, keep on forgiving us, keep on helping us and providing for us, where would we be?

If the Lord Almighty lost heart, if He gave up on us, treated us as a lost cause, a failed experiment, a waste of grace, what then? If half way down the road to Jerusalem and the cross the Lord Jesus had thought better of the idea and turned aside what kind of hopeless darkness would engulf us still!

But He didn't! He proved faithful. He stayed His course. He went the distance. He hung there at Calvary until every sin was atoned for and He could cry out in a loud and triumphant voice "It is finished"!

God is good, compassionate and gracious and He is faithful. When He makes a promise He keeps it. When He makes a covenant He sticks to His part. When He gives His Word, we can depend on it. And the New Testament tells us that God has poured out His Holy Spirit generously in our day. His Spirit resides in the heart and life of every Christian, seeking to produce in us the fruit of godly character. As we prayerfully give the Lord free access to every area of our hearts and lives He produces and nurtures in us qualities such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and faithfulness. We are not all powerful or all knowing and certainly not morally pure and perfect like God, but we get a little more like Him in character each day as we submit to His Spirit's will working in us.

God expects His people to keep our promises because He does and He helps us do so by living in us.

So how are we at keeping the promises we make?

Maybe we agree to take on things too readily or make promises too lightly for we should be careful. Careful to do what we say we will

do in things little or large, because people will judge our Lord by us and we need to be dependable like Him. People in your home, your school, workplace, circle of friends should be happy to entrust things to you, knowing that you'll do what you say conscientiously and well. Christians should have a name for reliability, just like the Lord we represent.

In the big things all the more so. Think of some of the biggest promises we might be asked to make in our lives. Let's think about marriage, baptism, communion, ordination.

Thinking firstly of marriage. Christians should pray for the Spirit's help to practise a love that is dependable. Easy to promise undying affection when we're young and attractive and full of life and passion and adventure and fun. What about when sickness comes? Or financial hardship? When the hair and teeth leave us, when the dress no longer fits, when dinner doesn't quite turn out etc etc... People need to know they are loved and valued full stop. That their partner will always be there for them. That circumstances may change but loyalty remains. That at every stage joy and adversity will be faced together.

What about the promise a couple make when they present their child for baptism? Again they stand before God and witnesses in His house and promise to give their children a Christian upbringing in the Church. Sadly some parents seem to think this just means leaving their kids off and picking them up from Sunday School. We who are parents need to pray the Spirit's help to provide a home life that is persuasive. Would faithfulness to this promise not prompt parents to *pray* with their children, read Bible stories at home, say grace at mealtimes, speak God's name in reverence and bring their family to worship regularly? God is our witness when we make these promises. He watches to see how we follow through!

Similarly when someone comes on profession of faith for baptism or a first communion they make a promise to follow Christ all their lives and be loyal members of His Church. So where are all these people

who have professed to be Christian and promised to support their Saviour's Church when we have a Bible study or a prayer meeting or when people out there need to hear the Gospel? We need to pray for the Spirit's help to be a congregation that is committed. How well do we remember that promise when the things of this world call out to us? When the pleasures and cares of other things crowd in for our attention?

And then what about the commitment some of us gave when we were ordained as ministers and elders? The Church in every age needs a leadership that is constant. To work together for the glory of God, loyal to Christ, and to each other and the congregation where God places us. Will we prove faithful? Can the Lord count on us? Can the congregation depend on us to pastor them with the love of the Good Shepherd? Over the years will we be consistent in providing godly leadership by prayerful decision and humble example?

And in a wider sense – organisation leaders, choir members, office bearers, door stewards, all who have given any commitment to assist in any way – can we be trusted to be in our place when we're meant to be?

This challenge is wide and far-ranging but I want to conclude briefly and positively. To those who prove faithful in God's service there waits a crown and reward in Heaven, even as Jesus proved faithful and sat down in glory at the Father's right hand. And further, there is joy in the here and now for at times we are granted to see how faithful service for the Lord, done under the guidance and in the power of the Holy Spirit, bears eternal fruit for God's Kingdom. If we are faithful, as God is faithful, we will rejoice to see souls saved. The Lord will make us glad in our hearts as we serve Him!

Let's pray.