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### A Study of the Use of the Phrase Faithful is God in the New Testament Writings

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A STUDY OF THE USE OF THE PHRASE "FAITHFUL IS GOD"  
IN THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITINGS

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Exegetical Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Divinity

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by

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June 1954

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of God's faithfulness is implicit in all of the Sacred Scripture; indeed, one could say that the Bible is, in a sense, the story of God's faithfulness. But only comparatively seldom does this attribute of God come to the surface explicitly. The purpose of this thesis is to study those passages and their context in the New Testament where it is specifically mentioned. Each of these passages is like a facet of a diamond, revealing a new aspect of God's faithfulness, highlighting another element of it, making our conception of it richer and deeper.

The order in which the passages are studied must be, to an extent, arbitrary; though it is planned that there be some logical progression and development of thought in the manner of presentation. Therefore we begin with a study of God's faithfulness in the forgiveness of sins, since this is the cardinal doctrine of our faith. We follow that with a discussion of how God supplies those who have experienced forgiveness with all grace in Christ Jesus. Then some of the normal experiences of mankind, temptation, persecution and suffering, man's unfaithfulness, and hope, are discussed in the light of God's faithfulness. The final passage explains that God will preserve His children until the Second Coming.

So we start at the threshold of our faith, and continue through to its grand conclusion.

Since the New Testament cannot be understood fully without the Old, the study proper is prefaced by a brief investigation of the Old Testament concept of the faithfulness of God. There is also a semantic study of the word πιστός, since we cannot understand the concept if we do not understand the word.

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## CHAPTER II

### THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Perhaps the best way to grasp the Old Testament concept of God's faithfulness is to study the terms employed to convey this thought. The verb  $\text{יָצַח}$ , usually in the Niphal, and its derivatives are often utilized. It has various meanings: "to support, bear in the arms," as children; "to be founded firm and stable," e.g., of a house; "to be of long continuance, perennial," as of a covenant; or "to be sure, certain," as of the Word of God. From this it can easily be seen how the word came to be used metaphorically as "to be faithful, trustworthy, sure," such that one can "lean upon." It is applied to God in such a sense in Deut. 7:9; 32:4; Ps. 36:5; 40:11; Is. 49:7; 65:16. It invariably has reference to God's covenant relation to His people, and shows that God can be confidently relied upon in this capacity. He will never desert or forsake His chosen people.<sup>1</sup>

The noun  $\text{אֱמוּנָה}$  is also used to express God's faithfulness. Its primary meaning is "firmness, stability, perpetuity, or security," Is. 39:8; Josh. 2:12. Thence it derived the meaning "faithfulness, fidelity," in which

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<sup>1</sup>W. Gesenius, " $\text{יָצַח}$ ," Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon, translated by S. P. Tregelles (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), pp. 58 f.

anyone is consistent and performs promises, Ps. 30:9; 71:22; 91:4. Very often joined with  $\tau\theta\eta$  Ps. 25:10; 40:11; 57:3, 10; 108:4; 138:2."<sup>2</sup>

This attribute of fidelity is ascribed to God even in passages where these words do not occur. The thought is implied in the covenant name Jehovah "where the immutability of God is put in special relation to the divine decree of election, and the promises that flow therefrom, as in the case of Ex. 3:13 ff.; 6:2 ff. The name implies the invariable faithfulness of God, which side of the notion of Jehovah is especially emphasized in the Old Testament, to awake confidence in God; cf. Deut. 7:9; Hos. 12:5 f."<sup>3</sup>

The fidelity of God is also implicit in the name which is commonly applied to Him, "the Rock,"<sup>4</sup> and when He is referred to as "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their fathers' God," Ex. 3:6, 15, 16.<sup>5</sup>

Caspar W. Hodge summarizes the Old Testament concept of God's faithfulness thus:

The emphasis which this attribute of God has in the Old Testament is determined by the fact that throughout the whole of the Old Testament the covenant relation of Jehovah to His people is founded solely in God's grace, and not any merit of theirs. If this

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>3</sup>G. F. Oehler, Theology of the Old Testament, revised by George E. Day (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1883), p. 95.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>5</sup>C. W. Hodge, "Faithfulness," International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, edited by James Orr (Chicago: Howard Severance Company, 1915), II, 1088.

covenant relation had been based on any claim of Israel, faithfulness on God's part might have been taken for granted. But since Jehovah's covenant relation with Israel and His promises of salvation spring solely from, and depend solely upon, the grace of God, that which gave firm assurance that the past experience of God's grace would continue in the future was the immutable faithfulness of Jehovah. By it the experience of the fathers was given a religious value for Israel from generation to generation. And even as the faithfulness of God bridged over the past and the present, so also it constituted the connecting link between the present and the future, becoming thus the firm basis of Israel's hope.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 1089 f.

## CHAPTER III

### A SEMANTIC STUDY OF ΠΙΣΤΟΣ

Of the derivation of πιστός, Cremer says:

Πιστός is originally most probably a verbal adjective from πείθεω, πείθεσθαι, so that it may be taken actively or passively, according to the different meanings of πείθεσθαι--to obey, hence submissive, faithful;--to confide in, hence confiding.<sup>1</sup>

The active sense apparently occurs first in the New Testament (Gal. 3:9; 2 Cor. 6:15; John 20:27, 1 Pet. 1:21) and is rather rare in profano Greek. The meaning is "trusting," "believing," "confiding."<sup>2</sup>

It is in the passive voice that the word holds significance for our study. "From the meaning submissive, tractable, arises the so-called passive signification faithful, one whom we may trust, trusty."<sup>3</sup> In this passive sense it is applied to God, persons, and things.<sup>4</sup> Since the passages where it is applied to God are discussed in the body of this thesis, they will not be discussed here. However, it is significant that a word used to describe an attribute of God is also applied to men and inanimate objects.

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<sup>1</sup>Herman Cremer, "πιστός," Biblico-Theological Lexicon of the New Testament Greek, translated by W. Urwick (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1878), p. 476.

<sup>2</sup>J. H. Moulton and George Milligan, "πιστός," The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1949), p. 515.

<sup>3</sup>Cremer, loc. cit.

<sup>4</sup>W. Bauer, "πιστός," Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament (Berlin: Alfred Toepelmann, 1952), p. 1209.

The word is used primarily of persons,  $\delta\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ , Matt. 24:45; 25:21, 23;  $\omicron\iota\kappa\omicron\nu\omicron\mu\omicron\varsigma$ , Luke 12:42;  $\delta\iota\acute{\alpha}\kappa\omicron\nu\omicron\varsigma$ , Eph. 6:21;  $\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi\iota\epsilon\rho\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$ , Heb. 2:17; etc.<sup>5</sup> These are "persons who show themselves faithful in the transaction of business, the execution of commands, or the discharge of official duties."<sup>6</sup> It is used in a very elevated sense of "Antipas, my faithful martyr," Rev. 2:13; Moses, the faithful servant, Heb. 3:5; and Christ, the faithful witness, Rev. 1:5; etc.

Applied to things, it is used especially of words.<sup>7</sup> (1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:11; <sup>8</sup> Titus 1:9; 3:8; Rev. 21:5; 22:6). Other examples are  $\omicron\tilde{\iota}\kappa\omicron\varsigma$ , 1 Sam. 2:35;  $\delta\iota\alpha\theta\acute{\eta}\kappa\eta$ , Ps. 89:28;  $\tau\acute{\omicron}\pi\omicron\varsigma$ , Is. 22:23, 25;  $\upsilon\delta\omega\rho$ , Is. 33:16.<sup>9</sup>

So it can be seen that there is a note of self-sacrifice in the word, the person is submissive, his object is to serve another. And in this service he is completely dependable and trustworthy, even as a good servant or steward. The person depending on him need not worry or doubt, for he can be trusted and used, even as pure water or a stable house can be trusted and used.

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<sup>5</sup>Cromer, loc. cit.

<sup>6</sup>J. H. Thayer, " $\pi\iota\sigma\tau\acute{\iota}\varsigma$ ," A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (New York: American Book Company, 1889), p. 514.

<sup>7</sup>Bauer, op. cit., p. 1210.

<sup>8</sup>Infra, chapter VIII, p. 34, paragraph 2.

<sup>9</sup>Cromer, op. cit., p. 477.

## CHAPTER IV

### GOD'S FAITHFULNESS AND THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

#### A Study of 1 John 1:5 - 2:2

The central doctrine of Christianity is the forgiveness of sins. The Christian realizes that because of his sins he can never be accepted by God, unless God forgive him. Will the fact that man is born in sin and that he sins daily, even after he is forgiven, frustrate or cancel the forgiveness of God? Can man sin so often, or flagrantly, or shamefully that God will refuse him forgiveness? Never, if he confesses his sin and sincerely believes in the Lord Jesus, for then God is faithful and just to forgive sins. Such is God's faithfulness, that nothing can block his forgiveness. No matter how many our sins, or how great our guilt, God can be depended on. He is faithful to forgive.

In verse 5 John proclaims what is the nature of God: "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." Westcott says of this:

In each region of being "light" represents the noblest manifestation of that energy to which it is applied. Physically "light" embodies the idea of splendor, glory: intellectually of truth: morally of holiness.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>B. F. Westcott, The Epistles of St. John (Cambridge and London: Macmillan and Company, 1886), p. 16.

In accordance with where they stand in relation to God, John proceeds to divide mankind into two camps: the children of light and the children of darkness.

In mentioning the children of darkness, John brings three accusations against them. The first is their plea as to the "indifference of moral conduct to spiritual communion";<sup>2</sup> or as Westcott says, they "deny the reality of sin."<sup>3</sup> They claim the highest religious experience: "We have fellowship with God," and yet they are unconcerned with moral behaviour: they "walk in darkness," verse 6. This is obviously directed against the Gnostics, a sect which began to infiltrate into Christianity after it became well-established. They claimed an esoteric "knowledge" of God which others could not attain, and often accompanied this with base immorality and licentious living.<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, the children of darkness may deny "the abiding power of sin as a principle in one who has committed sins."<sup>5</sup> That is, they say they have no sin (v.8). The third accusation is "the denial of the fact of having committed sin."<sup>6</sup> They say they "have not sinned" (v.10). The result of all

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<sup>2</sup>A. E. Brooke, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles," International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), XLII, 13.

<sup>3</sup>Westcott, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>4</sup>Brooke, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

this is that they are false to their own knowledge, persuade themselves that falsehood is truth, and set themselves above God (vv. 6, 8, 10).<sup>7</sup> In effect, they deny the faithfulness of God, or even the necessity for it, and thus make it impossible for God to exercise His fidelity towards them.

Interwoven with this is a description of the children of light. John is writing this epistle so that they will not sin (2:1). Nevertheless, they do sin (2:1; 1:8, 10). While John teaches that the new man cannot sin (3:9) he does not teach a sinless perfection, for we still have the flesh with us.

But when the Christian sins, he knows that he has a propitiation for his sins, ἱλασμός (2:2). "Christ is said to be the 'propitiation' and not simply the 'propitiator' in order to emphasize the thought that He is Himself the propitiatory offering, as well as the priest (compare Rom. 3:25)."<sup>8</sup> As our propitiation, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from sin (1:7). Leviticus 5 and others explain the Old Testament symbolism involved in this.

Because he has a propitiation, the Christian has also an "Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous," (2:1).

Westcott says:

The idea of "advocacy" and "propitiation" are distinct, and yet in close connection. The latter furnishes the basis of the former: the latter is universal, while the former, so far as it is revealed, is exercised for

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<sup>7</sup>Westcott, loc. cit.

<sup>8</sup>Westcott, op. cit., p. 44.

believers only. Christ as Advocate pleads the cause of the believer against his "accuser". (Heb. 9:11 ff., 24; 7:25).<sup>9</sup>

If the Christian, then, confesses his sin and calls in his Advocate to help, God is faithful and just to forgive his sins and cleanse him from all unrighteousness. "He is just, in that, in spite of men's failures to fulfill their obligations, He remains true to the covenant which He made with them; and this includes forgiveness on certain conditions."<sup>10</sup> He is just because He accepts the propitiation which Christ made for the sins of the world. He would be unjust to punish the same sin twice, or to turn away the heavenly Advocate who sacrificed His own life.

Not only is God just, but He is also faithful. He can be relied upon and depended upon to forgive sins. God has, so to speak, obligated Himself. If we confess our sins and plead the propitiation of Jesus Christ, He must forgive us; or else He would not be faithful and just. God is

not "faithful because He is just," and justice in His relation to men includes the necessity of His fulfilling the promises which He has made. The two adjectives are coordinate. God's faithfulness is shown in the fulfilment of His promises.<sup>11</sup>

"i v a. defines the sphere in which the faithfulness and the justice are shown."<sup>12</sup> God expresses these attributes by forgiving sins and cleansing men from unrighteousness.

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<sup>9</sup>Westcott, loc. cit.

<sup>10</sup>Brooke, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

The image of "remission," "forgiveness," (ἀφίερα) presents sin as a debt . . . the image of "cleansing" (καθαρίσω) marks the personal stain.<sup>13</sup>

Unrighteousness, ἀδικία, denotes "injustice, failure to maintain right relations with other men or with God."<sup>14</sup>

This piling up of phrases indicates the complete and full forgiveness that we have in Christ. Such is God's faithfulness, that He gives full forgiveness.

Thus God is faithful to the children of light. But Christ Jesus died not only for our sins, but for the sins of the whole world (2:2). If the children of darkness will confess their sins, they, too, will experience God's forgiveness. For He is faithful to all who confess and accept the propitiation of Christ Jesus. There is no other condition; no one need fear rejection. The propitiation made for the sins of the world will always be applied by the faithful God to everyone who confesses and believes.

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<sup>13</sup>Westcott, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>14</sup>Brooke, op. cit., p. 21.

## CHAPTER V

### GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IS EXPRESSED IN CHRIST

#### A Study of 1 Corinthians 1:4-9

In this section Paul stresses that God is faithful in Christ. The man who does not have faith in Christ cannot experience the faithfulness of God, for it is expressed and channeled only through Christ. But in Christ God's faithfulness is boundless; it is operative in every sphere of our existence. Our text says, in effect: God expresses His faithfulness through Christ; and through Christ His faithfulness gives us all grace and all the gifts of grace.

Paul begins this epistle, as is his custom, with a thanksgiving. "The cause of his thanksgiving is the grace of God given to the Corinthians. Grace in this verse is therefore not a virtue of God but the manifestation thereof.  $\chi \acute{\alpha} ρ ι ς$  here has the same meaning as  $\chi \acute{\epsilon} ρ ι ς μ α$  in verse 7."<sup>1</sup>

This grace is given "in Christ Jesus,"  $\epsilon \nu \chi ρ ι σ τ \acute{\omega} \text{ } \Upsilon \eta \sigma \acute{o} \upsilon$ . This theme runs throughout the whole paragraph: we are enriched "in Him" (i.e., Christ) verse 5; the gifts of utterance and knowledge come and are confirmed through the preaching of Christ (vv. 5 and 6); we are preserved by and for Christ

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<sup>1</sup>F. W. Grosheide, "Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians," The New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), p. 27.

(vv. 7 and 8); we experience God's fidelity through fellowship with Him (v. 9). (See also 1:30).

Paul then enlarges on what this grace given us in Christ is, i.e., he explains how God expresses His faithfulness in Christ. "In every way you were enriched in Him," verse 5. "Enriched" denotes abundance.<sup>2</sup> This abundance is further expressed by the double usage of "all" in verse 5: "in all utterance and in all knowledge." The verb is in the passive, which indicates that God is the author, He alone enriched them.<sup>3</sup> This enrichment was ἐν παντί, in every sphere; in no area were they deficient (14:26). So they were furnished: (1) in every sphere, and (2) completely in every sphere. "So that you are not lacking in any gift," verse 7, states the same truth negatively.

Paul proceeds to single out two of the spheres in which God has enriched them. The two examples are utterance and knowledge. Utterance, λόγος, means they had something to speak about and they actually did speak about it. "Knowledge, γνῶσις, is not exclusively the result of research or thinking, but is an insight into things. 8:1 f."<sup>4</sup>

It is not by accident that the apostle only mentioned here the speculative and oratorical powers, and not the moral virtues. His intention is not doubtful; for in chap. 8:8-13 he himself contrasts the two

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<sup>2</sup>F. Godet, Commentary on First Corinthians (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1890), I, 52.

<sup>3</sup>Grosheide, loc. cit.

<sup>4</sup>Grosheide, op. cit., p. 28.

principal gifts of utterance, tongues, and prophecy, and then knowledge, as things which pass away, with the three things which abide: faith, hope, and love. Here then, side by side with the riches for which the apostle gives thanks, we already discover the defect which afflicts him. This defect stood in relation to the character of the Greek mind, which was distinguished rather by intellectual and oratorical gifts than by seriousness of heart and conscience.<sup>5</sup>

Verse 6, which is largely parenthetical, is a personal reference to Paul's comparatively long ministry (over one and a half years) to the Corinthians. His preaching there was the human instrument for the imparting of these spiritual gifts to them. Paul had great opposition at Corinth (Acts 18:9 ff.) but faithfully continued his witness to Christ among them; and God faithfully "confirmed" this witness, making it effective (*ἰσχυροποίησεν*).

As they are daily enriched more and more, and their deficiencies eliminated, they "wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ," verse 7. Now they have the gifts, then they will have the Giver. They have a foretaste of the Faithful One, so they yearn to see Him face to face. Though the unbeliever will "shrink from Him in shame at His coming," 1 John 2:28; Luke 17:30; the believer will set his hope fully upon the "grace that is coming to him at the revelation of Jesus Christ," 1 Peter 1:13.

Verse 8 continues: "Who also will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus." The "who" probably

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<sup>5</sup>Godet, op. cit., p. 53.

refers to its nearest antecedent, Christ. Christ will confirm us, i.e., as Paul explains the term in Col. 2:6, cause us to be "rooted and grounded in Him." How faithful God is to give us such an anchor of hope: Christ Himself shall confirm us until His own day. His faithfulness is furthermore expressed in the phrases "until the end" and "unreprovable." (1 Thess. 5:23).

Verse 8 was so full of the thought of God's faithfulness that Paul must cry out in verse 9:  $\pi \iota \sigma \tau \acute{o} \varsigma \delta \epsilon \theta \epsilon \acute{o} \varsigma$ , God is faithful. "The statement is brief, almost blunt. Its very brevity and bluntness show that it admits of no question. It is eternally attested."<sup>6</sup> It is the essence of all he has been saying. All these gifts of grace in Christ are the signs and irrefutable proof of God's faithfulness. "It is really the fundamental affirmation of the whole letter."<sup>7</sup>

As great as God's faithfulness may be, it is revealed always and only in Christ: "by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."  $\kappa \epsilon \iota \nu \omega \nu \acute{\iota} \alpha$  is derived from  $\kappa \epsilon \iota \nu \acute{o} \varsigma$ , which means "common," and has the same root as "syn," with.<sup>8</sup> It means: partake, commune, be a partner, companion, in union with. In our text it means that

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<sup>6</sup> J. Campbell Morgan, The Corinthian Letters of St. Paul (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1946), p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> G. E. B. Cranfield, "Fellowship," A Theological Word-book of the Bible, edited by Alan Richardson (New York: Macmillan, 1951), pp. 81-83.

we are made one with Christ. The parallels in this paragraph have already been noted under verse 4, and there are many others in this and all Paul's epistles. So fully is God's faithfulness channeled through Christ, that He is called simply "The Faithful One," Rev. 19:11. In 2 Thess. 3:3 it is said that "the Lord is faithful," and in the New Testament "Lord" refers almost exclusively to Christ. See also 2 Cor. 1:18 ff. All that Christ does shows us the faithfulness of God; He is God's faithfulness in action.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD AND TEMPTATION

#### A Study of 1 Corinthians 10:12-13

In this section Paul discusses the faithfulness of God as it relates itself to temptations. Although there were multitudinous moral difficulties at Corinth, the Corinthians acquired an air of self-satisfaction, complacency, and carnal security, 4:6-8; 6:12 ff. In order to shatter their presumption, Paul warned them of how the highly-blessed Israelites were overthrown as a result of their sins. That is to be a warning sign to them: "Let him that thinketh he stands, take heed lest he fall." But Paul does not want the Corinthians to go to another extreme, and despair as if their situation were utterly hopeless and falling inevitable; so he counterbalances his first point with the truth of God's faithfulness. The faithful God can not only save them from sin, which is the cause of falling; but He can save them from temptation which is the cause of sin. Paul says, in effect, "You are not perfect, so do not be presumptuous; but neither despair, for God is faithful."

Paul begins with a "therefore," *ὄρα*, which points to the fact that this verse is a summary of what had preceded, "that this exhortation to watchfulness is the inference to

be drawn from the foregoing examples."<sup>1</sup> In the previous verses Paul related how stably the Israelites were standing, and what glorious privileges were theirs:

I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same supernatural food and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the rock was Christ, verses 1-4.

If the Israelites had such an enviable standing, the Corinthians' was even more so: they had the Christ incarnate, crucified, and resurrected. They had not only the types, but the actual Baptism and Eucharist.<sup>2</sup> All the gifts of the Spirit were outpoured on them.

Paul must remind them that the Israelites, in spite of their high standing, were visited with God's judgment:

"With most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness"; "23,000 fell in a single day"; "some of them were destroyed by the Destroyer"; "some of them were destroyed by serpents," verses 5-10. The same devastating fall could come to these Corinthians, therefore Paul warns them: "Take heed lest ye also fall." As you were privileged like Israel, so you can also fall like Israel.

But why did Israel fall; what was the cause? It was sin. They desired evil, practiced immorality, indulged in idolatry, tried the Lord and grumbled, verses 6-10. And what would

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<sup>1</sup>F. Godet, Commentary on First Corinthians (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1890), II, 68.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

cause the Corinthians to fall? The same thing: sin. So Paul warns them: "Do not be presumptuous; you, too, may sin so as to fall."

Having warned them, Paul immediately comforts them. He does not want them to despair as if failing were inevitable, so he points them to the faithfulness of God. "The Lord is faithful, He will strengthen you from evil,"

2 Thess. 3:3. Their security is not to be their state of perfection or their tested faith, but the faithfulness of God.<sup>3</sup> Paul proceeds to give the proof of God's fidelity.<sup>4</sup>

The first proof is that God deals primarily with temptations,<sup>5</sup> not sin. Sin is the cause of downfall, but temptation is the cause of sin. God goes right to the root of the problem: He deals with temptation so that sin may not issue from it.

The second proof of God's fidelity is that He only permits such temptations to come upon them as are common to man, ἀνθρώπων πειρασμοί; literally, "human." That means "such as men are

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<sup>3</sup>C. Hodge, The First Epistle to the Corinthians (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.), p. 182.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>5</sup>Most commentators maintain that πειρασμός means both temptation and trial due to affliction here (Godet, Hodge, Grosheide, etc.). But in the light of the context, I think we are compelled to take it as referring almost exclusively to temptation (see especially vv. 6-10 and v. 14). No mention is made of the advantages to be gained from trials, as we might expect; rather, falling is mentioned. Note also the negative tone of v. 13 and the necessity for escape. All that is said here is true of trials, also; but I think the reference is mainly to temptation. For the faithfulness of God in trials, see 1 Peter 4:12-19.

able to bear, accommodated to human strength."<sup>6</sup> Godet very appropriately warns: "A temptation proportioned to the strength of man'; but without isolating man from God, for God only can give man victory even in the slightest temptation."<sup>7</sup>

God will not let man be tempted beyond what he is able. Emphasis should be placed on the word "let," *ἐάω*. God is in control of the universe. He may permit Satan to try believers as he did Job, but Satan is always limited; he can only tempt us in so far as God permits.

And God is faithful, Who will not permit you to be tempted above that you are able, *ὅτι ὁ ὁσίως*. It does not say that God will not permit the Christian to be tempted at all, or even that his temptations will be light and superficial. But He does promise that the temptations will never surpass the Christian's strength or endurance. No matter how weak he may be, he need not worry, for his temptations will be even weaker than he.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Hodge, op. cit., p. 182.

<sup>7</sup> Godet, op. cit., p. 71.

<sup>8</sup> Godet's note is interesting: "Has man then some power? And if the matter in question is what man can do with the divine help, is not the power of this help without limit? But it must not be forgotten, that if the power of God is infinite, the receptivity of the believer is limited: limited by the degree of spiritual development which he has reached. God knows the measure, Paul means to say, and he proportions the intensity of the temptation to the degree of power which the believer is capable of receiving from Him." Ibid., p. 72.

But with the temptation, God will make also the escape, "ἐκβασίην, the way to "walk out" rather than fall. "The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation," 2 Peter 2:9.

Escape may be gained in two ways. Either God can put an end to the situation itself, or He can rid the believer's heart of the fascinating charm exercised over him by the tempting object, and change into disgust the seductive attraction which it exercised.

Because there is an escape, Paul can tell the Corinthians in verse 11<sub>4</sub> to "flee."

The verb is interesting in this phrase: "God will also make along with the temptation the escape," *πρὸς ἴσθαι σου*. God Himself will make the escape, and He will make it concomitantly and simultaneously with the temptation. Just as the Christian is painfully aware of his temptation, he can also be joyfully aware that there is an escape. If he believes God's Word, the weight of the temptation is itself proof of escape. God makes the escape *σὺν* the temptation, not "after," or "when it becomes too burdensome," or "if He deems it necessary," but "with."

God will make the escape that "you may be able to bear it," *τὸς ἰσχύειν ὑμῶν κἄν*. Sin will not weigh the Christian down and cause him to fall. Ideally, no man need fall since God has made such provision and escape.

When our sins cause us to fear lest we fall, we have this confidence that God is faithful. Therefore He will deal

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 72 f.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD EXPERIENCED IN SUFFERING

#### A Study of 1 Peter 4:12-19

The first epistle of Peter is often called the epistle of suffering. That note is certainly dominant in this paragraph, where reference is made to fiery trials, sharing in Christ's suffering, being reviled for Christ, etc. It is saturated in suffering. But in the heat of trials, we have also the unquenchable glow of God's faithfulness. Sufferers are exhorted to entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, i.e., the One who will use all their sufferings for constructive purposes, to benefit them. Though their trials pain, they will also purify them. In fact, they will draw them into a closer communion with God, causing His Spirit of Glory to rest upon them, and then to glorify God. And as their sufferings weigh them down, the hope of His Second Coming will buoy them up. At that day they will rejoice with exultation, for they shall see creation consummated and perfected. With the eyes of a realistic man St. Peter can see much suffering in this life; but with the eyes of faith he can see that which is so incomparably and eternally more real, a faithful Creator. God is faithful.

Peter begins with the imperative: *μὴ ἑνθάδε*, "Don't be amazed or astonished at the trial by fire you have to undergo. It's nothing strange or surprising." Indeed, the

people of Asia Minor were already accustomed to many kinds of trials; the previous portion of the epistle is abundant with such incidents. But now there probably are organized persecutions: they are being reviled for the name of Christ, suffering for Him, and undergoing all sorts of fiery ordeals. This had come as quite a shock, "for which the ordinary trials of life in a heathen environment, the arbitrary blows of surly masters and even occasional prosecutions before a magistrate, were no preparation."<sup>1</sup> Truly, "all those who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution,"  
2 Tim. 3:12.

The trial by fire that is coming upon them, τῆ ἐν ὑμῶν πυρώσει πρὸς περισσόθεν ὑμῶν γινομένη, will be a true trial, i.e., it will test them and discipline them. This is similar to the metaphor of the purifying fire in Chapter 1:7, "that the trial of your faith, being more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Christ Jesus." (1 Cor. 3:10-15; Is. 48:10). Not only should they not be surprised by trials, rather they should count them all joy, for they cause them to be "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing," James 1:2-4. Thus, God is faithful to make persecutions and trials beneficial for His children.

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<sup>1</sup>F. W. Beare, The First Epistle of Peter (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1947), p. 162.

Peter continues: "In the measure in which," "In so far as (καθὸ) you share in Christ's suffering . . . ." When a Christian suffers for Christ and His Church, he is sharing in Christ's sufferings: κοινωνεῖτε τῷ τῷ Χριστῷ παθόμενον . Phil. 3:10: "τοῦ ἡμεῶν αὐτοῦ . . . καὶ κοινωνεῖτε παθόμενων αὐτοῦ." See also 2 Cor. 1:5; John 15:18-20; Matt. 10:24 f.; 16:24; Col. 1:24. We should rejoice because such suffering forges a new link of fellowship with Christ;<sup>2</sup> the bond of unity is tightened as we suffer like Him, for Him, and with the same results, in their degree, which His suffering effected, 4:1-12.<sup>3</sup> But we must not go to the extremes of mysticism, thinking that we can feel the actual suffering of Christ.

As a result of such sharing in suffering we should rejoice, χαίετε. Rejoice not in spite of suffering, but because of suffering. Joy springs from and is nourished by suffering. However, this is not any kind of suffering, but only that suffering which results in a communion with Christ. Suffering as an end in itself is useless, it must be for practical reasons.<sup>4</sup> (Romans 5:3-5). We have many examples of such suffering and rejoicing in the book of Acts.

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>3</sup>C. Bigs, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude," International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), XLI, 176.

<sup>4</sup>Beare, op. cit., p. 165.

Then Peter adds: "that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy," "ἵνα καὶ ἐν τῇ ἔποικελύψει τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ χαρήτε ἀγαλλιώμενοι."

The final clause does not depend primarily on χαίριτε, but rather on κοινωνεῖτε τοῖς τοῦ Χριστοῦ παθημάτων: the share in the future glory of Christ is the promised counterpart of the sufferings that have been shared. It is not precisely a thought of reward, but rather of an inherent compensation. (Matt. 10:32; 2 Tim. 2:11 f.)<sup>5</sup>

St. Peter lays great stress on the time "when His glory shall be revealed," i.e., Christ's Second Coming, 1:5, 7, 13; 5:1. Now we rejoice, then we shall rejoice with rapture. Ἀγαλλιάω means exult or be full of joy. In the Septuagint, especially the Psalms, it often expresses the worshippers exultation in God and His mercy.<sup>6</sup> Here rejoicing with rapture is said to be our attitude at the Second Coming, but in 1:8 it is said to be our attitude now. Thus we have the common "now and not yet" tension, a foretaste of joy which is a pledge of what is to come.

Peter enlarges upon his point with a paraphrase of the last Beatitude: "If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed." The words of our Lord are:

Blessed are you when men reproach you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you, Matt. 5:11 f.

To be reviled and reproached can be a most irksome burden and sharp sort of suffering; but if it is done "for the name

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> E. G. Selwyn, The First Epistle of St. Peter (London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1952), p. 222.

of Christ" it is also a most direct method of sharing in the suffering of Christ. (Matt. 10:22; Acts 4:7).

A person who bears such reproach is blessed, *μακάριος*, i.e., happy or enviable. This is a peculiarly religious happiness and may have nothing to do with the emotions.<sup>7</sup> He is blessed because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon him. This is one and the same Spirit, with two of His characteristics delineated. Glory is the "brightness which radiates from the presence of God."<sup>8</sup> Isaiah gives an excellent explanation of glory (60:1 f.): "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the Glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and His Glory will be seen upon you."

The Spirit of God also rests upon the one who is reproached. This text becomes pointed when we look to Isaiah (11:2), whence Peter quoted it. There it refers to the Messiah. Just as the Spirit rests on the only Son of God (and the Spirit was given to Him without measure, John 3:34), He likewise rests upon those who are reviled for Christ. Selwyn gives a good summary of this:

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>8</sup> W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans," International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), XXXII, 84.

The glory of God (1) is already Christ's (4:11), and (2) will soon be revealed in all its majesty; meanwhile (3) its presence rests on the persecuted Church, as the Shekinah did on the Israelites and the tabernacle and the temple; and (4) in the glory there rests also on the Church the Spirit of God, which is neither fully identified with it, (καὶ τό) nor fully differentiated from it (singular ἐν ταύτῃ).

In verse 15 Peter interjects a warning that a Christian is never to suffer for any misdemeanor or wrongdoing, but only for Christ. "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or as a wrongdoer, or a mischief-maker." *κακοποιῶς* is probably a general term meaning any kind of wrongdoing. The derivation of *ἐλλοτριεπίεκατος* is very nebulous, but it may refer to a busy-body.<sup>10</sup>

"Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God." It is to be noted that the first century believers always referred to themselves as saints, disciples, brethren, etc. The name "Christian" was applied to them only by unbelievers (Acts 11:26; 26:28). It seems to be a term of derision, and the literal ground for persecution.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, note the stress given it: "as a Christian," "under that name," and verse 14, the only passage in the New Testament which uses

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<sup>9</sup>Selwyn, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>11</sup>Beare, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

the phrase *ἡμεῖς Χριστοῦ*. This was probably to lead up to the name "Christian" here.<sup>12</sup>

If such be a believer's lot, he is not to be ashamed.

The natural converse would be to "let him count it an honor"--but it is turned more forcefully to the thought of the honor that may be done to God in glorifying Him by a steadfast confession.<sup>13</sup>

The believer will cause a slur against his faith to sing to the glory of God; and scorn to redound to His praise. When God's name is mocked, the believer is spurred on to acknowledge the glory that belongs to God.

Verses 17 and 18 seem to be largely parenthetical.

Beare explains them thus:

His motive is to warn and remind them that there is no ultimate escape in apostasy; those who might be tempted to seek an immediate freedom by renouncing Christ are warned that the imminent menace of, far worse punishment hangs over the disobedient.<sup>14</sup>

"For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God."

This is the first act in the great drama of the Last Judgment. The house of God is now standing trial before the Judge, not long to be deferred, those that disobey the Gospel must in<sup>15</sup> their turn stand before His throne to face His wrath.

(Mal. 3:1-5; Amos 3:2; Ezek. 9:6; Jer. 25:29; 1 Cor. 11:32).

"And if it begins with us, what will be the end of those who do not obey the Gospel of God?" "If the ordeal for the Christian is terrible, the end that awaits the unbeliever is beyond

<sup>12</sup>Bigg, op. cit., p. 180.

<sup>13</sup>Beare, loc. cit.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

imagination."<sup>16</sup> If God is a purifying fire for the believer, He is a consuming fire for the unbeliever, Heb. 12:29. No matter how painful our suffering, we are far more fortunate than the unfaithful.

Peter then quotes Proverbs 11:31 (Septuagint) to prove his point: "If the righteous is scarcely saved," *Μόλις σώζεται*. *Μόλις* is derived from *Μόλος* (toil) and means "with difficulty, hardly."<sup>17</sup> That is due to the great trials he must endure. Stoeckhardt quotes Wiesinger on this point: "Kaum, aber doch gewiss."<sup>18</sup> This *Μόλις* does not invalidate the faithfulness of God. "Where will the impious and sinner appear?" *Φανεῖται* refers not to annihilation, but, like *τέλος*, to the impossibility of imagining the degrees of disaster that is to befall the impious and sinful."<sup>19</sup>

Peter then sums up the paragraph: "Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will do right and entrust their souls to a faithful creator." Those who have not brought their suffering upon themselves by infractions of justice (v. 15) or sought persecution (3:15), but have suffered only when

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> J. H. Thayer, "*Μόλις*," A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (New York: American Book Company, 1889), p. 417.

<sup>18</sup> G. Stoeckhardt, Kommentar Ueber den Ersten Brief Petri (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1912), p. 217.

<sup>19</sup> Beare, op. cit., p. 169.

it was God's work and will, may entrust themselves to Him as to a faithful creator. Bigg brings out the idea of "entrust" ( $\pi\alpha\rho\epsilon\iota\sigma\tau\acute{\iota}\theta\epsilon\omega\sigma\alpha\iota$ ) clearly:

It is to deposit something in safekeeping Ps. 31:5; Luke 23:46. In the classics it refers to giving one's money into the safekeeping of a friend. Since there were no banks that was often done in taking journeys, etc. Such a deposit was regarded as entailing a peculiarly sacred obligation, which none could violate or think of violating without the deepest guilt.<sup>20</sup>

Because God is so faithful, the believer may confidently entrust himself into His hands.

We entrust ourselves to a faithful creator. Many commentators become romantic and poetic at this point, finding the proof of God's faithfulness in His role as Creator.<sup>21</sup>

I do not believe we can do this. Nature is too often arbitrary, cruel, and mocking to prove the faithfulness of God. Besides, God's faithfulness is seen only and alone in Christ, I Cor. 1:4-9. Rather than finding the proof of God's faithfulness in creation, this phrase means that God will express His faithfulness in creation. Pain, suffering, death, catastrophes, and destruction all seem to be a frustration of creation. But the faithful Creator will rectify all these ills, bring good from evil, and perfect and consummate His creation. This theme has been running through the whole paragraph. Trials are looked at as being not merely painful, but purifying. Persecutions are an actual sharing in the suffering of Christ, and thus a cause for rejoicing. God

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<sup>20</sup>Bigg, op. cit., p. 182.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.



## CHAPTER VIII

### GOD'S FAITHFULNESS AND MAN'S UNFAITHFULNESS

#### A Study of 2 Timothy 2:11-13

In this pastoral epistle Paul shows the deepest concern that the Gospel be preached, the whole letter seems to revolve around that thought. In that light, Paul reflects on his own faithfulness as a preacher: 1:8-13; 2:8-10; 3:10-11; 4:6-8; 16-18. He encourages Timothy to be faithful in his ministry: 1:6 f., 13 f.; 2:1-7, 14-19; 3:14-17; 4:1-5. He directs Timothy to find others who are faithful and worthy, that they, too, may preach, 2:2. Finally, Paul warns Timothy that not all are faithful: 1:15; 2:16-26; 3:1-9; 4:10, 14-16. The section which we are studying summarizes all these thoughts most concisely and picturesquely. It says, in effect: if anyone is faithful in his ministry, God will be faithful to reward him; if anyone is faithless, God will abide faithful by judging him.

The section begins: "The saying is sure," πιστὸς ἡ λέξις .

This is a saying common to and confined to the Pastoral epistles, 1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; Titus 3:8: probably the writer's own note, either calling attention to the importance of what<sup>1</sup> he said himself or quoting some well-known saying.

The latter seems to be the case here, as the verses that follow have a "distinctly rhythmical character," and may be taken

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Lock, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles," International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924), XXXVIII, 155.

from a hymn, as 1 Tim. 3:16.<sup>2</sup> The πιστός then would verify the thoughts of the hymn, giving them the sanction of being as dependable as God Himself.

"If we have died with Him," εἰ συνεκπεθάνομεν has been taken as referring to baptism by the analogy of Rom. 6:8, (so Lock, Easton, Jeremias); and the aorist would seem to point to that. But as everything in these verses is related and intertwined with the context, I believe this is also, and the primary reference is to suffering for the Gospel, even to the point of martyrdom, verses 3:9; 4:6. 2 Cor. 4:7-15 and 1 Cor. 15:30-32 are close parallels.<sup>3</sup>

"If we have died with Him we shall also live with Him." "This confirms the ἐγρηγμένον of verse 8; as συμβασιλεύσομεν does ἐκ σπέρματος Δαβὶδ verse 8; and ὑπομένομεν does ὑπερίνω verse 10."<sup>4</sup> Those who have suffered and died because they were faithful in preaching the Gospel, may be certain that God will raise again their bodies to a new, everlasting life, (Phil. 3:10 f.).

"If we endure," the present tense signifies a continuing state.<sup>5</sup> We know from this and Paul's other epistles that he had to undergo many trials for the Gospel, and truly,

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<sup>2</sup>Charles J. Ellicott, Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, second edition (London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, 1861), p. 128.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>4</sup>Lock, op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>5</sup>Ellicott, loc. cit.

"all those who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted," 3:13. This signifies "a brave bearing up against sufferings rather than a mere tame and passive sufferance."<sup>6</sup>

If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. This is "an extension of the previous idea" that we shall live with Him.<sup>7</sup> Kretzmann comments:

Sind wir schon hier auf Erden durch die Glaubengemeinschaft mit ihm Koenige und Priester, Offenb. 5:9,10, so werden wir erst recht in der Ewigkeit mit koeniglichen Gewaendern bekleidet und mit koeniglicher Gewalt betraut worden und mit ihm herrschen und regieren in alle Ewigkeit.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, if we are faithful in our ministry, God will be faithful to reward us.

But Paul continues: if we are faithless, God will be faithful to judge us. First Paul says: "If we deny Him, He will also deny us." "The future conveys the idea of the ethical possibility of the action."<sup>9</sup> These words are an echo of the words of Jesus:

So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven, Matt. 10:32 f.

"If we are faithless, He remains faithful."

Der letzte Satz dieses Abschnitts ist oft missverstanden worden, als sei diese letzte Erinnerung eine Art Trostwort, wodurch gleichsam die Haerte der vorhergehenden

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>8</sup>P. E. Kretzmann, Die Pastoralbriefe (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1918), p. 232.

<sup>9</sup>Ellicott, loc. cit.

Warnung gemildert wuerde. Was zunaechst den Zusammenhang mit dem vorhergehenden Satze betrifft, so wird dieser trefflich dargelegt von Bengel: Si abnegamus: ore; si non credimus: corde. Abnegatio prius ponitur; nam fidem, quae fuerat, exstinguit, Rom. 3:3.<sup>10</sup>

"He remains faithful." The sentence seems to break off abruptly, and these words stand alone and majestic like the "πιστός ὁ Θεός" of 1 Cor. 1:9. We would expect Paul to continue and draw a conclusion from this premise, as he did in each of the three preceding cases. But there is none.

We can only infer and conjecture:

Perhaps, He remains faithful to His promises of mercy, but the balance of the rhythm and the following clause almost require a note of warning: He remains faithful; He keeps His word both for reward and punishment; cf. 4:18,14; Ex. 34:6 f.<sup>11</sup>

Such an interpretation would make this passage a close parallel to Deut. 7:9 f.:

Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love Him and keep His commandments, to a thousand generations, and requites to their face those who hate Him, by destroying them; He will not be slack with him who hates Him, He will requite him to his face.

This seems to be the best interpretation.

"For He cannot deny Himself." It is of the very essence of God to be faithful. He is the eternally Faithful One; and He cannot be "untrue to His own essential nature."<sup>12</sup> If He were unfaithful He would deny Himself, He would no longer be God. This hits a peculiarly somber chord here, where we

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<sup>10</sup>Kretzmann, loc. cit.

<sup>11</sup>Lock, loc. cit.

<sup>12</sup>Ellicott, op. cit., p. 130.

believe that God can be referring only to His righteous judgment. He is faithful, alas, even in judgment.

Here, then, we have the first and only note of warning in all of the "faithfulness" passages. The faithfulness of God is a two edged sword. He will express His fidelity to those who are faithless by denying and judging them. Thus we cannot become sentimental about God's faithfulness, it is no deluded devotion; it remains a virile thing. Therefore, neither need we ever doubt it, for as He must be faithful to judge the unfaithful, so He must be faithful to bless and glorify the faithful; He cannot deny Himself.

## CHAPTER IX

### GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IS THE BASIS OF HOPE

#### A Study of Hebrews 10:19-25

One of the major hallmarks of the Christian faith is hope. This hope is not simply wishing, or trust in a blind fate, or a vague and baseless optimism. Rather, it is a hope that is sure and founded, realistic and dependable; for it is based on the faithfulness of God. It is only God's fidelity that gives any meaning to hope; but for the Christian hope has rich and living meaning, "for He is faithful who promised."

With 10:18 the doctrinal section of the epistle concludes, and

The writer now proceeds to apply his arguments practically to the situation of his readers, urging their privileges and their responsibilities under the new order of religion which he has just outlined.<sup>1</sup>

In verses 19-21 a brief summary is given of the blessings which Christians possess:

They have an entrance to the Divine presence in virtue of Christ's blood, a way made by the Incarnation, and

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<sup>1</sup>J. Moffat, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews," International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924), XXXIX, 141.

an availing personal Advocate, a Priest over the house of God.<sup>2</sup>

Drawing the logical and practical conclusions from this elevated position of the Christians, the writer follows the path of the great triad: faith, hope, and love.<sup>3</sup> This is done through the three cohortatives: προσερχώμεθα (v. 22), κατέλωμεν (v. 23), κατενοῶμεν (vv. 24 f.).<sup>4</sup>

The approach of the worshipper (v. 22) is characterized "by two personal qualities, real devotion and ripe faith,"<sup>5</sup> "with a true heart in full assurance of faith." In a true heart there is no "divided allegiance, no reserve of feeling."<sup>6</sup> When balanced by a faithful God, the faith of the individual can have "full assurance." Chapter 10:38 ff. is a commentary on this faith.

The characterization of the worshipper continues, but the writer turns from the subjective to the objective, from their disposition to their divine endowment.<sup>7</sup> Their hearts have been sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and their

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<sup>2</sup>B. F. Westcott, The Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1950), p. 318.

<sup>3</sup>J. A. Bengel, Gnomon of the New Testament, translated by C. T. Lewis and M. R. Vincent (Philadelphia: Perkinpine and Higgins, 1862), II, 649.

<sup>4</sup>Otto Michel, "Der Brief an die Hebraeer," Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament, edited by H. A. W. Meyer (8th edition; Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1949), XIII, 230.

<sup>5</sup>Westcott, op. cit., p. 322.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

bodies washed with pure water, i.e., they are purified internally and externally. "The metaphors are sacerdotal; as priests were sprinkled with blood and bathed in water,"<sup>8</sup> and so the Christian is cleansed by the blood of Christ, and saved by baptism.

From faith the writer turns to hope: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful." Hope, ἐλπίς, which is not found in the Gospels, has great prominence in this epistle: 3:6; 6:11, 18, 19; 7:19; 11:1.

The hope in each case appears to be fixed upon the realization of a complete divine fellowship under new conditions. To this the Christian looks forward with a vivid anticipation. In it he sees the assurance of the transfiguration of the conditions of earthly being (1 John 3:2,3). The resurrection of Christ is the pledge of its fulfillment (1 Peter 1:3, 21). Hence Christ Jesus Himself is "our hope" (1 Tim. 1:1; Col. 1:27).<sup>9</sup>

The Christian is to hold fast the confession, ἐμολογία, of this hope (3:1; 4:14). It is thought that this hope was first confessed at baptism,<sup>10</sup> (and that this phrase is connected with the "washing by pure water" of verse 22). Nevertheless, the Christian is never to keep his faith and hope to himself, but must express it fully and freely before the world.

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<sup>8</sup> Moffat, op. cit., p. 144.

<sup>9</sup> Westcott, op. cit., p. 324.

<sup>10</sup> Moffat, op. cit., p. 146.

This confession is to be held fast without wavering, *κατέχωμεν*. . . ἡ κλίση, "so that it remains erect and firm."<sup>11</sup>

Why should our confession be held so firmly? Because "He who promised is faithful," *πιστός γὰρ ὁ ἐπαγγελλόμενος*.

We can be certain in our hope, because God's faithfulness is certain. Indeed, God's faithfulness can be the only basis for hope, but it is an ever sure and unshakeable basis.

"The fidelity of God is not only the sure ground of our confidence but (as men speak) it challenges our fidelity."<sup>12</sup>

In 11:11 an example of this faith is given: "By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered Him faithful who had promised."

See also 6:13-20 and 2 Cor. 1:17-20.

The last appeal is to love, verses 24 f.

The members of the circle or community are to stir up one another to the practice of Christian love. Since this is only possible when common worship and fellowship are maintained, the writer warns them against following the bad example of abandoning such gatherings.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Westcott, loc. cit.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Moffat, loc. cit.

## CHAPTER X

### GOD'S FAITHFULNESS PRESERVES CHRISTIANS UNTIL HIS SECOND COMING

#### A Study of 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and 2 Thessalonians 3:3

Paul stayed with the Thessalonians probably no longer than three weeks, Acts 17:2. That being such a brief period in which to establish a church, Paul was deeply concerned about their condition after he left, 1 Thess. 2:17-3:10. He knew they were passing through the spiritual struggles common to all Christians, 1 Thess. 2:14-16; 2 Thess. 1:4 ff. Could they stand up under such trials and persecutions, they who had so little of Paul's ministrations? Paul was concerned, but he was not doubtful, for he knew God was faithful: He would guard them from the evil one, He would sanctify them wholly, He would keep them until the coming of the Lord Jesus. The faithful God preserves His children until the Second Coming.

"May the God of peace Himself,"  $\text{Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης,}$   
1 Thess. 5:23. The phraseology stresses that none other than God alone can sanctify them,<sup>1</sup> "in independence of

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<sup>1</sup>C. A. Auborlen and C. J. Rigenbach, "The Two Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians," Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, edited by J. P. Lange, translated with additions by John Lillie (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1868), XXII, 94.

their exertions and Paul's exhortations."<sup>2</sup> To sanctify, ἁγιασμοῦ, "includes not only devotion to God, but conduct, ethical soundness."<sup>3</sup> ὁλοτελεῖς, wholly, is best taken quantitatively: "in your collective powers and parts; marking more emphatically than ὅλου that thoroughness and pervasive nature of holiness."<sup>4</sup>

The next phrase: "and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ," is an enlargement of the first. "Wholly" is explained by "spirit, soul, and body." By this Paul means to refer to the total man. Already in 4:3-8 he showed concern for the body. But the body cannot be consecrated unless the soul and spirit are also consecrated.

Paul prays that the body, soul, and spirit be preserved "entire," ὁλόκληρον. This word occurs only here and in James 1:4 (where its usage is illuminating) in the New Testament. It is best taken in a qualitative sense;<sup>5</sup> "sound" is a good translation.

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<sup>2</sup>J. Denney, The Epistle to the Thessalonians (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.), p. 251.

<sup>3</sup>J. E. Frame, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary of the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians," International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), XXXVII, 210.

<sup>4</sup>C. J. Ellicott, St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians (4th edition; London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts and Green, 1880), p. 84.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

Furthermore, Paul prays that they be kept blameless, ἀνέμπτως. This is the negative side of being sanctified.

The thought is related to 2 Thess. 3:3, "But the Lord is faithful; He will strengthen you and guard you from evil."<sup>6</sup>

Paul assumes that they will be strengthened both in faith (1 Thess. 3:2) and conduct (1 Thess. 3:13; 2 Thess. 2:17), and thus be shielded from the power of Satan (1 Thess. 2:18; 2 Thess. 2:9), that is from the ethical aberrations, perhaps specifically idleness and meddlesomeness.<sup>7</sup>

Thus they were kept blameless.

Lastly, Paul prays that they be kept until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Throughout these two epistles the greatest emphasis is placed on the Second Coming of Christ (1 Thess. 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13 ff.; 2 Thess. 1:10; 2:1 ff.). In this earliest epistle, written comparatively soon after the Lord's ascension,<sup>8</sup> Paul is confident that these young and inexperienced converts will be kept until the final day (1 Cor. 1:8; Phil. 1:6, 10). They can anticipate the Second Coming with joy rather than fear, confident that God will surely keep them.

Paul has concluded his prayer; now he strikes a note of strong assurance that God will fulfill this prayer. Why is he so confident? Because God is faithful.

This happens not from my prayers, he says, but from the purpose with which He called you. (Chrysostom) This

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>7</sup> Frame, op. cit., p. 294.

<sup>8</sup> Denney, op. cit., p. 64.

faithfulness of God has already been manifested when in keeping with His eternal choice (1 Thess. 1:4) He called them (2:12) through the preaching of the Gospel (2 Thess. 2:14). But if the caller is faithful, He may also (καί) be relied upon to perform the very thing involved in the call, namely, that for which Paul prayed, *ἵνα ὑμεῖς καὶ ἡ τὴν ἐξ ὑμῶν*

This prayer gives a rich manifestation of God's faithfulness:

Notice the comprehensiveness of the Apostles prayer. It is conveyed in three separate words: *ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ ἡ ἀνάγκη* and *ἡ σὰρξ*. It is intensified by an enumeration of the parts or elements of which man's nature consist: "your spirit and soul and body." It is raised to its highest power when the sanctity for which he prays is set in the searching light of the Last Judgment--in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup>

Faithful is He that calleth us, who also will do this.

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<sup>9</sup>Frame, op. cit., p. 214.

<sup>10</sup>Denney, op. cit., p. 253.

## CHAPTER XI

### CONCLUSION

One should not think that after studying these passages one has learned all that there is to learn about the faithfulness of God. This is not all there is of it. The faithfulness of God is implicit in all of the Scripture. Every act of God that is recorded therein is a manifestation of His fidelity. We might say that Christ is God's faithfulness "incarnate"; He is the display and working of God's faithfulness. In every word, thought, and act of God we see this note of faithfulness.

If God's faithfulness is implicit in all of Scripture, it is also more explicit than we often imagine. Notice how many different authors of the Scripture dwell on this theme. See how Paul returns to it again and again. And see how the sacred writers apply it to so many of the varying situations and experiences of life: to sin, suffering, hope, preaching, etc. The apostles range through the length and breadth of life, viewing it all in the light of God's faithfulness. It follows us through all the paths of life.

It is interesting to note how much sharper focus the faithfulness of God is given by the New Testament. In the Old Testament it was mentioned only rather generally, usually in connection with the covenant. It has that fundamental, but rather vague, application. However, in the New Testament it

is mentioned in great detail, and no aspect of life is too insignificant to be viewed in its light. It has an all-pervasive nature; we cannot get away from it.

A study such as this can become rather cold and intellectual, and the concept of God's faithfulness no more than a topic which we stow away in our minds for dry consideration. But for the one who has suffered, who has tasted despair or walked through the valley of the shadow, this is not simply a concept. It is an anchor of hope in a troubled world, a source of certainty amidst so much uncertainty; it is assurance of full salvation. God is faithful!

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