

Faithful Christians

Colossians 4:7-17 *Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. ⁸ I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts, ⁹ with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will make known to you all things which are happening here.*

¹⁰ Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him), ¹¹ and Jesus who is called Justus. These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me. ¹² Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. ¹³ For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis. ¹⁴ Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you. ¹⁵ Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that is in his house. ¹⁶ Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea. ¹⁷ And say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."

An elderly preacher was rebuked by one of his deacons for preaching without much result, except for the salvation of one boy, who wanted to be a preacher.

Well, that young boy turned out to be Robert Moffat, a man who became one of the mightiest missionaries to Africa ever.

That aged pastor was faithful. And even though the results were not immediately obvious, God blessed his faithfulness.

The Bible says in **Proverbs 20:6**, *But who can find a faithful man?* It seems Paul was blessed to find several.

Colossians closes with Paul giving greetings and instructions regarding several men. In fact, nine men are spoken of. But as we examine parallel Scriptures we find out that at least one of them abandoned the faith. As far as we can tell, all the others stayed the course to the end. In other words, we find eight faithful men, and one unfaithful man.

As we look a little deeper into their stories we find what it means to be a faithful Christian.

I. Faithful Christians Serve Consistently.

Paul gives us examples of faithful men here. In verse 7, Tychicus is called a 'faithful minister'. In verse 9, Onesimus is called 'a faithful brother'. In chapter 1:7, Epaphras, is called 'a faithful minister.'

In what ways were these men faithful?

Well, Tychicus is mentioned five times in the New Testament. Tychicus was willing to travel with Paul in a time where extended travel was difficult and dangerous. He stayed near Paul in Rome during his imprisonment. Tychicus was so faithful that Paul had him as a temporary replacement for Titus and for Timothy when they needed to be away from their churches. You get the sense that this man was reliable, loyal, and trustworthy. So much so, that it was Tychicus who brought the letter of Colossians to the church at Colosse, as well as the letter of Ephesians, and possibly Philemon as well.

For someone to be given such high praise by Paul, there was one thing you could count on – they would be at their post. You didn't come and go on missionary enterprises. If Tychicus was the kind who wilted when the going got tough, he would not have been at Paul's side when Paul was placed in prison. If Tychicus was a fair-weather Christian, he would not have been counted on to deliver

this letter to Colosse, which meant crossing Italy and Greece on foot, sailing across both the Aegean and Adriatic Seas, and still a further 160 kilometres on foot. Clearly the Holy Spirit trusted this man to personally carry what would become three books of the New Testament.

Proverbs 25:19 *Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a bad tooth and a foot out of joint.*

You can only rely on someone who is faithful. You can only rely on someone who is at their post, consistently, loyally labouring. You know where to find them. You know what to expect. They are faithful.

The same can be said of Ephaphras. What is he faithfully doing for the church at Colosse?

Matthew 24:44-51 *Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. ⁴⁵ "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? ⁴⁶ Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. ⁴⁷ Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. ⁴⁸ But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' ⁴⁹ and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, ⁵⁰ the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, ⁵¹ and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

Take note of verse 46. Blessed is the servant who is busy doing what he is supposed to do when his master returns. Question: if you do not know when the master will return, how can you make sure you are doing it when he returns? You can make sure by doing it consistently.

Faithfulness does not serve with eye-service, but as to the Lord.

Amongst some Christians, you find the “good ol’ days” mindset. They will tell you about how fervent they used to be, how devoted they used to be, but it is all in the past tense. Many years ago, they were prayer warriors. Many years ago, they were ministering to the youth, or preaching the Gospel on the streets, or teaching Bible studies, or whatever the case may be. And taking nothing away from their genuine acts of service for the Lord then, you have to ask, “What about now?” Why is the highpoint of your service in the past? Should it not be future?

But to listen to some Christians talk, it is as if they only had the responsibility to be faithful for a period in their life. Now, they are retired, and like war veterans, they look back and talk about the glory days.

Wait. What did Paul say he did to “*press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*” (**Phil 3:14**)?

Philippians 3:13 *forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,*

The secret to consistent, faithful service is a future oriented focus. I press toward the mark. I look for that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ.

Faithful Christians think on the future and live in the present. Unfaithful Christians too often think of the past and live in the past.

II. Faithful Christians fulfill their ministries

Paul tells Archippus to 'take heed that you fulfill your ministry'. The word for *fulfill* in the original suggests complete, finish, fill up.

The idea here is one of quality. Let your ministry be one of thorough, diligent service that you increasingly work to perfection.

Ministry is your life of service. It will not be only one thing. It will involve what you do for your family. It will involve what you do for unbelievers. And of course, it will involve what you do for other believers.

In our churches, think of the many ways we minister to each other. The 'one another' commands - over 27 ways Scripture tells us to treat one another.

Christians in our church have chosen to serve each other by setting up chairs & sound systems, setting out hymnals & tracts, preparing coffee & tea, serving others coffee & tea, bringing refreshments, washing up, playing music, teaching the children in Kids4Truth, teaching the adults in discipleship hour, teaching on Wednesday nights, teaching at Bible studies during the week preaching in church, assisting in the Lord's Supper; recording sermons, copying them, distributing them; opening homes for Bible studies, for hospitality; phoning people to encourage, using their cars to pick people up and take them home; running libraries, book sales, literature tables; helping in the nursery, counting money, keeping financial records, doing church administration, giving financially and materially, visiting people in their homes, taking them out for lunch or coffee. This is how we serve one another, and as we serve one another, we serve Christ.

But whatever you believe God has called you to, do it thoroughly, heartily.

2 Timothy 4:5 *But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

A simple principle in Scripture is that faithfulness in one area, tends to bring greater responsibilities.

Matthew 25:20-21 *"So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' ²¹His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'*

Faithfulness in little brings greater responsibilities. David proved himself faithful with caring for his sheep. So God made him a captain. He proved himself faithful as a captain, and God made Him a King. He proved Himself faithful as King, God made his throne the throne of Messiah's kingdom.

Charles Spurgeon preached to thousands in London each Lord's Day, but he started by handing out tracts, teaching Sunday School and preaching in obscure places as a teenager. He later stated that he would not have been preaching to thousands if he had not been faithful in little.

But David exemplified this attitude when he said, **Psalms 84:10** *I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.*

When someone is faithful to the very basic – they present themselves for corporate worship, they will no doubt go to the next level – knowing other believers and their needs and serving them. As you are faithful in performing whatever task is given you, God gives you more.

Fulfill what you are doing. Don't get frustrated because all your gifts are not being used at this moment. Receive your task with humility.

What did Jeremiah say to Baruch? **Jeremiah 45:5** *And do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them;*

Romans 12:16 *Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.*

In other words, whatever you get to do for the Lord at this time in your life, do it heartily.

Fred Craddock told pastors that it would be easier to consecrate our lives like a \$1000 dollar bill. But what God usually expects is small withdrawals, small payments over a lifetime. That's faithfulness.

Luke 16:10 *He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.*

III. Faithful Christians finish their ministries

We pick up on an interesting incident here. In verse 10, Paul refers to Mark. He says, 'If he comes, welcome him.' Now, this is very interesting considering the history of Paul and Mark.

Acts 12:25 *And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.*

Acts 13:2-5 *As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. ⁴ So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. ⁵ And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as their assistant.*

Acts 13:13 *Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.*

Acts 15:36-40 *Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing." ³⁷ Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. ³⁸ But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. ³⁹ Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; ⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God.*

On his first missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas, Mark decided to quit halfway. It was too much for him. When Barnabas wanted to bring him along for another missionary trip, Paul wouldn't hear of it. Missions is not for fair-weather Christians. He refused, until their disagreement resulted in them forming separate missionary teams.

Now you might think that is the end of Mark's story. He is the model of unfaithfulness, right? Not so fast. The book of Colossians was written in around 62AD. It corresponds to Acts 28, during his time of imprisonment in Rome.

This incident in the book of Acts 15 occurred around AD 52. So when Paul tells the church at Colosse to welcome Mark, it is ten years later. What happened in those ten years?

The answer is: Mark proved himself to be faithful. Mark didn't start well, but he got up and kept going. His failures didn't stop him from pursuing faithfulness. So much so that ten years later, Paul wanted him to receive a special welcome by the church at Colosse.

In fact, it gets even better. The very last letter that Paul wrote is 2 Timothy. This was probably in the year 66, shortly before he would be executed by Nero. Look what he says of Mark.

2 Timothy 4:11-12 *Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. ¹² And Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus.*

Paul is now so convinced of Mark's faithfulness, he wants him at his side in his last days. Look who

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else are still faithful – Luke, and Tychicus.

Mark reminds me of the parable Jesus told

Matthew 21:28-31

But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go, work today in my vineyard.' ²⁹ 'He answered and said, 'I will not,' but afterward he regretted it and went. ³⁰ Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go. ³¹ Which of the two did the will of his father?"

Faithfulness is not saying yes, and then saying no. Faithfulness ends with a yes.

In fact, Paul himself knew what it meant to finish your ministry. Look in this very epistle:

2 Timothy 4:6-8 *For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.*

A faithful minister does not stop when he is tired. He stops when the race is finished. A faithful minister does not stop battling when he is wounded or sore or discouraged. He stops fighting when fight is over.

The lesson from Mark is that you might stumble at first, but faithful ministers get up and go.

Proverbs 24:16 *For a righteous man may fall seven times And rise again,*

Seven falls - perfect fall - a really complete fall! But the righteous rise yet again.

However, sadly we see something else here. In Colossians 4:14 Paul says that Luke and Demas send their greetings.

Now look in 2 Timothy, at the end of his life, Paul says this of Demas:

2 Timothy 4:10 *for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica -- Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia.*

Demas didn't finish. Demas stopped running and turned back. Demas gave up fighting and joined the enemy. I find it interesting that the Holy Spirit by the mouth of Paul called Tychicus and Onesimus faithful, but He didn't call Demas faithful, for He knows what is in men. It's disturbing to us when we read of people who professed faith, were baptized, and even served in ministry, and then drop out. We hear of people like that today. But didn't Jesus already teach us about this phenomenon?

Mark 4:14-20 *The sower sows the word. ¹⁵ And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts. ¹⁶ These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; ¹⁷ and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble. ¹⁸ Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, ¹⁹ "and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. ²⁰ But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred."*

The seed on good ground finishes its ministry. When the true seed finds good ground, it produces faith that endures.

Faithful believers serve consistently. Faithful believers fulfill their ministry. Faithful believers finish

their ministry.

“Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” Aren't those the words you want to hear one day?