

13. Keeping the Church Faithful (3Q 2012—1 and 2 Thessalonians)

Biblical material: 2 Thess. 2:13–3:18, Acts 17:11, Luke 10:25–28, Matt. 7:24–27, 18:15–17.

Quotes

- I think we may safely trust a good deal more than we do. *Henry David Thoreau*
- To be trusted is a greater compliment than to be loved. *George Macdonald*
- We will be a better country when each religious group can trust its members to obey the dictates of their own religious faith without assistance from the legal structure of their country. *Margaret Mead*
- Our distrust is very expensive. *Ralph Waldo Emerson*
- A faith that cannot survive collision with the truth is not worth many regrets. *Arthur C. Clarke*
- Faith is not belief. Belief is passive. Faith is active. *Edith Hamilton*
- Unthinking faith is a curious offering to be made to the creator of the human mind. *John A Hutchinson*
- Faith is no irresponsible shot in the dark. It is a responsible trust in God, who knows the desires of your hearts, the dreams you are given, and the goals you have set. He will guide your paths right. *Robert Schuller*
- The leaders who work most effectively, it seems to me, never say “I.” And that’s not because they have trained themselves not to say “I.” They don’t think “I.” They think “we”; they think “team.” They understand their job to be to make the team function. They accept responsibility and don’t sidestep it, but “we” gets the credit.... This is what creates trust, what enables you to get the task done. *Peter Drucker*

Questions

Why is the idea of faithfulness so important? How do we show we are faithful? What is the basis for our trust in God? What would you have told the Thessalonians to encourage them? Why would they listen to Paul particularly? In what ways can we encourage one another to trust in a trustworthy God?

Bible summary

As Paul closes his letter, signing off personally, he wants to send a message of encouragement, to tell them to remain faithful: “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God the Father (who through his grace gave us eternal confidence and a trustworthy hope), encourage you and strengthen you so you can say and do everything that is good.” 2 Thess. 2:16, 17 FBV.

Paul’s prayer for them is “May the Lord lead you into a deeper understanding of God’s love for you and the endurance of Christ.” 2 Thess. 3:5 FBV. He wants them to grow spiritually, coming to a deeper knowledge of God and his care for them Paul wants them to trust in God no matter what.

As he signs off, Paul tells them, “Brothers and sisters, don’t give up doing good.” 2 Thess. 3:13 FBV.

Acts 17:11 reminds us of the situation in Berea where those Paul spoke to went and checked whether what he was telling them was true. This investigation of the evidence is such an important principle in discovering truth. Jesus also shows in Luke 10:25-28 that this is no academic exercise, as he gives the story of the Good Samaritan in response to the question of “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” You build on firm foundations of truth and right, says Jesus in the illustration of the two builders (Matt. 7:24-27). You are faithful if you follow these principles in the way you deal with conflicts, especially in personal relationships, (Matt. 18:15-17).

Comment

Back in Genesis we discover a crisis of trust. You remember the story. A definite doubting of God and what he said. A crisis of trust in the Garden of Eden. Trusting the serpent instead of God. That is what sin is: whatsoever is not of faith is sin—in other words not trusting God. Thinking he is not as he is, doubting his word, not believing in his promises to us.

So when God comes looking for Adam and Eve, they hide. They believe the Devil’s lies that God is going to be furious with them, that he is a hard and cruel God who is going to hurt them. And just like Elijah, God comes saying: “Where are you. What are you doing hiding in the bushes?”

How does Adam reply? “I heard you in the garden and I was afraid. This is the first time fear is mentioned in the Bible. Why? Because they did not trust God, because they believed the lies of the Devil about what God was like. A crisis of trust. And God cannot restore trust simply and easily. It has taken from Creation till now for God to begin to restore the trust that we lost, to prove to everyone that he truly is trustworthy.

For us to trust someone we have to know them well. Before we lend someone money we like to know that we’ll get our money back! We want to know something about that person so that we can have confidence in them. And how do we develop that trust? By getting to know them, spending time with them, watching how they behave.

This is what we have to do with God. He wants to win back our trust, and so all the Bible is a record of how he acts and behaves; details of the reasons why we can confidently trust him. Above all else, Jesus, the God who came to us, is the demonstration that we can have complete and total trust in him. By his life and death he illustrates the truth, laying bare the Devil’s lie; and shows us that the God of the still small voice is right, and we can believe in him.

Faith is a risk. This is what trusting means. We have evidence enough to convince us that we can truly trust God, but we must exercise our trust. This requires definite action. It is not enough just to believe. We have to trust God, and let him do his work in us. Otherwise we do not trust, we do not let go, and God cannot help us. When the crisis of trust comes, listen to the gentle whisper, the still small voice, and do as he says. Only then will we truly trust God, and only then will we have the victory, God and us.

When Jesus walked this earth, he had time for the children. Why? In Luke 18:15-17 we read the happy scene of folk bringing their babies to Jesus. Why? No magic—they just wanted him to pray for them too. But the disciples are sure that Jesus—and the God he represents—wouldn’t be bothered with such minor details. They shoo them away, and tell them off.

But they are misrepresenting God. For Jesus *wants* to be with the children, and smile with them for a little while. He wants to show them who God really is. Jesus tells his disciples and the people: “The Kingdom belongs to them! And if you are not like them, you won’t enter it!”

What did he mean by this? Imagine the disciples thinking: What is he saying? We have to become like little children? How demeaning! How silly! After all, we’re mature, we’re adult.

What Jesus is saying is that we must relate to God as our Father in the way a child here relates to his/her parents. We must trust. Or to use a religious word, we must have faith. Faith in God is reasonable, and based on evidence. That’s what God wants—not some blind unthinking faith that can lead us to some completely mistaken ideas about himself.

We must trust like children do. Do children know their parents? Of course! The image of childlike trust is often given as a little girl throwing herself from a high step into her father’s arms. But I can tell you, that its *trust based on evidence*. The little girl *knows* her father will catch her, because he has shown himself to be trustworthy. He cares about her. He loves her. And he will not let her fall.

So too with us. Our childlike trust in God is based on the *evidence* of God as a completely trustworthy person. That’s what the Bible is for—to show us what God is like in his dealings with humanity. That’s what Jesus came to demonstrate personally—that God can be trusted: completely and fully. There is no doubt! And that’s what we have to discover in our own experience: that we can place ourselves in God’s hands without any doubts at all. It’s all *a question of trust*.

Ellen White Comments

Faith is not feeling. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. There is a form of religion which is nothing more than selfishness. It takes pleasure in worldly enjoyment. It is satisfied with contemplating the religion of Christ, and knows nothing of its saving power. Those who possess this religion regard sin lightly because they do not know Jesus. While in this condition, they estimate duty very lightly. But a faithful performance of duty goes hand in hand with a right estimate of the character of God.

There is earnest work to do for the Master. Christ came to preach the gospel to the poor, and he sent his disciples forth to do the same work he came to do. So he sends forth his workers today. Sheaves are to be gathered for him from the highways and hedges. The tremendous issues of eternity demand of us something besides an imaginary religion, a religion of words and forms, where the truth is kept in the outer court, to be admired as we admire a beautiful flower; they demand something more than a religion of feeling, which distrusts God when trials and difficulties come. Holiness does not consist in profession, but in lifting the cross, doing the will of God. Saying, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?” will not secure for us an entrance into the kingdom of heaven. “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected.”
{RH, February 28, 1907}