

The Faithfulness Principle



Laurence D. Brown

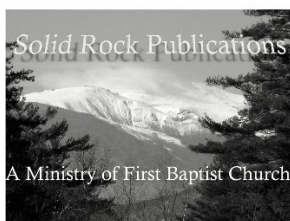
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Introduction

One of the great truths of Scripture concerning Jehovah is that He is faithful. In His relationship with the people of Israel and in His connection to those who place their faith in Jesus Christ, He continues to protect, fulfill His promises, provide and bless. Furthermore, the Word of God exhorts us as believers to cultivate that same character trait – faithfulness – because we are His children.

This is a very brief study based on work that I first presented in August of 1987 and expanded over the years. The seed for this investigation was the question, *Since God is the source of all our blessings and successes, how will He evaluate believers, if not based on “success”?*

This brief examination follows this outline:

1. Jehovah is Our Faithful God
2. Turning Our Faith into Faithfulness
3. The Faithfulness Principle
4. The Reward for Faithfulness

May our faithful God continue to build us into His faithful people.

By the grace of God and the prayers of the people of First Baptist Church, North Conway, New Hampshire

Laurence Brown

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1. Jehovah is Our Faithful God

A. God is Faithful in His Personality. As Paul reminds us in II Timothy 2:13, even if we prove ourselves to be unfaithful, unreliable, and disloyal to Him, “He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.” It is Jehovah’s character to be loyal, unswerving, and always available to His children; He cannot be anything other than the rock and fortress of those who trust in Him. This characteristic of God is found throughout Scripture. Jesus Christ is said to be “the faithful witness” in Revelation 1:5; one of His titles in Revelation 19:11 is “Faithful and True.”

Moses, in his words of encouragement and exhortation to the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 7:9, said, “Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments.” Faithfulness, you see, is a part of who God is, and not merely an action or an external add-on. It is built into the character of God. When He forms a relationship, the object of His covenant bond or promise will ***always*** receive what God has said He will do. God cannot do anything other than give all His loyalty, consistency, and special attention to His children because He is faithful.

As Paul opens his first letter to the Corinthian church, he notes that their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation means that God has been at work in their church and in them individually, enriching them, equipping them, and building them up in their Christian lives. He encourages them with the truth that God “will confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 1:8). This is a remarkable statement, especially because Paul is going to spend the next many chapters dealing with shortcomings, sins, wrong thinking, and points of carnality and immaturity among the Corinthians. How could they know that God would bring about their confirmation and a

blameless presentation before the Lord at the Bema? Here's how: "God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (I Corinthians 1:9).

It is the faithful character of God to which Paul appeals as a guarantee of the final outcome of Christian development. Because God is reliable in carrying out all the results and implications of His call, we can rest assured that we will not be left in an unfinished state.

B. God is Faithful in His Proclamation. Titus 1:9 says that the Word of God is "faithful." Five times in the pastoral epistles Paul uses the formulaic phrase, "faithful is the word," or "reliable is the word." On the ship in the great storm that resulted in the seafarers being wrecked on the shores of Malta, Paul tried to reassure his fellow shipmates with this statement: "Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told" (Acts 27:25). This is the essence of this concept – God keeps His promises, and His revealed Word is truth. It is to be relied upon when all else around us is proven false and empty. It is an anchor point in the changeful sea of human wisdom and opinion.

As John the Apostle is finishing up his epic record of God's revelation of future events in Revelation chapters 21 and 22, God gives him these words: "Write, for these words are faithful and true" (Revelation 21:5). This phrase is repeated in Revelation 22:6. Praise God that we can rely on His words as genuine, real, solid, and dependable.

C. God is Faithful in His Performance. Sarah concluded that God is not only capable of fulfilling His word, but He also does it. Hebrews 11:11 says, "By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised." There are several component pieces of this aspect of God's faithfulness.

God is faithful to not leave us open to the power of sin. I Corinthians 10:13 teaches us that God's faithfulness means we are never compelled to sin. With every temptation that comes our way, God always has an escape route for us to avoid caving in to the flesh. And if we do fall, God's faithfulness means that He always forgives and cleanses us when we confess our sins to Him (I John 1:9).

For children of God who are going through suffering and trials, the faithfulness of God is a precious truth. Peter wrote these words: "Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right" (I Peter 4:19). We can trust God because He is faithful in supplying the need of the moment and providing the stamina to endure for His Name's sake.

This principle also applies in a general sense to Christians striving to live the Christian life over the course of many years and many challenges. Hebrews 10:23 reminds us, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful." The sure and certain knowledge that God will fulfill all His promises to us – resurrection, eternal life, being in His presence, having an eternal opportunity to know Him better and serve Him – all His promises will be carried out because God is faithful!

2. Turning Our Faith into Faithfulness

The Greek word for "faith" is *pistis*. The Greek word for "faithfulness" is *pistos*. You can see that they are related: they are built on the same root. The root underneath both terms is *peitho*, to be fully persuaded or convinced. Behind this word is the root *pis* or *pith*, which denotes a binding, a strong tie, an assured certainty. "Fully persuaded" could be a description of the content of this concept. The connection between faith or belief and faithfulness is simply a matter of the direction in which the trust

flows. In faith, I believe that someone or something else is trustworthy, and I depend on it in some way. In faithfulness, I demonstrate a trustworthiness such that someone else depends on me.

A. The Call to Faithfulness. For the child of God, we find that the Bible contains God's call for us to become faithful to Him. We are told that we, God's children, are to become like our heavenly Father. Peter puts it this way: "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'" (I Peter 1:14-16). The character of God is pure, separate from sin, holy; therefore His children should likewise be holy. Jehovah is also faithful, as we have seen above; therefore we are to be consistently, reliably obedient: children of the Heavenly Father whom He can rely on to carry out His will.

A general principle found throughout the Bible and especially in the New Testament shines a spotlight on God's call to faithfulness for His children. It is simply this: "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Jesus Christ, our Savior said this. It is His desire that we express our love to Him – and our faith in His finished work and future promises – by obedience. And one of the Bible's expectations of us is faithfulness. I Corinthians 4:2 says, "In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy [literally, "faithful"]."

B. The Conversion of Faith into Faithfulness. Paul says in II Corinthians 1:18 that God's faithfulness and our relationship with Him are supposed to have an impact on us. In the context of II Corinthians one, he points out that because God is faithful, we can avoid saying "yes and no" – we don't have to be vacillating, doubting, or unstable. Paul says that God establishes us (v.21) and that we can stand firm (v.24).

Peter uses the same idea when he writes in I Peter 4:19, “Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.” As we go through the trials and sorrows of life, we entrust our lives – we believe, we depend upon – the faithfulness of our God to see us through and bring us safely home to Himself. And as we do this, we take the next step as Peter says in verse 19: we do what is right. We simply obey, one day at a time.

This idea, “one day at a time,” is helpful in a very practical way when we are contemplating our faithfulness to God as Christians. You see, it can be very intimidating to think: “Okay, I see the principle in Scripture – I’ve got to be consistently, reliably obedient to my Master for the rest of my life, come good times or bad times. That’s a lot of faithfulness, and I’m so weak! I don’t think I can do it!” Do you remember the provision of God for the children of Israel in the wilderness? Do you remember the manna? God’s gift of food was given to His people each night as the dew fell on the ground, and the Jews were supposed to gather it in the morning – enough food for their family for one day at a time (except the day before the Sabbath, when they were commanded to save some for the next day).

It is indeed a daunting thought that I have to be consistent, reliable, obedient, trusting the Father, and doing the right thing from now until the day I die. I don’t think I can do it! But if I think about being faithful to the Master for just one day: today – then with His strength, His grace, and the power of His Spirit, I think I can do that.

3. The Faithfulness Principle

A. God’s Standard of Success is Not “Results.”

The world around us measures the success of an individual, an enterprise, or an organization, based on its results. When a computer parts manufacturing company hires a new

salesperson, how does it know if that salesperson is effective? By how many parts that salesman or saleswoman sells. When a high school athlete runs down the track, how do the judges and onlookers know whether the efforts of the individual are worthy of a medal or not? By how high he jumps, how fast she runs. In grade school, how does a fifth-grade teacher know whether a particular student has mastered her history material? By how many questions she answers correctly on the test. Success is based on results in the world's system of evaluation.

But God's standard is different. God's standard of success is not results. This is so because God is the One Who causes successful results.

In Deuteronomy 8, Jehovah, through Moses, is telling the nation of Israel about His gracious gifts to them in the land of Canaan which they are about to enter. In verses 7-10 here is what He says: "For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land where you will eat food without scarcity, in which you will not lack anything; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper. When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you." A little farther on, in verse 18, He says this: "But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He might confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day."

This theme continues in Deuteronomy 9:1-3: "Hear, O Israel! You are crossing over the Jordan today to go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than you, great cities fortified to heaven, a people great and tall, the sons of the Anakim, whom you know and of whom you have heard it said, 'Who can stand before the sons of Anak?' Know therefore today that it is the Lord your God who is crossing over before you as a

consuming fire. He will destroy them and He will subdue them before you, so that you may drive them out and destroy them quickly, just as the Lord has spoken to you.”

It was the sovereign might of Yahweh that defeated the Canaanites, not the military genius and fighting prowess of the Jews. The orchards, olive groves, farms, and vineyards the Israelites took over had not been established or cultivated by them. The results – victory and the inheritance of the land – were God’s gifts to His people. A very clear-cut example of this is the victory of Israel over the fortified city of Jericho in Joshua chapter six. What was the role of Israel in that battle? Simply to believe that God would cause the walls to collapse, and then take possession of it. The results come from God.

In II Kings 19, we find the record of the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem during the reign of King Hezekiah. The victory that God orchestrated (the death of 185,000 Assyrian soldiers) was not a story of amazing courage and brilliant stratagem by the Israelites; it was the result of the miraculous intervention of God (see vv. 19, 35, 36 in chapter 19).

Does this principle – that the successful results are from God – hold true in the New Testament, and in the spiritual realm? Yes. The infant church experienced stunning numerical growth, not because of finely-tuned evangelism efforts or marketing strategies, but because God was adding to their number (Acts 2:47). Spiritual growth is God’s work, Paul says in I Corinthians 3:5-7, while acknowledging that he and Apollos contributed their own labors to the Corinthians’ development, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth,” he wrote in verse 6.

In the great passage on body life in the church and the point of the ministry, Paul says that growth comes from Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church (Ephesians 4:15, 16).

So the crux of the matter is this: How can God evaluate us, His children, on our results, when He is the One who produces those results? Anything good, anything lasting or of eternal value, came from His gracious hand. Anything noble, bringing honor to His Name, pleasing Him – any Christian success was His power and grace working in us and through us. So how can He hold us accountable for those results?

The short answer is He doesn't. The standard of evaluation that God uses for us is not results. It's something else entirely. What could that be?

B. God's Standard of Success is Faithfulness. I Corinthians 4:2 says, "In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found faithful" (the NASB95 here has the word "trustworthy," which is a good translation of the word *pistos*, but elsewhere the translators mostly used "faithful"). The world doesn't much value the virtue of faithfulness. The more charismatic and self-absorbed qualities of celebrities, politicians, and worldly leaders capture the eye and heart of the unbelieving crowds. Beauty, wealth, fame, articulating the latest fad or bizarre and godless cultural ideology, having powerful and influential friends – these are the traits the world covets and applauds. But faithfulness? Not so much.

Being consistently, reliably obedient to the Lord, sticking with the path of trusting submission to His Word over the long haul: the culture around us does not even recognize this quality, let alone treasure it as valuable. But God does! Look at what the Bible says about these individuals:

- Abraham – "You found his heart faithful before You" (Nehemiah 9:8)
- Moses – "he is faithful in all My household" (Numbers 12:7)
- Lydia – "if you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay" (Acts 16:15)

- Paul – “He considered me faithful, putting me into service” (I Timothy 1:12)
- Teachers in the church – “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who be able to teach others also.” (II Timothy 2:2)
- Antipas – “...and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one...” (Revelation 2:13)

God will evaluate us, His children, based on how faithful we have been to Him. Not how rich we are, not what status or career benchmarks we achieved, not even how many people we led to Christ. Rather, were we consistently, perseveringly, reliably trusting Him and simply obeying Him?

C. A Picture of the Faithful Life. What does the faithful life look like? Does the Bible give us any sort of a picture of the component parts of the faithful Christian?

The Lord Jesus told a parable about a reliable steward or chief of staff of a household in Luke 12:35-48. He describes the steward as “faithful” (Greek: *pistos*) in verse 42. There are three outstanding traits of the faithful steward in verses 42 and 43.

1) He has a perceptive head. In verse 42 the Lord described the steward as “sensible.” The word here contains the idea of evaluating and seeing life through a particular grid or framework. Specifically, this steward knows what the master wants, and looks at life and his role in life through the grid of what he can do to carry out his master’s desires. Paul says that all believers ought to have this characteristic: “Trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:10). We should be plugged into what our Savior, Jesus Christ, wants to accomplish. Our highest goals should be those aimed at carrying out the plans of God and not our own ambitions. The faithful child of God sees and understands that pursuing pleasing the Lord is the noblest

and most important thing he can do with his life, and this guides his decisions and activities.

2) He has a performing hand. The faithful servant of God does not merely think about what honors the Lord and what God's will is; he actually does it. There is no substitute for simple obedience. A favorite hymn of many Christians is "Trust and Obey." It would be hard to come up with a more succinct summary of the Christian life. We are supposed to trust God always in all circumstances, and we are supposed to obey what the Master has told us to do. In the parable in Luke chapter 12, the servants who knew the master's will and did not obey were held accountable for their disobedience. The faithful child of God is the one who obeys.

3) He has a persevering heart. Notice in verse 43 that the servant is doing what the master told him to do. When the master returns, he finds the slave in the process of carrying out his orders. He was obeying day by day what he knew the master wanted. This behavior is contrasted with that of a slave who thinks he knows how long his master's trip will take, and gets lazy, mistreats the other workers, and is a bad servant.

4. The Reward for Faithfulness

There is a reward for the child of God who consistently, reliably obeys the Lord. Our gracious Father sees and keeps a record of all that His children do for His Name's sake. And He will reward the faithful service of His children.

A. God Will Grant More Service Opportunities to the Faithful Believer. Lydia, in Acts 16:15, demanded and was granted the chance to serve Jesus Christ by utilizing her home as a base of operations for Paul and his ministry team. This was because Lydia had said, "If you have judged me to be faithful, come into my house and stay." You see, one of the greatest

possible rewards for faithfulness to God is to be given bigger and more meaningful opportunities for service. What could be more meaningful, more rewarding than a chance to show our love and devotion to the One who died for us? Paul advises Timothy that he should train and delegate other men to carry on the work of teaching and discipling believers in the church. The chief characteristic of these men is that they must be *faithful*. “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (II Timothy 2:2).

This reward of greater service is not only for this lifetime. The evidence of Scripture is that at the Bema – the Judgment Seat of Christ for believers – our faithfulness to the Lord Jesus will be rewarded with greater roles of service in the millennial kingdom and beyond. Many of our Lord’s parables about masters and servants have this as a key theme. The apostle Paul, in one of his succinct, condensed doctrinal statements said, “If we endure, we will also reign with Him” (II Timothy 2:12). Our perseverance – our continuing to obey Him, trust Him, love Him, and seek to please Him – our endurance qualifies us to serve Him in the capacity of “reigning” with Him.

B. The Faithful Believer Will Hear the Approval of the Savior. Many Christians have been motivated by the thought of our Master saying, “Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:21). It makes a difference who commends you. If it is someone whose opinion does not much matter to you – so what? But if the Lord of glory, the Creator of all things and the One who died to rescue us from the penalty of sin – if He says, “Well done” – well, that means a great deal, doesn’t it? It means that He approves, that He smiles upon our small efforts to honor Him and be loyal to Him. The significance of this reward cannot be overestimated.

To hear His voice of approval, to see His smile, to receive His commendation will instantly make any small sacrifices we make here and now, any little bits of suffering, hardship, or persecution, eternally and hugely valuable.

C. The Faithful Believer Will Be Given the Crown of Life. Twice in the New Testament, there is mention of “the crown of life.” James 1:12 says, “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” Note that persevering under trial is equated with loving God in this verse. If you love the Lord, then be faithful to Him, even during hard times and difficult circumstances.

Additionally, in Revelation 2:10, the Lord Jesus, writing to the church at Smyrna tells the believers there that if they are “faithful unto death” He “will give you the crown of life.” In this context “unto death” is likely literally referring to Christians who will be persecuted resulting in their physical death. Without twisting the meaning at all, however, a Christian can also be “faithful unto death” by simply being consistently, reliably obedient to Jesus Christ until God calls him or her home to heaven.

The crown of life is probably a physical indicator of faithfulness, but it is also the Lord’s endorsement and authorization for a future role of service. It is the victor’s badge of service – not a cause for self-aggrandizement – but rather a medal of honor and approval; it is a recognition that servant walked worthy of his calling and that the Master’s trust in that one was proven. On the basis of that approval, the Master will grant more and bigger chances to love and serve Him.

The reward is worth much more than any little bit of sacrifice, hardship, or effort we endure now. Stay faithful! The reward is just around the corner!

“Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.”

