

8. The Fruit of the Spirit is Faithfulness (1Q 2010—The Fruit of the Spirit)

Biblical material: Gal. 6:9, Matt. 25:1–13; Luke 16:10; 1 Thess. 5:23, 24; 2 Tim. 3:1–5; Hebrews 11.

Quotes

- For the truly faithful, no miracle is necessary. For those who doubt, no miracle is sufficient. *Nancy Gibbs*
- Only the person who has faith in himself is able to be faithful to others. *Erich Fromm*
- Think not those faithful who praise all thy words and actions; but those who kindly reprove thy faults. *Socrates*
- It is better to be faithful than famous. *Theodore Roosevelt*
- I'm not religious at all. I think faith is something that gives you strength. I believe in fate and I believe that things happen for a reason but I don't think that there's a high power, necessarily. I believe in karma very much though. There are so many rude people around and they're the people that don't have any real friends. And relationships with people—with your mum, your nan, your dog... are what you get the most happiness in life from. Apart from shoes and bags. *Amy Winehouse*

Questions

Why is faithfulness such an important concept? What determines whether we are faithful? How does the Spirit lead us to be faithful? How do we determine faithfulness? In terms of the great controversy, how do we see that God's claim to faithfulness is confirmed? How do we become "more" faithful?

Bible discussion

The story Jesus told of the ten virgins illustrates faithfulness (Matt. 25:1–13), and also invites our questions as to what this truly is! He also comments that "If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones." (Luke 16:10 NLT). God is the one who is faithful (1 Thess. 5:24). 2 Tim. 3:1–5 identifies the faithless at the end time, which is in contrast to the great chapter on faith, Hebrews 11.

Comment

In His dealings with humanity, is God making demands that have no real sense but which can test for faithfulness, or is God inherently reasonable and acting from an objective, not a subjective, position.

In the account of the Fall in Genesis 3, the serpent accuses God of acting arbitrarily in not giving good to His created beings:

"'You will not surely die,' the serpent said to the woman. 'For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' Genesis 3:4, 5 NIV. God is an arbitrary and hostile God, creating not out of love, but for blind obedience, not wanting loving acceptance but fearful compliance. That is the charge of Satan, God's Accuser.

Similarly Satan accuses God and Job of a relationship built on reciprocal benefit, a mutually self-serving contract by which God “buys” Job’s loyalty by providing material prosperity, family blessings, and personal health:

“Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied. “Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.” Job 1:9-11 NIV.

God allows the Accuser to do his worst to answer the charge that Job’s relationship to God is based on the fulfillment by Job of God’s arbitrary commands. Satan’s allegation is that this is purely a contract-based relationship, without any genuine appreciation of God and His character. In other words, there is no true love for God as He truly is.

Then comes the Accuser’s ultimate challenge—that Job will demonstrate he is operating in fulfillment of God’s arbitrary demands if Job experiences physical pain and sickness. Satan alleges that this is where the contract basis will be clearly seen. He asserts that God’s true capriciousness and fickle, demanding nature will be unmasked as Job relates to him as an unthinking servant blindly trying to follow his arbitrary impositions. That’s why Satan says:

“Skin for skin!” Satan replied. “A man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face.” Job 2:4, 5 NIV.

When there is no benefit from following God’s arbitrary demands, says Satan, then no one will willingly choose them. Instead God will be cursed as an illogical enforcer of unnecessary impositions, a divine Tyrant that seeks rigid and unthinking obedience to his arbitrary commands.

In this way Satan clothes God with his own perverse and illogical character, demonstrating that in reality it is Satan who is the arbitrary and irrational one, not God. In the words of Rabindranath Tagore, “God seeks comrades and claims love, the Devil seeks slaves and claims obedience.”

Ellen White Comments

The earnest toil, the unselfish work, the patient, persevering effort, will be abundantly rewarded. Jesus will say, Henceforth I call you not servants, but friends. [See John 15:15.] The approval of the Master is not given because of the greatness of the work performed, but because of fidelity in all that has been done. It is not the results we attain, but the motives from which we act, that weigh with God. He prizes goodness and faithfulness above all else. {GW 267}

Only by faithfulness in the little things can the soul be trained to act with fidelity under larger responsibilities. God brought Daniel and his fellows into connection with the great men of Babylon, that these heathen men might become acquainted with the principles of true religion. In the midst of a nation of idolaters, Daniel was to represent the character of God. How did he become fitted for a position of so great trust and honor? It was his faithfulness in the little things that gave complexion to his whole life. {COL 356}