

BE FAITHFUL

Colossians 3:23-25; 4:2-13,17

Many people who make a confession that they are Christians will say things that reveal a pattern of thought that (at the very least) seem to be contrary to what the word of God teaches is the norm (or the expectation) for those who have died to the old sin nature and been born again of the Spirit of God. I hear such contrary statements even from “religious professionals” who will make statements that their “want to” or what they really desire to do is more in line with that of a lost person than someone who is saved. For example, they may have a conflict or disagreement with a neighbor and they share with their Christian friends that they really wanted to tell their neighbor how stupid they are or what bad thing they wish would happen to their neighbor and then congratulate themselves that they refrained from actually stating what was in their heart. This is somewhat of a “self indictment” from a person who has been a Christian for several decades that his thoughts were not more in line with concern and compassion for his neighbor. I hear people who brag (or is it a complaint) that they are constantly being attacked by the devil. They will relate their conversation with the devil and take spiritual pride in telling him off. What about just saying, “the Lord rebuke you” and then move on with what God has called you to do? Even the Archangel Michael “did not bring railing accusations against the devil in disputing over the body of Moses” as we are told in the letter of Jude. James tells that we are to simply rebuke the devil and he will flee from us. If the devil keeps coming around, then he likely sees a possible opening or crack in our spiritual armor.

With regard to being faithful, one commentator noted that, as Christians, “we don’t have vacation days where we are exempt from being faithful and there are no areas in life where we get a pass that exempts us from being faithful.” That is a good observation. However, he also observed that “the lack of any exemption creates problems for believers who want to stretch the limits. They would like one area where they can please only themselves. They would like some time to call their own for which they have to give no accountability.” It is my opinion that this is truly a sad commentary, if this is what a “believer” is thinking. This kind of thinking is similar to that of the Israelites in the Wilderness wanting to go back to Egypt. This is akin to a person who puts his hand to the plow and is constantly looking back (Luke 9:62). If we have been saved and are being transformed, then the “limit we should want to stretch” is to move even closer in our daily walk with the Lord and be even as Enoch who “walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.” (Gen 5:24)

As Paul concluded his letter to the church at Colossae, he shared with them several areas that can help us stretch the limits on the positive side of being faithful in our walk with the Lord. The first is to always keep in mind that our ultimate accountability is to the Lord and not to other people. The second thing is that we should always opt for the wise choice in whatever situations we are in. We will seldom (if ever) regret taking the high road, being gracious, being tactful, being kind, etc. The third area is related to knowing that our actions are expressions of the condition of our hearts. If we want to be counted as faithful, then we must show faithfulness in our behavior. The final area is that we are to care for others and show our concern not only in what we think, but also in what we say and do.

Live for the Lord - 3:23-25

²³ Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. ²⁵ For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. Colossians 3:23-25 (NASB95)

In the larger context of the passage on practical operation of a Christian household, we will look specifically at the instruction given to slaves. In a sense, since each one of us is in

some type of a relationship in which we have accountability issues, these instructions are most generally applicable to any of us. Admittedly, the servants or slaves of that era were not voluntarily accountable, however, they did have some leeway or choice as to the degree of excellence to which they carried out their duties. Their motivation could easily have been to avoid punishment for failure to do a good job. In our accountability situations we have considerable leeway regarding how good a job we will do. Some people will contract their services and they will be a stickler as to what they do or don't do on the job as defined by the contract. They will tell you that certain tasks are not part of their contract. Here, the motivation is to satisfy the contract and meet their legal obligations and avoid a civil lawsuit. Others may be hired to do a job that is multifaceted and those who are professional will have a set of standards to which they work which will go beyond the minimum requirements. Others, who just see themselves as hired hands, will not go that far but will only do what it takes to keep the job and have a regular paycheck. Another situation is that of a small business owner and some may think that he has no accountability, but that would not be the case since he is accountable to his customers. The final situation we should consider is that of a non-paid minister in a church. What kind of accountability do we find in such a situation? Many times, the level of excellence of the execution of the tasks is determined by the "self respect" the person has and perhaps the "pride of workmanship" he may have.

We could make an argument that in the progression of accountability that takes us from avoiding punishment, to meeting a legal obligation, to satisfying customers, and finally to pride of workmanship that we have raised the standard of what really motivates us. However, there is an even higher standard that can be applied in any situation we find ourselves from slave to chairman of the board or anything in between. Paul taught that a worker's motivation and his standards of workmanship are to be the best possible, since they are done for the sake of Christ. Their service is not to be superficial or performed so as to attract attention; instead, they are to work *with sincerity of heart, i.e.,* heartily or conscientiously and out of pure motives. As they carry out the duties of their job, they need to realize that God is in control and that the actions they take are ultimately serving the Lord. The employer might use negative or positive rewards or payments to motivate, but our true Master gives us, as his reward, an eternal inheritance of life. The question we must always ask is "Whom am I really working for?"

One point to keep in mind with regard to working as unto the Lord is that He will provide an appropriate reward for what we have done. The reward will always fit the level of excellence of the work we have done.

Live Wisely - 4:2-6

² Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with *an attitude of* thanksgiving; ³ praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; ⁴ that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak. ⁵ Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. ⁶ Let your speech always be with grace, *as though* seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person. Colossians 4:2-6 (NASB95)

If we are to work as unto the Lord in whatever we do, then we are going to need some help to accomplish this. A logical starting point to obtain this help is to devote ourselves to prayer. Is it appropriate to pray that God would help you do your job at the bank or the factory or the school or the church so that you would bring honor and glory to His name in all that you do? We might be more likely to do this (to pray) if we are preparing to teach a Sunday School class or getting ready to go out to follow up with those who have visited our church or if we are going on a mission trip to some remote part of the world. Paul's advice was to do it in everything.

Several years ago I read a story about a farmer who was barely getting by. He sought advice from a mystic in his town and the mystic sold him a magic stone that would bring him

success. He was to take the magic stone and walk around his farm once each week. On the first trip he noticed several places where his fences were broken and his animals were being lost. He repaired the fences. The next week we found that the roof on his barn had a leak and that was ruining his hay. He repaired the roof. On the next trip he discovered that his cattle had eaten all the grass in the field and he moved them to new pasture. This went on for an entire year and each time he discovered problems that could be corrected. By the end of the year he was a very successful farmer.

What does that story have to do with prayer? Not only are we to pray, we are to be watchful, vigilant and alert regarding the object of our prayers. That will require that we “walk around the farm” or the sphere of our influence on a regular basis. Paul’s advice to be alert suggests to me that we should be specific in our petitions and not just have a general “Lord, help me to do a good job when I go to work” request. Being diligent or devoted in our prayers could also mean more than just praying on a regular basis but also that we are thorough in exploring the various aspects of life experiences we are likely to encounter on a daily basis. If, as we pray, we will explore the variety of situations on our job or in the home or even at church, then we are more likely to receive help in these specific areas as we interact with the Holy Spirit during our prayers.

Paul also emphasized the importance of our attitude when we pray. Many times we pray from anxiety or because we are fearful or in despair. If we would be in prayer before the situation deteriorates to the point of having a crisis, then our prayer can be with an anticipation of receiving help from the Lord and we can have the confidence to express Thanksgiving even before we see the physical evidence that our prayers have been answered.

Paul also reminded them to include concerns for others and their ministry as they prayed for their own needs. Many times we forget to pray for others and we may then become very self-centered in our concerns. We also may lose our appreciation of the efficacy of prayer and forget that God works in the affairs of mankind in response to the prayers of His saint. Jesus told us that whatsoever we asked in His name, He will do. We tend to forget what James wrote about the effectual, fervent prayers of the saints making a difference.

Going beyond the need to pray for those who are fellow workers in the kingdom of God, Paul reminded them to conduct themselves in a proper manner when they interacted with non-believers. In order to have such wisdom to know what to say and how to behave in such interactions, we should make this an object of our prayers since we need to be doing this “as unto the Lord” also. Again, we find advice from James regarding wisdom: “If anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask the Lord Who will provide what is needed.”

Live with Faithfulness - 4:7-9

⁷ As to all my affairs, Tychicus, *our* beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. ⁸ *For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts;* ⁹ *and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number.* They will inform you about the whole situation here. Colossians 4:7-9 (NASB95)

Paul mentioned two men who were known by those in the church at Colossae; namely, Tychicus and Onesimus. Paul used three descriptors that were applicable to both of these men. Both were beloved. In the simplest meaning of this term, we would think that Paul and those in the church at Colossae cared for and were concerned about their well being. Paul used the phrase “fellow slave” in reference to Tychicus to communicate there was **kinship** that he felt with this man and that those in Colossae should feel also, assuming they saw themselves as bond-servants to Christ. Paul did not use this same terminology in characterizing Onesimus but simply referred to him as “one of your number.” The message was intended to emphasize the kinship they had with Onesimus. It is likely that Paul was quite deliberate in not using the term “slave” in reference to Onesimus since he was, in fact, a slave. This may be an example of Paul

being very tactful in his choice of words. The third descriptor Paul applied to these two was “faithful.”

All of us are familiar with what the word “faithful” means. In a practical sense it means that the person can be counted on. A faithful person is reliable and will do what he is assigned to do. One of the problems in today’s church is the unreliability of those who agree to minister in a particular area. Several weeks ago a Parking Lot Greeter Team leader was in front of the church and as I was talking with him, he shared that he was the only one of the six members of his team that showed up that Sunday. A few of his team members called him and said they would not be there BUT they didn’t find a replacement and others just did not show up. If you want a picture of the opposite of being faithful, then look no farther. This is about as plain as it gets. These persons would **not** characterize themselves as being unfaithful since they would have little or no conviction of having failed in a ministry they had committed to do. But we excuse this kind of behavior because they are “just volunteers.”

Notice that though Paul characterized both Tychicus and Onesimus as faithful, he did make a distinction in that Tychicus was a faithful minister and Onesimus was a faithful brother. Tychicus had some assigned ministry responsibility in the church at the time, and we might conclude that Onesimus did not have such responsibility since he was a slave who was owned by someone in the church named Philemon. The point is that faithfulness is an expectation (requirement) for those who have ministry responsibilities **and** for those who might be characterized as “members” and have not yet taken on ministry responsibilities.

Live with Concern - 4:10-13,17

¹⁰ Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and *also* Barnabas’s cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him); ¹¹ and *also* Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me. ¹² Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. ¹³ For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis. . . .¹⁷ Say to Archippus, “Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.” Colossians 4:10-13,17 (NASB95)

I don’t think you would find any argument among Christians that “having and showing concern for others” is an essential part of what being “faithful” is all about. Paul mentioned three people who came out of a Jewish background who showed concern for him since they provided needed encouragement for him. Many times we try to encourage others by sending them a card or letter or an email which is certainly a good thing to do. We might even call them on the telephone, but these three that Paul mentioned did even more. They were (literally) there for him. All of us can “just be there” to help with whatever ability the Lord has given us in times of need. This is a way to be faithful and it does not require any special training to go and simply do what you can do counting on the fact that the Lord will provide whatever you need.

Paul also mentioned another man who was from the Colossae area and we find here an additional way we can be faithful with regard to our concern for others. Epaphras prayed for the Christians at Colossae and the surrounding area. Notice that what he prayed for them was that they would “stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.” That is, in essence, a prayer that they would be FAITHFUL!

If we are looking for specifics of how to do that on an individual basis, then we need look no further than Paul’s instruction to Archippus in verse 17 which was simply to “give proper attention in order to carry out the ministry that God called you to do.” In other words, “Do the best job that you can do with the Lord’s help in whatever ministry you were called to do.” Now that is a down-to-earth description of being faithful. Go thou, and do likewise.