

The Fruit of the Spirit - Faithfulness (Part 2)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 April 2017

Preacher: Rev. Thomas Davis

[0 : 0 0] Well, as I mentioned, we are in the middle of a study on the fruit of the spirit and in fact tonight we are in the middle of a two-part study of one element of the fruit of the spirit because this morning we started looking at the great topic of faithfulness, one of these glorious elements of the fruit of the spirit highlighted in Galatians 5, 22 and 23. The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law. And as I say at the start of every one of these services, the fruit of the spirit is both the effect and the evidence of having God the Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts. As Christians, God dwells in us by his spirit and that has an effect. It changes us. It does a work of sanctification whereby our being, our nature, our characteristics are changed into what God wants us to be. And so it has this effect but it is also the outward evidence of the fact that we are gods because just as though fruit on a fruit tree is the means by which you identify the nature of that tree, so to our fruit is what makes us known to the world as Christians. And today we've been looking at faithfulness and we've been highlighting the fact that faithfulness is a key part of our own character as Christians.

Now as we said this morning, faithfulness simply expresses the idea of trust, somebody who is reliable, someone who is dependable, someone who is trustworthy. And of course the greatest example of that is God himself. That was out focused this morning looking at the faithfulness of God.

And we saw God's faithfulness shown in three areas. God is faithful in what he says. And so every word that God speaks, every promise that God makes, every warning that God gives, it is all faithful. It's always true, it's always reliable. God is faithful in his words.

God is also faithful in his relationships. That was the great theme running across the whole of the Old Testament. The fact that Israel as God's people had such privileges and yet they were unfaithful, constantly, constantly turning away from God, yet throughout it all God was faithful, always faithful to his covenant. And so God is faithful in his relationships. And we saw finally that God is faithful in his thinking. God's inward disposition, his mindset is one of faithfulness, one of commitment. And that is the rock on which we stand. Our faith is in God's faithfulness.

So we saw these three areas. God is faithful in his words, faithful in his relationships, faithful in his thinking. Tonight we're going to ask our second question. What should our faithfulness look like? Because that's the great teaching of the fruit of the spirit, isn't it? All of these elements tell us what God is like and yet they are also the expectation as to what we should be like. And so we need to have that faithfulness, that loyalty, that trustworthiness, that dependability. We need to have that evident in our own lives. We always have to remember faith is what makes you a Christian. But faithfulness is what shows you are a Christian.

[4 : 10] Faith is what makes you a Christian. Faithfulness is what shows that you are a Christian. And the question arises is, well, how do we do that? And quite simply, I want us just to look at the same three areas that we looked at this morning. The area of speech, the area of relationships, the area of thinking or attitude. So that's our plan for tonight. First of all, then, faithfulness in our speech. We saw this morning how God is utterly and totally consistently faithful in what he says. And quite simply, we must also be the same. Now that points us towards a lot of important biblical teaching, especially some of the teaching of God's law.

We should automatically think of the ninth commandment when we're talking about faithfulness in their speech. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour. And it's probably something we've known from childhood that God expects us to be truthful. As Christians, we should not lie.

That should not be a characteristic of our personalities. And so there's that foundational principle enshrined in the ninth commandment. But as with all the commandments, God expects not just a sort of rigid, narrow observation of the minutiae of what it says, there is really a general principle that arises out of all the commandments that should be evident in our lives. And so in terms of faithfulness, there should be a general faithfulness in all of our speech. And this is highlighted in some in various verses. I want to take James chapter 5 verse 12, as a starting point for this. But above all, my brothers, do not swear either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your yes be yes, and your no be no, so that you may not fall all under condemnation. This verse is highlighted in the fact that as Christians, our speech must always be reliable, dependable, and trustworthy. And that short phrase that your yes be yes, and your no be no, emphasising the fact that when you say yes, everyone should know that that simply means yes. You don't need to supplement it with swears or oaths or any other colouring like that.

Your yes should always be a reliable yes. Your no should always be a dependable no. And it sounds so simple, but it's so important in life. It's really referring to the question of integrity.

When I say yes, you should know that it's a yes, and you should be able to rely and depend on that. Now, as with many biblical principles, it sounds very, very simple, and it shouldn't almost be easy. And yet this is the kind of area that's incredibly hard, because there is so much pressure on us from the world. There's pressure to gossip. It's so easy to hear something, isn't it?

[7 : 39] And then it's so tempting to pass it on. There's always a thrill in passing on news, especially if it's, you know, if it's something maybe dramatic or something like that. And even if we may be uncertain of the truth of it, we can still be tempted to pass it on. And that's what so much of the world revolves around. And we will be surrounded by people at work who are doing this and who don't even realise that they're doing anything wrong by engaging in this kind of thing.

And I can't stand here and claim that I have never done it myself. I am guilty of it as well. There's a pressure to gossip, but that kind of speech is unfaithful and unwise. There is also pressure to conceal the truth. That's a difficult one, because especially if something goes wrong, I remember as an engineer, it was always a comfort for me, because when I started working for my father-in-law, he came to me and he always said, if you break something, come and tell me.

He says, I'm not going to give you a row. If you break something, just tell me. We all break things and that happens. And it was wonderful, because it meant when you did make a mistake, you didn't have to hide it. But you often hear of other situations in work where maybe something gets broken and nobody will admit to it. Nobody says it. And then the next person goes along to it and finds that it's broken. There can be this temptation to conceal the truth, especially when we have made a mistake. And so we have been reminded that we should be faithful in our speech.

If something goes wrong, we hold up our hands and we don't try to conceal the truth. So there's pressure to gossip, pressure to conceal the truth. There's also pressure nowadays to exaggerate.

Isn't that true? So much of life now is subject to exaggeration. Something happens and it grows arms and legs and it gets expanded upon and speculated upon and exaggerated. Sometimes people exaggerate things in order to impress. You often see that with children, they'll come and they'll say something. They'll say, I'm the fastest boy in the school or something like that. And they're exaggerating in order to impress. So sometimes people will try to say how good things are in order to make a good impression. Other times people will try to exaggerate how bad things are in order to get attention. And we are just being reminded by God that our yes should be yes, our no should be no. And we should avoid gossiping, concealing or exaggerating as much as we possibly can. And it's a reminder that in all situations in life, we must follow the example that God shows us in the Persian of Jesus Christ. His words were always faithful, always dependable, always reliable. And may God help us all to be the same. And this idea of being faithful in our speech is bringing us into an important topic and that is the one of, in terms of our accountability to one another. That's a really interesting topic and one that maybe we don't talk about enough. The fact that as Christians we are to be accountable to one another, helping one another, nurturing one another. The Bible makes it very clear that this is a principle that God expects in the lives of his people. A good example is from Proverbs 27.

[11 : 27] Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Profuse are the kisses of an enemy. That verse is highlighting the fact that it is better for someone to be honest with us, to correct us, to guide us, to show us where we are going wrong.

And even if it's a wound, a wound from a friend that helps us to grow in our Christian lives is better than a kiss from an enemy. Now, this is the kind of area that's a big challenge in the Christian life. It's a big challenge because it's quite sensitive to accept a faithful word of rebuke from a brother or a sister. I remember when I was training in Edinburgh to be a minister, we used to have to preach to our classmates, which was an agonising experience in many ways. And afterwards you would get comments from them. And it was an excruciating experience in many ways because they would highlight things that you were doing wrong. But it was all done with the aim of helping, of encouraging and of guiding. And so we have to be ready to be accountable to each other, to accept a word of guidance from one another. And it's important because without that kind of accountability, sin goes unchecked, doesn't it? So it's really important. And Paul reminds us that really this is just simply part of the whole principle of loving one another as Christians.

As he says, rather speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head into Christ, from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Now at the very start, then you see the vital principle, we are to speak the truth, but we are to speak the truth in love. And so as Christians, as brothers and sisters, we are to encourage, guide, help in a way that is loving, in a way that is patient, in a way that is honest, but in a way that will ultimately make us all more Christlike. Because that's what we want, and that's what we need. So we are to be faithful in the things we say, faithful in our speech.

The second area is faithfulness in our relationships. We saw how God is the perfect example of this. You look in the Old Testament and you see that Israel failed again and again and again. Israel messed up again and again and again. Israel kept doing the same silly things, and yet God was faithful.

[14 : 44] God guided them. God waited for them. God called them to repentance, and God in fact consummated his faithfulness in the New Covenant, the New Testament, sending his own dear Son so that we might be saved and in an eternal relationship with God. So God is incredibly faithful in his relationships, and we must be the same. And much of the practical instruction of the New Testament is in terms of faithfulness in relationships. And I can highlight four areas, and I hope this is helpful. It's really just very practical, and in many ways it's probably reminding us of things that we already know, but nevertheless these are the kind of things we need to think about. So four key areas. First of all, marriage, which I'm sure is perhaps the most obvious of all. God expects a husband and a wife to be faithful to each other. They enter into that covenant relationship together, and it is for life. It is a permanent bond. Now I am always very conscious whenever we talk about this kind of topic that that's not always the way it turns out for people, and that's desperately difficult for everyone affected. But it is good to remind us of what God intends things to be, what God wants things to be. God expects a husband and a wife to be faithful to each other. And that of course stands in total contrast to so much of what the world says today. Because what does the world say today? The world says, I must be faithful to myself. I must be who I am. And therefore I will have a relationship as long as it suits me.

I will have a marriage as long as it's what I want. I will be part of this as long as I'm happy myself. As long as I'm being who I am, I must be faithful to myself. And of course when things are no longer as we want them to be, or when things are difficult, people tend to walk away. They walk away when the appeal of the early days has disappeared. They walk away when the burdens and the struggles increase. And people think, I have to be faithful to myself. I have to be who I am.

And it's interesting, that's the kind of self-protecting mindset, isn't it? Faithful to myself. I'll look after myself. And so you would think that that self-protecting mindset would bring security, wouldn't you? You know, I'm protecting myself. Therefore that's going to be the best way to be safe. And yet the end result is the complete opposite.

Because when we just go after what we want, when we go from one thing to the next thing to the next thing in terms of relationships, we end up exposed, vulnerable and hurt. And so what we think is going to be self-preserving is actually self-exposing. And the security that we look for in putting ourselves first actually robs us of safety. And all the time the Bible is saying, the important thing is not to be faithful to yourself, but to be faithful to your spouse.

Be faithful to your husband, be faithful to your wife. And that means sticking together no matter what. And do you know the end result of that is not vulnerability. The end result is safety.

[19 : 10] Isn't it? Because you're safe in that commitment where you are mutually supporting one another, mutually committed to one another. And the Bible is teaching us the best way.

That's the kind of characteristic that should shape our Christian relationships. I'm going to give you an example of what I mean. A clear example of what I mean is sex.

We are surrounded today by a world that is obsessed with this topic. And you have this attitude, I must be true to myself. And therefore I regard this area as something to be toyed with, something to have fun with, something to experiment with, something to do what I like.

A topic where it's, if you like, a free for all. But that kind of attitude is a one-way ticket to being hurt. Because you are exposing yourself to all sorts of vulnerabilities. And we see the wreckage of that in the world around us, don't we? And God is showing us that the precious intimacy of this topic is something that should always be under the safe protection of faithfulness.

Faithfulness brings safety. And so it applies in that area, but it applies in all areas of marriage. In terms of encouragement, in terms of making decisions, in terms of facing challenges, a husband and wife should be faithful to one another. Now, again, as I say, it's not always like that.

[21 : 10] And that's hard for everyone. And God knows that. And God is not harsh with somebody who has been hurt. And please remember that. And I am not saying any of this other than simply to acknowledge what God would want it to be and what God can make it. So there's an area of faithfulness in our lives. We are also to be faithful in terms of our relationship between parents and children.

That should be a relationship where children can depend on their parents and where parents can trust their children. Ephesians 6 gives us some great teaching on that. Children, O obey your parents and the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother. This is the first commandment with a promise that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. So as parents, those of us who are as parents, we always wanted to be the case that our children know that we will be faithful to them, faithful to hug them when they are hurt, faithful to comfort them when they are sad, faithful to guide them when they are confused, faithful to console them when they are heartbroken, faithful to forgive them when they make mistakes. And as children, we always wanted to be the case that our parents can trust us. Isn't that a great way to be as a child, even as a grown-up child like I am? We want our parents to be able to trust us, trust us to behave well, trust us to make wise decisions, trust us to be there for our parents as they get old and vulnerable themselves. The parent-child relationship should be one of faithfulness. That's how God wants it to be. Third area, we can look at his employment.

This takes us to the next version in Ephesians chapter 6. Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ. Not by the way of eye service as people please, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man. Knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he's a bondservant or a slave. Masters, do the same to them and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their master and yours is in heaven and there is no partiality with him.

So that means for everyone who's going to work tomorrow morning, God expects you to be faithful. And that's something that we must always be disciplined with because there's always the temptation to waste time. So always the temptation to avoid work.

There's always the temptation to maybe leave things for someone else to do or to be careless with their time or with their attitude. It's so important that we are reliable. And it's so interesting. I spoke to somebody recently, he was looking to employ somebody for the summer.

[24 : 34] And they had a specific job for this person that required training in order to be able to do a specific task. But the person said, all I want is someone reliable. I can teach them the rest.

I want somebody reliable. And as Christians, that's how we should always be, as much as our health and our availability allows us to be faithful as employees or as employee urge. So that's the third area, which on marriage, parents and children, employment, fourthly, faithful in our relationships as a congregation. As the people of God here together in Carlyway, we are to be faithful to each other. And that is the principle that is clearly exemplified by the letter to the Galatians. Paul is writing to the Galatians at a time when they had got into a right mess.

The Galatians, as we've been saying in the early part of our study, they had got embroiled in false teaching from people who had come and were claiming that they needed to be circumcised in order to be saved and that their law had to be obeyed in order for them to be part of God's kingdom. And so they were adding to the gospel this legal obligation and they were in a terrible mess.

And the relationship they had, the good relationship that they had with Paul seems to have broken down. There seems to have become tension there and hostility and real concern. So Paul is writing to Christians who are in a mess and that's something we see often in the New Testament. The Galatians were bad, the Corinthians were even worse and the Colossians weren't that good either.

And yet what does Paul do? He faithfully writes to them. And he's not writing them off, he's not washing his hands of them, he's not trying to cut them off as he writes this letter.

[26 : 46] He is faithfully trying to bring the Galatians back onto the right track. Isn't that amazing? A group who had really mucked up and yet all he wants to do is to bring them back on the right track. He is being faithful to them in this letter. And that's such a good example for us. We as a congregation must be faithful to each other, faithful in meeting together to worship each week. That's what's so important. It's not so important that we are in this building, the important thing is that we are together. That's what matters. Faithful in meeting together, faithful in spending time together. You look at the New Testament church, they ate together constantly. We could be doing that a bit more I think. Eating together, spending time together.

Faithful in working together for the gospel. Each of us as our own part with the spiritual gifts that God has given us. Contributing us blocks in a wall all built up together into one spiritual house. All as different members of the body serving together to the glory of God.

And faithful in supporting one another in giving each other the help that we need. And as Jesus says, even a cup of water, even a cup of water doesn't go unnoticed by God.

And I am so thankful for the faithfulness that you all do show because I'm not saying this to rebuke you at all because you are so faithful. But we are just being reminded from scripture how important this is and it's something that we always want to maintain. So we are to be faithful to one another in all of these areas. But what if one of us makes a mistake?

What if one of us makes a mistake and gets into a mess? What should our response be? For example, what if a church member stood beside me just now and said, I drank too much last night. I swore I became aggressive. I got into a fight.

[29 : 25] And I'm so sorry. How should we respond to somebody who said that? A rebuke? Criticism? Suspension?

Well, let's look at what Galatians says. Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

Bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ. That is faithfulness.

And that's exactly how God treats us, isn't it? That's exactly how God treats us. And if you want an example of this, look at how Jesus treated Peter after his denial.

Jesus went to him and simply said, Peter, do you love me? He was so gentle. He was so gentle.

[30 : 55] And this raises a question, a really interesting question. Can faithfulness be conditional? Now, what do I mean by that? Well, it's basically the idea that says, I will be faithful to you so long as you don't do this or you don't do that or you maintain this or you maintain that. I will be faithful so long as. Can faithfulness be conditional like that? Well, I'm not going to answer that question. You can just think about it.

As Christians, all our relationships should be characterised by faithfulness. And the key point in it all is that faithfulness is not about me, is it? When we are unfaithful, we are not unfaithful to ourselves. We are unfaithful to others.

Faithfulness is not about me. And that's what lies at the heart, what should lie at the heart of a relationship with others as Christians. It's all very, very challenging. I'm very aware of that. And I'm pleased to not take anything of what I'm saying as a rebuke. I am speaking to myself before I speak to anyone. But this is how God wants us to be. And it's important teaching. And that brings us to our third area, faithfulness in our attitude. And at the heart of what we've been saying is that just like God, we need to be faithful in our attitude.

Faithfulness should be at the core of our mindset because from there everything else flows out. Faithfulness should be an attitude. And this raises an important point about little things.

Does God care about little things? If you owe somebody 50p, does that matter? Does sending a wee text to somebody, a word of encouragement, does that make any difference?

[33 : 05] Does politeness in your emails matter? Does the creche rota here matter or the cleaning rota? Or anything like that? Do these things matter? Do we things like that really matter to God?

Well, Jesus teaches us a really good lesson. He says, one who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much. And one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.

And this is why we should probably never use the phrase, I just, when it comes to life in the church. Now what do I mean? Well, what I mean is somebody who says, I just clean the church.

I just print the bulletin. I just do teas. I just help a bit with WFM. I just do some visits when I can.

I just do that. These things are small, which is why you're probably saying I just. But Jesus is reminding us that your faithfulness in these little things is demonstrating to God that you are trustworthy and reliable. And these little things all matter. And so let's all be faithful in our attitude, faithful in prayer, daily praying with confidence and expectation that God will hear our prayers. Faithful in reading our Bibles, let's every day hear God speaking to us through his word and let's meditate on his word, think about it, carry it with us, read the same passage over and over again, let it sink in, let it shape you, let's be faithful in reading our Bibles. Let's be faithful in asking each other if we're okay in showing that concern. Let's be faithful in bearing one another's burdens as Paul tells us in Galatians 6 to just share the load. I am sure that every single person in this building is carrying a load. I am sure you are. And God's instruction to us is to bear one another's burdens. Faithful in serving in the church and giving to the church and in doing what we can to help further the work of the gospel. And faithful in our obedience, remembering that we are answerable to God, not to man. But in terms of our church life,

[35 : 42] I want to emphasize one area in particular. And that is the importance of being faithful in the work of mission. Faithful in our work of bringing the gospel to people who need to hear it.

And this is something that is so, so important that we understand. I am sure every single one of us here longs for our church to be fuller, don't you? We long to have more people here. We can look out and we can see dozens of houses where there's people who don't come to church. And I am sure there's people in here who long for people who are close to them and dear to them to be here in church with them. I am sure you feel like that. I feel like that. And we all have people who we long to see coming to faith. And yet sometimes it feels like nothing is happening, doesn't it? It can feel like nothing is happening. And we are trying and trying and trying. We are praying and praying and praying. We are preaching and preaching and preaching. And yet nothing is happening. Well, I want us to remember the life of Abraham. We read about the life of Abraham this morning. And as we were doing the reading this morning, I asked everyone the question. We read from Genesis 12, which is when God first came to Abraham. And we read in Genesis 21, which was the account of when Sarah gave birth to Isaac. And we were saying how God's promise to Abraham was that his offspring would be a great nation. And so step one in God's promise to Abraham was that he would have a child. That was step one. And as we read these two passages, I asked the question, how long did it take to get from Genesis 12 to Genesis 21? How long did it take for step one?

A month, a year, five years, 25 years, 25 years for step one. That is like us preaching and working here in Carlyway for 25 years without one single convert. That's what Abraham experienced. But Abraham was a man of faith. And he knew that God would be faithful. And he remained firm in his trust in God. And God is looking for the same attitude in you and me. And that's why the question that really matters is never how many new members have you had? How many new people have been coming out to the prayer meeting? The question that matters is this, how faithful is Carlyway for each church? That's the question that really matters. And it might take us a long, long time to see the converts that we long for. It might take a long time for us to see the seats being filled, that we long to be filled. But time is nothing in comparison to eternity.

So don't worry if things are slow. And don't be discouraged if people aren't responding quickly.

Don't be saddened if you have been praying for years and yet not seen anything. Don't be discouraged.

[40 : 05] Be faithful. Don't be discouraged. Keep going. Keep trusting. Because timing is God's business.

And we have to leave that in his hands. We must keep on faithfully doing all that we can for the Lord in our lives. And let's just remember what Paul says. Paul has got the perfect sentence for us. Let us not grow weary of doing good. For in due season we will reap if we do not give up. That should encourage us to keep on going. Because we are here to sow, to sow the seed of God's word. The Church of God is a fascinating organisation because I think it's the one organisation in the world where the ultimate scrutiny is not in terms of results.

You look at the world, it is so often based on results. Football is a very clear example. You might have a football manager who is doing everything right and yet if results are going against him he will lose his job. You might have a company where they are putting in together all sorts of good, healthy structures and practices. And yet if the results aren't there, then people will start to get very agitated. The world tends to scrutinise the results above anything else.

God does not scrutinise our results. Because the results are his work. The scrutiny for us is in our faithfulness, isn't it? And we are here to keep on sowing, to keep on doing all that we can for God's glory. Now this should excite us because it means this.

You could do something this week that leads to the conversion of a sinner in 25 years time.

[42 : 14] That's part of the glory and the beauty of the Christian life. So don't give up, don't be discouraged. We are Christians and Christians are faithful. Let's pray.

God our Father, we thank you for your faithfulness and we pray, O Lord, that we would also be faithful, faithful to one another and faithful to you. And we know, Lord, that every one of us can think of times where we have failed in this area. And we pray for your forgiveness for that.

And we thank you that with you there is always forgiveness. And we pray that you'd help us just to go on faithfully serving you, confidently looking to you and being shaped by what your word teaches. So please help us, Lord, to listen to what your word is teaching us. May we be shaped by it and may we be faithful to it. Thank you for everybody here and for everyone's faithfulness to this church in so many ways, in serving, in giving, in attending, in praying. Thank you for the faithfulness of the people of Carlyway. May they be blessed and may they reap a wonderful harvest for everything that they've sowed. In Jesus' name, amen.