

How To Stay Faithful

Malachi 3:16-19

A great challenge in living the life of a Christian is *“How to remain faithful.”* Once a person becomes a Christian, the challenge then is to live a faithful life to the Lord. The challenge becomes greater sometimes due to difficult circumstances that come our way. With this in view, the Lord thru John addresses the suffering saints in Smyrna. ***(Revelation 2:10) Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*** Here we are instructed to be faithful unto death even in times of difficulties.

It's real easy to start something and not finish it. That is evident all around my house. Starting is easy but completing the task is the challenge. Jesus talks about the challenge of remaining faithful in Luke 14. ***(Luke 14:28) For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? (29) Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, (30) Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.*** The question before us is do you have what it takes to finish the journey of the Christian life; to remain faithful to the Lord.

The good news is that while the Bible speaks of the challenge of remaining faithful to the Lord, but the Bible also provides the practical instruction needed to accomplish this challenge of living a life that is faithful to Him. This takes us to the book of Malachi.

Malachi was a prophet sent by God to the Israelites who had returned from the Babylonia captivity back to Jerusalem. This was about 400 years before Christ. After returning, they rebuilt their temple; they rebuilt their cities, and to some extent they reestablished their life in their homeland; but their hearts were not faithful to God. We read in Malachi 1 how the priest were corrupt and failed to show reverence to God in the way that He deserves by offering their culls as sacrifices. In chapter 1:13 they complained of being weary for what the Lord had commanded.

In chapter 2 we learn that their priest disregarded their marriage covenant and dealt treacherously with that commitment. So we have ***(Malachi 2:16) For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.*** Most will agree that the term *“putting away”* has reference to divorce – thus the text reads *“he hateth divorce.”*

Chapter 3 tells about their refusal to give as they were commanded thus it is said that they rob God. Because of their unfaithfulness, Malachi was sent by God to rebuke and to correct this attitude. Now there is a silver lining in all of this, and that there were some who responded to the prophet's message and decided to live their lives faithfully to God.

As we consider the results of Malachi message, we see three key pieces that should help us to remain faithful to God in what is a very faithless and wicked environment. **First, to remain faithful to God you need to surround yourself with other faithful people to God.** After the prophet delivered his rebuking message, notice v. 16. ***(Malachi 3:16) Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another:***

Paul says ***(1 Corinthians 15:33) Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.*** The NIV says *“bad company corrupts good character.”* When you associate with the wrong people, it will have an impact on the way that you live. You see people all the time that are in trouble that say they were running with the wrong crowd. That's the same idea Paul presents in ***(2 Corinthians 6:14) Be ye not unequally yoked***

together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

But note the flip side of the coin is just as compelling. When you associate with the faithful, then that will have an influence on your behavior. **The faithful will help you to remain faithful.** So Malachi 3:16 says *they that feared the LORD spake often one to another*; they associated with one another. So the question now becomes how much time do you associated with the brethren of like mind. Peter describes this relationship as *“Like Precious Faith.” (2 Peter 1:1) ... to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ:*

This is one of the benefits of coming together. You don’t get the encouragement and the spiritual boost that is needed to remain faithful when you are absence from the assembly. So when the faithful come together for worship, you need to be there to help you to remain faithful. *(Heb 10:24) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: (25) Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.* As we surround ourselves with the faithful, we are helping build up one another and exhorting one another. While worship is a good time to associate with faithful Christians, if those two hours a week are the only time you are associating with the righteous, then you will still have a hard time to remain faithful.

No. 2 In order to be faithful to God, we need to have the understanding that we are known by God. The faithful belong to God. *(Malachi 3:17) And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts...* God took note of those people that feared Him and were striving to remain faithful to Him. To those people the LORD said, *“They shall be mine.”* He knew who they were during that time and He knows who we are today as well. *(1 Corinthians 8:3) But if any man love God, the same is known of him.* So Malachi speaks of the faithful being in a book of remembrance. God knows the faithful and speaks of another book in the NT. *(Rev 21:27) And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.* Just as there was a book of remembrance concerning the faithful in Malachi’s day, there is a lamb’s book of life in our day. You need for your name to be written in that book. The motivation for you to rid you life of sin and live a faithful life is to understand that it is the faithful that belong to God. Let us not lose sight that Jesus came into this world to save us from eternal destruction; to save us from our sins. *(1 John 4:14) And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.* That’s why he came. His purpose of coming was to save us.

We read about how to enter into this saved relationship in Acts 2. You need to place your faith in Jesus Christ; you need to repent of your sins; confess your faith and be baptized into Christ for the remission of your sins. In Acts 2 there were those that had been rebellious and had sinned against Lord and even crucified the Son of God. So in Acts 2:37 they asked, *“What shall we do?”* Peter tells them what to do. *(Act 2:38) Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins* To enter into this relationship with the Lord, we too need to change our life in repentance, be baptized into Christ and the promise is you will receive the remission of sins.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in the region of Galatia and said *(Galatians 3:26) For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. (27) For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.* We are talking about a relationship of putting on Christ. That happens your faith motivates you to be baptized into Christ.

Now from that point on, there is the expectation that the child of God will grow and draw near to the Lord thru diligent study and involvement and service to the Lord. Let us come to grips with the fact baptism is just the starting point. Now is the time of a life of faithfulness and spiritual growth. In spite of how hard our life may get and how bad thing may appear, we have our security in knowing that that our Lord will care of us.

As a Christian you are known by the Lord. The same idea is put forth in John 10 by a shepherd/sheep relationship. The Lord knows who you are and what is happening to you.

To remain faithful to God requires a long range commitment. Going back to Malachi 3, we noted a moment ago how the faithful spoke to one another and God heard them. Concerning the faithful God said that he would make them his jewels. **(17) And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.** These faithful ones are valuable. *“They are mine and I will spare them”* is the idea. The Bible constantly expresses the message that the Lord will save the faithful and punish the wicked. In Romans 2 beginning in v 6 Paul writes that God will render to each one according to his deeds. Eternal life to those that continue in doing good and punishment to every man that does evil. Notice the good **(Romans 2:6) Who will render to every man according to his deeds: (7) To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life:** In the grand scheme of history, we are only here for a brief time but our focus is long range perspective. In life we look forward to special days like our birthdays; but being a Christian we can't mark on the calendar a date as our reward day because we don't know when Christ is coming again; therefore we don't know when we can expect to receive promised reward. So Paul writes **(7) To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life.** Patience and endurance is needed in order for the child of God to remain faithful. Paul put it another in the book of Galatians. **(Galatians 6:9) And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.** But we need to recognize that the fullness of our reward will not be realized in this life. We need a long term commitment.

Now notice the evil. **(8) But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, (9) Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile;**

Now note his conclusion. **(Romans 2:10) But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: (11) For there is no respect of persons with God.** If you are going to remain faithful to God, you need look at life from an eternal perspective. Recognizing that when all is said and done, the Lord is going to reward the righteousness with eternal life and he is going to punish the wicked with eternal death.

(John 5:28) Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, (29) And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. The life of a faithful Christian is about setting up a long range goal in your heart; the goal of obtaining the resurrection of life. That's why we need to remain faithful. Coming forth to the resurrection of life, i.e. heaven needs to be our first and foremost desire. Keeping your mind focused on heaven will help you remain faithful. I recognize that there are distractions; there is the here and now, the daily activities of living that tend to distract our focus; but if you are going to be faithful to God, we have to learn to keep our mind focused on the eternity of God in spite of the distractions in life.

Are you living faithfully? Is your name written in the book of life?

Malachi closes these few verses by reminding us why we should live faithfully. It's the same reason Jesus stated in John 5. It's because one day the Lord is going to return and discern between the righteous and the wicked. **(Malachi 3:18) Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.** You see, the righteous is said to be the one that serves God – that's faithful living. The unrighteous is said to be the wicked and serves not God. You fall into one of those two categories.

Invitation