

When You Are Faithless, Christ Is Your Faithfulness

Faith, as a subjective experience, is forever in flux. Sometimes it feels like “God’s in His heaven; all’s right with the world.” Some Christians go on like this for days at a time, even weeks on end, with nary a twinge of uncertainty or doubt. But that’s not the norm. It’s unrealistic to assume your faith should constantly seem strong and resilient; by its very nature, faith usually is mingled with doubt. That’s because your faith differs from knowledge that you acquired by logical deduction. Though God uses word, water, bread and wine to connect with us, ultimately, faith itself is rooted not in tangible things but in invisible ones. It is “*the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*” (Hebrews 11:1).

For as long as we live, you and I will experience ups and downs in our life of faith. We can be at the top of our game at one moment and down in the depths in the next. Human emotions are like that, as you well know. Any number of things going on in a given moment, even the phases of the moon or atmospheric conditions, can impact our mood (I often get a headache when there is a change in the weather, and I don’t feel too happy about that!) Faith isn’t an emotion. True, as we reflect on faith, it can often seem like a feeling. But faith is far more: Faith is the hand that grasps the promises of God. Faith is trust - faith is reliance on God and His word. It’s a two-party arrangement, a mutual bond, and while God remains steady and firm, we often falter.

You can certainly see this dynamic playing out in the history of Israel and their faith. God chose their ancestral father Abraham, pledging to make of his descendants a great nation from which would come the Redeemer He had first promised in Eden. Through the centuries, He repeatedly renewed His covenant relationship with them, promising to be their God over and over again. And in turn, generation after generation of Israelites promised to be His people.

Most strikingly of all, after their long bondage in Egypt, God delivered his people dramatically and miraculously from the swift chariots of Pharaoh’s army at the Red Sea, leading them safely through the waters on dry ground and bringing them to the sacred mountain of Sinai. There, He personally appeared to Moses and the elders of Israel, renewing the covenant He first gave to Abraham and vowing once again to give them His gracious blessing and merciful hand to guide them. At Sinai, God spoke to His people through His prophet Moses, giving them His Law to bind them to Himself, and with one voice the people of Israel responded: “*All that the LORD has spoken we shall do*” (Exodus 19:8).

But what did the people actually do?

Even a casual review of the history of God’s covenant people shows how fickle they were in their relationship with Him. Repeatedly they turned to other gods instead of the Lord, who had brought them out of slavery in Egypt and delivered them with His mighty hand and outstretched arm. Repeatedly they broke His commands. Repeatedly they embraced the idolatrous, adulterous ways of the pagan nations among whom they lived.

You may think that their faithfulness would improve when God entered human history in person, born in human flesh. But no. The pattern of ancient Israel carries through in the church in the New Testament. While Jesus deliberately hand-picked His twelve disciples to found a new Israel, their faith faltered as well.

On the night in which He was betrayed, after the Last Supper, Jesus informed His disciples that they would all fall away when He was betrayed to his executioners. Peter objected: “*Even if I must die with You, I shall not deny You!*” (Matthew 26:35). The other disciples said the same. Of course, before that night was over, Peter denied that he had ever known Jesus. The very next day at Golgotha, the whole crowd of disciples - with the exception of John, Jesus’ mother, Mary Magdalene, and Mary of Cleopas - abandoned Jesus to die the agonising, despicably shameful death of crucifixion.

I think I can understand Peter and his friends. At times, I’m utterly convinced that I can suffer anything - even death - and not depart from Jesus. At other times, I’m not so sure. Judging by my words and actions, the sad reality is that, like Peter, I repeatedly have denied the Lord who has bought me with His blood. Over and over again I have failed to live according to the commandments of God’s Law. Not only have I done things God forbids, but just as grievously, I have not done the things He commands.

I have lived as if God did not matter and as if I mattered most. My Lord’s name I have not honoured as I should; my worship and prayers have faltered. I have not let His love have its way with me, and so my love for others has failed. There are those whom I have hurt and those I have failed to help. My thoughts and desires have been soiled with sin.

I suspect that it’s much the same for you. But my point is not that you and I are sinners. Rather, I want to highlight what should be obvious but what we so often forget: our faith fluctuates from day to day. As a subjective, felt experience, it’s on again, off again. Hot and cold, strong and weak, sturdy and frail.

But faith does not hinge on our feelings. It is rooted firmly in the promises of God. When “*we are faithless, He remains faithful - for He cannot deny Himself*” (2 Timothy 2:13).

When calamity strikes, you can count on God - not because you feel close to Him, but because He remains close to you, in His Word, for Jesus’ sake. In the midst of the uncertainties of your life you needn’t wonder about His feelings or attitude toward you. Though your faith may fluctuate, His promises never waver: “*all the promises of God find their yes*” in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:20).

In life’s tight spots, focus not on your faith, but on God’s faithfulness. Look not at your promises to Him, but His loving promises to you in His Son. Rest assured, those promises include your name. Then, freed from the continual teeter-totter of faith’s emotional roller coaster, you can confidently utter your hearty “Amen” to God’s eternal glory.