

### “Wholeness Through Faithfulness”

In the gospel of John we are told how Jesus met a blind man; blind from birth (and aren't we all?). In the old belief, illness or handicap was attributed to sin - it was thought to be punishment of the guilty. (Lest we think that notion so archaic, think of how many times we say, "How could that happen to such a good person?")

Jesus broke the holy rules of Sabbath to cure him, but the man cares nothing for Sabbath rules. All he can say is, "Once I was blind, but now I see." He recognizes that the rules of Sabbath cannot fully illuminate, nor contain, this divine thing that has happened to him.

The blind man moved from blindness, his brokenness, to sight, his healing, then to insight, his wholeness. First, he recognizes his cure as coming from a man called Jesus. Next, he says Jesus is a prophet. Finally he confesses him as Lord and worships him. So the blind man hears the voice of One whom he cannot see and responds in faith to do the bidding of that Voice, and thereby comes to walk in the light. Don't you think that we are sometimes called to walk by *hearing*, more than by seeing, following He who speaks to our hearts?

Meanwhile, the Pharisees who have observed the proceedings are upset. Those who thought they were enlightened become blinded by the light of Christ. They turned their backs on him. Refusing to see, they looked into darkness.

Jesus had firmly denied that a man's blindness was God's punishment for sin. He doesn't say how the blindness is caused; only that it can be an occasion to do God's work. The poor man brings his brokenness to Jesus to find healing and wholeness. That is where wholeness of life, an integrated life, begins: in recognizing your brokenness, confessing it to Jesus, allowing him to touch you there at that point. Until the brokenness is brought to the light I doubt there can be health in your life and certainly not much in the way of spiritual growth.

Our brokenness is what we bring to Jesus in this community we call church. The broken body of Christ, that's what we are; like the broken bread. Healing of brokenness and fitting together His body is painful (as the resetting of broken bones). The healing begins as we reveal our brokenness to the His light and pray for one another. With the confidence of the children of God we can bring our brokenness before God because of His faithfulness. God is faithful and trustworthy and he will not turn us away.

Let's take a look at this 7<sup>th</sup> quality of the fruit of the Spirit: faithfulness. Many Christians wish they had more faith. They think that if only they had more faith their prayers would be answered. But faith is not an action, as though you could try harder at it. Faith is a response. If we strive for faith we'll be disappointed. But when we learn to trust in God's faithfulness, we will be blessed.

The Greek for faithfulness is **πίστις**, which means "conviction, belief in the truth, veracity, or reality of someone or something; to have confidence in someone or something." Your deepest faithfulness is to those things or people most "real" to you. You give them credit because you believe in them.

[Real faith: "My message this morning," began the recent seminary graduate, "is on the relationship between fact and faith. It is a fact that this is Sunday morning. It is also a fact that you are here and that I am ready to speak to you. It is faith that makes me believe you will remember what I have to say."<sup>1</sup>]

The faithfulness that can grow in us, through the Holy Spirit, has its basis in God's faithfulness. Because we can trust God and count on Him to be true, we will be able to obey Him and thereby be found faithful. Our Christian character is dramatically shaped by the measure of our faithfulness and it begins with the faithfulness of our Heavenly Father. Faithfulness means resting in God's certainty, being

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<sup>1</sup>Jacob M. Braude, BRAUDE'S TREASURY OF WIT (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1991), 77.

persuaded by his honesty, trusting in His reality, being won over by His veracity, being sure He's sure, and believing He's worth believing.

Psalm 145:13 - "The Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made." God's faithfulness is based on his characteristics: he is certain, true, enduring.

God could not be faithful without certainty: He must be dependable.

God could not be faithful without truth: He must be trustworthy.

God could not be faithful without endurance: He must persist.

His Word is truth: His Word will last forever.

2 Cor. 5:7 says, "For we walk by faith, not by sight." Is your faith a roller coaster, up one day, down the next? Do you base your faith on what God does, or who He *is*? Basing faith on what you perceive God to be doing says, "I believe in God as long as He does what I ask." Such "faith" depends on results and walks by sight.

Basing faith on who God *is* enables one to walk steadfastly with Him and will not be greatly moved (Psalm 62:2). Putting your trust in His character, will bring steady faith. God's actions appear to change from our perspective. One person is healed, while another one is not. God is glorified in the poverty of one, and in the riches of another. Life is constantly changing. God reveals himself to people in different manners, but His heart remains the same. We may not understand what God is doing in our lives (Isaiah 55:8-9), or around us, but we can count on his heart and character.

Acts 27 and 28 report the account of Paul's voyage as a prisoner on the way to Rome. The ship went through a terrible storm and was grounded on the island of Malta. Paul, the crew, and the soldiers guarding Paul found themselves shipwrecked, but welcomed by the people of Malta. Throughout the whole ordeal Paul prayed and listened for God's guidance. He trusted God. Truths gleaned from Paul's shipwreck account:

1. Feelings or perceptions cannot be the basis of faith even in the most Spirit-filled life. Many people feel disappointed in God because they treat their feelings as fact.

2. Faith comes from listening. Paul did not assume that every promise ever made by God throughout history would be applied to him in his moment of need. God's word is true, he keeps His promises, but reserves the right to apply His word as he sees fit. Despite seeing disaster Paul chose faith in God. God may calm the wind and waves (as He did for the disciples with Jesus) or he may lead you through them as He did with Paul.

3. God's deliverance came through the ship running aground! Deliverance does not always mean the easy way out. Heavy seas and winds in life may mean you're on the right course –for example: deliverance from a traumatic past can be painful.

4. God always has a destination in mind when he delivers. God will lead you to a place of kindness after you have been faithful to who He is. Running aground sometimes is what it takes to bring you to a better place.<sup>2</sup>

Paul knew that God's faithfulness culminates in Jesus Christ. God has proved his faithfulness, his believability, through Jesus; who fulfills the many prophecies of God found in the O.T. 61 of those prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus' earthly lifetime, (Micah 5:2 – Matt. 2:1; Psalm 78:2 – Matt. 13:34; Zech. 9:9 – Luke 19:35-37; Zech. 11:12 – Matt. 26:15; Psalm 22:16 – Luke 23:33 & John 20:25, 27; Psalm 22:18 – John 19:23-24; Psalm 34:20 – John 19:23; Amos 8:9-10 – Matt. 27:45). The chances of all the prophecies being fulfilled are mathematically astronomical. But with God all things are possible.

2 Cor. 1:18-20 "But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not 'Yes' and 'No.' For the Son of God, Jesus Christ ... was not 'Yes' and 'No,' but in him it has always been 'Yes.' For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ." Jesus Christ is the living testimony of

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<sup>2</sup>Beth Moore, *Living Beyond Yourself*, (Nashville, TN: Life-Way Press, 1998), 156-158.

God's believability. God expressed his faithfulness to us in Christ, and Christ expressed his faithfulness to us in the H.S. Through his Spirit we can express our faithfulness to God.

Every time the offering plate is passed in church we have an opportunity to respond to God's faithfulness with the faithfulness that the Spirit is growing in us. The fastest way to becoming faithful; the fastest way to wholeness; the fastest way to the life you really want, is through giving; learning to be generous. God so loved the world, God was so faithful to His promises, that he gave his only Son for us. If you really want to find your life, you give it away (it applies to our possessions as well). That's what Jesus said. It's one of the greatest paradoxes and mysteries of the human experience. But it's the way life works.

That was something the Pharisees just couldn't see. It looks like they trusted in their rules and regulations, and their expectations of how they believed God should act. If they had trusted in God's character, instead of their own notions, they would have seen. Ironically, the only blindness that comes from sin is blindness of the will - it's worse than being blind if you *will* not see. The whole story began with a declaration that physical blindness is *not* caused by sin, and ends with a declaration that *spiritual* blindness *is* caused by sin. [Therefore, the blind man who knows little, learns much; and the Pharisees who think they know everything, really can be taught nothing.]

When are Christians like those Pharisees? When we see only what we want to see, rather than what God is showing us. [We don't allow for divine guidance because we believe we already know what it is. Or, we simply refuse divine guidance because we think we know better.] Or, when we don't really trust divine guidance because we're not sure God can be trusted . . . trusted to take us where we think we ought to go. [this is often the case when it comes to our finances.]

Years ago a film was made on the life of Sir Thomas More – a devout Christian who refused to bow to the demands of King Henry the 8<sup>th</sup>. The film was entitled "A Man For All Seasons." His faithfulness was unwavering, despite the threat of his king. He trusted God, more than the king of England. By such faith he was able to weather all seasons of life, and find wholeness in his life. The Fruit of the Spirit in our lives is refreshment for our souls to make us men and women for all seasons.