

Today's Part B, of a 2-part message. And as I said last week, If I had to sum up today's Bible reading in one word, I reckon I'd choose "faithfulness".

We're in a section of Hebrews that's comparing the Old Covenant, with the New Covenant — The relationship of God with His people, **before** the coming of Jesus, and the relationship that God has with His people, today.

And today we get into some territory, that may mess with one's theology. You see, we **all** have an underlying belief about God. And as we read His Word, we tend to filter what we read, through the lens of what we already believe.... But it should actually be the other way around.

Instead of "my belief about God", shaping what I think Scripture is saying, The Word of God that we read, should shape what we believe about God. Are you with me???

Our task today, is to read God's word, and to let ourselves be changed by God's word. And if my theology/understanding of God, doesn't fit what God's Word is saying, then the change required, may be my theology itself.

I said last week, many make the claim, that the New Covenant is "**un**conditional" – that there are no conditions upon it. That is simply not true. There is always a condition on the New Covenant, and that is a condition of "faithfulness" – Faithfulness to Jesus/New Covenant/living by the Spirit.

I am reminded of some really blunt things that Jesus used to say:

- At the end of the Lord's prayer, He said: **Matthew 6:14-15 (ESV) 14** **For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, .**
Cool.
But, here's the condition: **15** **but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.**
- Jesus told the parable of the wicked, unforgiving servant. The King mercifully forgave the servant, what was an impossibly large debt... That's the grace of God in action, right there. That's the New Covenant, right there...
But:
that unforgiving servant ended up being removed from the King's presence, handed over to the jailer, and tortured. Why? Because he would not forgive his brother.
And Jesus said, **Matthew 18:35 (ESV)** **So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."**

What is that, if it's not a condition.

- He told the parable of the 10 virgins, waiting for the bridegroom. But when the bridegroom came, half of them had let their lamps run out of oil. They **were** ready (at the start, but then they weren't... And so, when the

Bridegroom came, they were locked out.

The condition of the New Covenant, is to have an ongoing faithfulness to our Lord. And this really comes through in today's reading...

Some Christians I encounter, are what we might call “selective promises of God junkies”... They search the scriptures for every nice-sounding promise of God, and they claim it as a promise for themselves... *And it's like living on lollies. You get a sugar hit, but there's no substance to it. And if lollies is a person eats, it's not healthy.*

And they will search the Scriptures – they dig into the Old Testament (Old Covenant) promises of God – promises that were made to the people of Israel, and they claim these promises for themselves. But something I've noticed, is that they are very selective in the promises they claim.

They only ever claim the nice ones - they only ever claim the blessings – the blessings that come with faithfulness to the covenant.

And at the same time, they completely ignore the curses that come with **un**faithfulness to the Old Covenant. (Because, they are promises of God too.)

You see, the thing is, if spiritually, we live on lollies, that's the way of the hypocrisy. All blessings, no responsibility. Saying “I believe”, but living a life that gives lie to that belief...

To continue the metaphor of food, The New Covenant isn't a meal of lollies. The New Covenant is a nutritional non-vegan meal... Meat & Veg. With the blessings, come the responsibilities, and in Him, we will be strong.

Righto:

Our Reading today, is about “faithfulness”. It is a condition of the New Covenant....

And as Hebrews describes the New Covenant, I noticed that it's quite similar to the way the Old Covenant was presented.

So, for example: In Leviticus 26, we're presented with the blessings of the Old Covenant, and the responsibilities of the Old Covenant. And by V14, it lays out the **punishment** for **disobedience** and for not keeping the Old Covenant... And then in V40, there is a reminder of the covenant and a call to faithfulness again.

In Hebrews **10**, it does something similar: It lays out the blessings of the New Covenant, which is pretty-much the Grace of God – a forgiveness that we do not deserve. **we** have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all..

And then vv19-25, lay out the **responsibilities** of the New Covenant (we discussed that last week):

- Let us draw near, with a true heart;
- Let us hold fast, the confession of our hope, without wavering;

- Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works...

And then from V26-31, it lays out the consequences for **un**faithfulness to God under the New Covenant.

And then V32-39 is a summary of faithfulness and a warning to continue on in faith.

It's a very similar pattern to the way the Old Covenant is presented.

So, what are we being warned about? We're being warned of the consequences of "**un**faithfulness".

And unfaithfulness begins with deliberate, unrepentant sin.

Let me be very clear here. If you're anything like me, you are a Christian who continues to do wrong (and you're not happy about that). And I thank the Lord, that He is a God of Grace and Mercy, and His grace is sufficient.

How does my wrongdoing, not destroy the covenant I have with God?

¹ John 1:(ESV)⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we

say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Alright, so:

- in our weakness, we sin – we do wrong...
- And the Holy Spirit convicts us of that sin,
- and so we confess our sin to God;
- we repent of that sin – we determine, “I do not want to do that anymore. I turn away from that.”;
- We ask God for forgiveness.
- And wow... He cleanses **us** from all **unrighteousness**.

And so, in the case of wrong-doing, to continue on in faithfulness, is to have a repentant heart – to confess our sins, and to receive forgiveness.

Unfaithfulness, is to **go on sinning deliberately** (after receiving the knowledge of the truth)...

What’s the difference between “sin” (that can be forgiven), and to “go on deliberately sinning”? Well, to go on deliberately sinning, is to not repent. It is to not seek forgiveness. It is to not strive to live in righteousness...

So, let me give you an example.

If a young man and a young lady are dating, and they’ve made a commitment to God – a commitment of purity – that they will save themselves/each other, for the loving, commitment of marriage... But then one night, they’re all alone, and they go too far...

And they:

- *are sad – it grieves them, that they have done wrong;*
- *repent;*
- *ask God for forgiveness.*

And part of their repentance, is to change the way they date, so they don't put themselves in that position again... And they are determined that they will save each other for marriage...

That, is faithfulness... And with repentance, comes forgiveness...

But if that couple were to decide, "It doesn't matter, what God says. Let's move in together. Everybody's doing it. We don't need to be married yet.."

And so, by moving in together, they commit to a life of sin. That's what it means, to deliberately go on sinning. – to commit to it – to make it normal...

That's just one example.

Another example might be:

- greed and worldliness. And we deliberately go on sinning by tying ourselves to a loan and repayments for something we do not need, and so we've committed to keeping it for ourselves and we are unable to be generous; or
- bitterness and unforgiveness, and we **deliberately** go on sinning by searching for more and more wrong in a person, (I'm going to find something else to hate you

for). And we scrutinise them (more so than anybody else), rather than forgiving them from the heart...

Are you with me???

And V²⁶ For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

There is no such thing as “cheap grace”. The cost of our forgiveness, was the nailing of our Lord Jesus, to the cross... There are no more nails to be driven. There is no other sacrifice to be made.

To deliberately choose a life of sin, is the first step, to what’s called “apostasy”. Apostasy, is to desert one’s faith in Jesus altogether. Why do I say that deliberately choosing a life of sin, is the first step to apostasy? Well, because it’s the opposite of being saved.

Being saved, is where we turn from our old ways, and we come to Jesus, sorrowful of our sins. We confess our sins and are forgiven.

In baptism itself, the old man is put to death. We put to death the old self, and raise up the new... But to deliberately go on sinning, is to raise up the old man – our old sinful ways.

And to use the words of Hebrews, to deliberately go on sinning, is to:

- trample underfoot, the Son of God.
- profane the blood of the covenant (the blood of Jesus) by which we were sanctified...

It shows that I don't really value Jesus – If I deliberately reject God and deliberately reject the New and Living Way, is the Lord really **my** Lord???

Back in Chapter 9, it was talking about the Day of Judgment, and we were reminded that when Jesus comes (on that day), He won't be coming to deal with sin. He will be coming **to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him**. And those who are eagerly waiting for Jesus, are holding on to their faith, and are longing for His return...

It's a big difference, isn't it... Those who deliberately go on sinning, have **a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that** will consume the enemies of God, But those who are faithful, are eagerly waiting for Him...

And to clarify what he's talking about, he gives an example of judgment from the Old Covenant.... There were certain offences that were so bad, that if there were 2 or 3 witnesses that you had broken that law, you'd be put to death. And to desert the covenant with God altogether, and to start following other gods, drew the same punishment...

Under the New Covenant, does God turn a blind eye?
Absolutely not. ²⁹ **How much worse punishment, do you**

think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?

For some strange reason, some folk believe that the God of the Old Testament, is very different to the God of the New Testament... What a nonsense that is. They refuse to see the grace and mercy of God in the Old Testament, and yet it's there all the way through it... And they won't open their eyes, to justice and judgment of God in the New Testament...

But the fact of the matter is, Jesus spoke more about "hell" than anyone else in the bible.

You see, over the last few weeks, we've talked about how, under the New Covenant, we come to a genuine **knowledge** of God. We don't just know about Him. We know Him; We are in an intimate relationship with Him. That's why we are eagerly waiting for Jesus to return...

And we love Him. Part of loving God, is loving His mercy. But also, a part of loving God, is loving His justice... We know God...

We know Him; We know His gift of forgiveness. But we also know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay."

And does V30 mess with your theology? “The Lord will judge his people.” ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

The Lord, will have no part in hypocrisy.

You see, we have a call to faithfulness. The **faithless** will be judged, but those who are **faithful**, eagerly await the coming of Jesus (which is the Day of Judgment)...

So, it has the warning...

And I love the way Hebrews shifts perspective at this point... It's a shift that begins at V32, but it comes to its pinnacle at V³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

You see, there are times, when we are drawn towards unfaithfulness. And if we follow that path, it will take us further and further away from God. (Here it is referred to as “shrinking back”). If we were to continue down that path, where would it take us? Destruction...

And Hebrews says, “**But that ain’t us!!!**”... Will we say it too???

- That is **not** going to be us.

- We will **not** go on deliberately sinning;
 - We will **not** shrink back;
 - We will **not** go back into a life of faithlessness...
-
- We are of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

That's the pinnacle. That's where we want to be. So, how do we get there? How do we stop ourselves from shrinking back?

We go back to our first love.

Jesus dictated a letter to the church in Ephesus... (Rev 2). And He said to that church, "You've got a problem. You have abandoned the love you had at first..."

- Remember how it used to be.
- Do what you used to do.
- Repent...

And the promise was, if you overcome this, you'll eat from the tree of life. In other words, you'll be saved...

And this is what we're given a picture of, here in Hebrews – remember your first love. Remember what it was like, when you first became a Christian???

V³² But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings,

Being a Disciple of Jesus isn't easy. He's reminding them of how when they first believed, it was really tough for them... They were **publicly exposed to reproach and affliction** In other words, they were publicly disgraced and they suffered for their faith, and they stood alongside others, who **also** suffered for their faith...

Isn't it strange, that when the going gets tough, we might stand strong in the faith, and endure the suffering for Jesus,,,, but then at other times, faith just grows cold...

Some of them were thrown into prison. Why? Because it was illegal to worship Jesus. And in some places of the world today, it is illegal to worship Jesus, and Christians are being thrown into prison.

And there were times when their property and possessions were confiscated. It says: **you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property**

And in some places today, Disciples of Jesus are so despised, that the law turns a blind eye, when people plunder their property. And yet here it says: **you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property.** Remember that.

Why??? Because it's a reminder that our place/enjoyment/investment, is not here on this earth. In Christ, we have a better possession – one that will last forever – something that no one, can ever take away from us...

Jesus said:

Matthew 6: (ESV) 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. **21** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Remember that???

Do you remember a time where you counted everything you have on this earth as nothing, because you know that your place is with Him in Glory, - your inheritance is not earthly – it is eternal...

Do you remember that???

You know what:

If I cannot remember this – If I cannot comprehend, that someone might steal all my stuff because I'm a follower of Jesus, and yet I'm happy, because I know that I will have eternity with Him – If I cannot make sense of that, do I even understand what the Christian faith is really about....

Remember.

- Remember faith in its purest form.
- Remember giving up everything, to follow Him;
- Remember the hope we have.
- Remember the confidence we have....
- Remember, that with faithfulness, comes great reward...

The message: Faithfulness: Stick with it (Endurance).

V³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. ³⁷ For,

"Yet a little while,
and the coming one will come and will not delay;
³⁸ but my righteous one shall live by faith,
and if he shrinks back,
my soul has no pleasure in him."

One thing you can be sure of: Jesus is coming. In a little while.

And when the Day of the return of Jesus comes, there will not be any delay. It's going to be immediate. And it will be complete...

And the opposite to shrinking back, is to live by faith

Who are we???

As Disciples of Jesus, ³⁹ ,, we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

It's a bit weird isn't it, talking about the consequences of going on in a life of deliberate sin. It's a bit weird to think about drifting off into unfaithfulness.

Why is it weird?

It's because the life of a Disciple of Jesus, is eagerly awaiting the coming of our Lord. It's holding on to the faith we have, because that's the most valuable thing in the whole wide world...

But if we **do** find ourselves drifting away:

- think back to the love we had at first...
- Remember the joy of knowing Jesus;
- Remember the fact that we would give up everything for Jesus...
- And love Him. Love Him like we loved Him at first.

Let's pray:

Oh Lord Jesus,
We are so sorry,
for when we have deliberately sinned.

We knew it was wrong,
and yet, we chose the temptations of the evil one,
over the righteousness of the Spirit...

God, forgive us.

And we thank You
that as we confess our sins,
You are faithful and Just,
And you forgive us of all unrighteousness.

And so, we thank You
that we stand before you now,
Holy;
No spot or stain of sin;
No accusation of the evil one, that can stick...

And Lord,
We renew today,
Our commitment to You;
Our commitment to Your covenant.

Lord, give us faithfulness.
As we remain true to You;
As we remain true to Your Word;
As we eagerly await the coming of our Lord.

In faith, we declare:

³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

in Jesus Christ our Lord,
Amen.