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**LESSON EIGHT
BE THOU FAITHFUL**

"Be thou faithful unto death, and
I will give the a crown of life."
(Revelation 2:10)

To say that a person is faithful is to say that he is loyal and steadfast in his affections and his allegiance. He is a person who is unswerving in his adherence to some one or some thing. This lesson is designed to show the way to --- and accentuate the need for --- your faithfulness to Christ.

MORE PRECIOUS THAN LIFE

For over three hundred years persecution of the early Christians raged, and multitudes were faithful unto death.

Some were young men like Stephen, who was the first to shed his blood for his belief in Jesus Christ (see Acts chapter 17). Others were like a post-apostolic father known as Polycarp, who, according to tradition, when brought before the Roman governor and commanded to curse the name of Christ replied: "Six and eighty years have I served him, and he has done me nothing but good, and how could I curse him, my Lord and Savior." Because of such loving allegiance to his Master, the old soldier of the cross was burned to death.

There were multitudes of men, women, boys, and girls who submitted to such death rather than deny their allegiance to Christ. Their blood was shed so often in the arenas that a traveler was once asked, "Do you want a relic? Take a handful of sand from the Colosseum. It is all martyrs."

But these disciples were no different from you or me. They were not born heroic. There was something which had become more precious than their own lives, and that was **FAITHFULNESS** to their Lord and Savior. The words of the apostle Paul became their words:

"None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself, to that I might finish my course with joy." (Acts 20:24)

THE MOTIVATION OF FAITHFULNESS

How had this happened? What could cause people to count faithfulness more precious than their own lives? The answer to this question is to find the way to our own faithfulness.

First, let us consider what motivated Jesus to be perfectly faithful in doing his Father's will. He said, "But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandments, even so I do." (John 14:31) Here it is clear that the motivation to faithfulness in the life of Christ was **LOVE** for the Father.

Love was the same motivation of the apostle Paul: "For the love of Christ constraineth us." (2 Cor. 5:14)

Before the death of Jesus on the cross the apostle Peter had been unfaithful to Christ. He had denied his allegiance to him three times. After the resurrection Christ asked Peter this question three times: "Peter, lovest thou me?" (John 21:17)

Faithfulness is motivated by an unswerving love of a person. Or, as Jesus said in his own words, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." (John 14:15,23)

When we love the way of life, we will be faithful to His Way of Life. We will hunger and thirst after righteousness. We will be merciful. We will love our enemies, bless them that curse us, do good to them that hate us, and pray for them which despitefully use us and persecute us. We will turn the other cheek. We will go about doing good. And when we love the Head of the church, we will be faithful to

His church. We will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together with God's people wherever we are.

The church is not a building, it is the people of God all over the world. Wherever we are we will faithfully support the work of God's people with our own time, talent, and possessions.

The Bible is the heart of God's people and since we love God's Word to his people we will faithfully follow it: we will study it and obey it not adding to it or taking away from it. We will contend for the faith once delivered to the saints and daily teach it to others.

Yes, if we love the Word of God (John 1:1) we will be faithful to His Words. (John 15:9,10)

"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous."

(1 John 5:3)

What then had caused the early Christians to be faithful unto death? It was love. They were in love with their Savior and his people and these they would not deny.

DIRECTED IN THE WRONG DIRECTIONS

But this great motivation of faithfulness --- love --- for most has been wrongly directed. It has either been turned inward to Self or given to the wrong things. Now, however, as disciples of Christ we are no longer in the process of redirecting our love. We no longer love the world, neither the things that are in the world. We have turned our hearts away from pleasing self and have presented our bodies as "living sacrifices, holy and acceptable unto God." (Romans 12:1,2) For we are no longer our own. We have been bought with a price, therefore we glorify God in our bodies and our spirits, which are God's. (see 1 Cor. 6:20).

A religious leader was once asked the secret to his success. His answer was, "God has had all there was for me. There have been men with greater brains than I; men with greater opportunities. But I made up my mind God should have all of me there was." When God has our hearts he has all there is of us. Therefore, "Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart."

LIVING TO THE WILL OF GOD

"That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh, but to the will of God." (1 Peter 4:2)

There is a story about a very wise man who always gave the right answer to every question. One day a young boy sought to trap him. He held a live bird in his hands and said, "Mr. Wise Man, is this bird in my hands alive or is it dead?" If the wise man said it was dead, the boy would open his hands and let the bird fly away. If the wise man said it was alive, he would give his hands a quick squeeze and open them and show the bird dead. But the wise man never looked at the boy's hands --- he merely gazed into his eyes and quietly said, "Son, it is whatever you wish it to be." And so it is. The life we live is the one we wish it to be. God's way or our way --- the choice is in our own hands: As one John Oxenham put it, "And every man decideth the way his soul shall go."

This was the choice Jesus made: "Father, not my will, but thine be done." (Luke 22:42) The life of Jesus was controlled by this one supreme purpose - to do only those things which pleased his Father. This was the foundation upon which all of his earthly career was built.

In that brief moment that we see Jesus as a young boy it is evident, even at the early age of twelve, the choice he made when he told his parents, "I must be about my Father's business." These are the first words we have recorded of Jesus. His last words before his death were "It is finished." Between these first words and these last there is a life with one dominant motive:

"My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish his work." (John 4:34)

"For I am come down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." (John 6:38)

The choice Jesus made was one of total commitment in living to the will of his Father, and he would have us to choose the same. But the choice is in our own hands, for "Every man decideth the way his soul should go."

NO EXCUSE --- IT IS REQUIRED

You now have the combination for being faithful unto death:

- > Love for Christ
- > Living to the will of God.

Now consider this last thought with all you heart. When Christ said, "Be thou faithful unto death" he did not mean merely to be faithful to the end of our lives, though we certainly are to be, but he was actually saying at this point in time: Be thou faithful to me even if it means death. Therefore, to the follower of Jesus not even the possibility of death is reason for infidelity to Christ and his people.

On another occasion Jesus said: "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. . . and fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

(Matthew 10:22,28)

Though it is unlikely that you, as the early Christian did, will ever have to literally give you life because of your allegiance to Jesus, if the occasion did occur, Christ says, "Be thou faithful".

The point is this, if death is not a reason for being unfaithful to Christ, his church, or his word, what is? The answer is obvious, nothing is. Consider this statement made by the apostle Paul: "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." (1 Cor. 4:2)

What is required? Faithfulness. God expects it. And someday he will inspect it: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." (2 Cor. 5:10) Those who are found to have met the requirement shall hear: "Well done thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." (Matthew 25:21)

ENDURETH TO THE END

We are now coming to the end of this series. But for you and me, as disciples of Christ, there is on this side of eternity no finality in being faithful to God our Father and Christ our Savior. There is never a time when the soldier of the cross may unbuckle his armor and become as other men. WE shall not be saved by anything less than faithfulness to God and his Will. Only those who "Endureth to the end shall be saved."

We have answered the call "Come unto me" and now another invitation comes to us: "Abide in me." It is our earnest prayer, night and day, that we will answer this invitation too, so that some day, after we have fought a good fight and have kept the faith, the last invitation of all will come to us:

"Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matt. 25:34)

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Lesson Eight
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ACTION PAGE

1. Scripture readings for the week:

- a. Revelation 2:19
- b. I Corinthians 15:58
- c. Hebrews 10:33
- d. I John 2:25
- e. Colossians 3:25
- f. II Timothy 4:8

Read these passages through once each day for the next seven days. Read them

aloud when possible and in the order listed.

2. The following questions are to be used as a check list to help you spot the STRONG and WEAK areas of your faithfulness to Christ.

Put an X by the strong or an O by the weak. Be perfectly frank and honest with yourself. Try to see yourself as God sees you.

- Do I pray every day? (this does not include giving thanks at meals)
- Do I study God's word every day?
- Do I try to please God more than men?
- Do I gossip?
- Do I see good in others before I see the faults they have?
- Do I practice doing unto others as I would have them do unto me?
- Do I keep my speech pure?
- Do I always speak the truth?
- Is my heart free from envy and hate?
- Have I forgiven those who have wronged me in any way?
- Do I make excuses for my sins?
- Am I as concerned about spiritual things as material things?
- Do I divide my life into the secular and the sacred?
- Do I seek first to do God's will?
- Do I consider God's will when I make decisions?
- Do I ask him for guidance?
- Do I profit from the mistakes I have made in the past? or do I do the same mistakes over again?
- Do I do good for others whenever I have the opportunity?
- Do I abstain from the very appearance of evil?
- Can people tell by my actions that I am following Christ?
- Do I talk to others about Christ and salvation?
- Do I invite others to worship and Bible study?
- Do I attend each service faithfully?
- Do I look forward to Bible study and worship with my brothers and sisters in Christ?
- Am I making a sincere effort to add to my faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brother kindness love?
- Do I overcome evil with good?
- Do I try to the best of my ability to obey the commandments of God that I know and understand?
- Do I understand the combination for faithfulness --- love for Christ and living to the will of God?
- Do I understand how to put this combination into action? Am I putting it into action?
- If I continue as I am now in following Jesus will I be stronger next year?
- Have I been honest with myself in my answers?

Add up your STRONG points and your WEAK ones. Look at them and study them carefully. Determine now to capitalize upon your STRONG and to strengthen your WEAK areas. If you need help in this, consult your elders, preach, teacher, or close Christian friend for helpful suggestions and prayer.

3. Just as our Master "went about doing good" he also "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14).

So that you might carry out your responsibility as a functioning member (organ) of the body of Christ, his church, think of the various works within church you attend and

make a list of those things you would like to help with. Share that list with your elders, preacher, teacher, or close Christian friend.

DO THIS WHILE IT IS FRESH ON YOUR MIND

"I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These are good and profitable unto men" (Titus 3:8).

4. Take eight (8) 3X5 index cards and copy the following passages on them. Cut them out and carry these verses with you throughout the day and read them over to yourself at convenient times. Let them encourage you and guide you in every decision, every situation, every area of your life. Let them become your guiding principles for the rest of your life as Christ's disciple.

IF YOU LOVE ME, YOU WILL KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS.
-JOHN 4:23

FATHER, NOT MY WILL, BUT THINE BE DONE
-LUKE 22:42

AND THIS IS LOVE, THAT WE WE WALK AFTER HIS COMMANDMENTS.
-2 JOHN 6

I CAME . . . NOT TO DO MINE OWN WILL, BUT THE WILL OF HIM THAT SENT ME.
-JOHN 6:38

I GO TO THE FATHER
-JOHN 14:12

THEN SAID I, LO, I COME TO DO THY WILL, O GOD.
-HEBREWS 10:7

BE THOU FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH AND I WILL GIVE THEE A CROWN OF LIFE.
-REVELATION 2:10

MOREOVER IT IS REQUIRED IN STEWARDS, THAT A MAN BE FOUND FAITHFUL.
-1 CORINTHIANS 4:2

SUPPLEMENTARY THOUGHTS

YE CANNOT SERVE TWO MASTERS

Christ knew no divided life. But some of his disciples may. Many times the trouble lies in the idea that we must live our lives in two different worlds: the sacred and the secular; or, to put it another way, the religious and the non-religious.

Consequently, as we cross back and forth between the two we find ourselves living a divided life: trying to serve two masters. But our Lord said:

"No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24).

However,

There is a way out of this trap. Paul tells us:

"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

again:

"And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not unto men" (Colossians 3:23).

and again:

"Not with eye-service, as men pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men" (Ephesians 6:6-7).

It is very apparent from the above words that we do not have to divide our lives. On our jobs, in our homes, with our friends, whatever and wherever, we can be faithful to him by doing everything we do "as to the Lord."

THE PROMISE IS UNTO YOU

The following passages of Scriptures are arranged in such a way as to bring a special message to you concerning the promises made to those who love God and are faithful to Him. We suggest that you continually come back to these words and read them for encouragement and strength "for the promise is unto you."

ROMANS 8:32 "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

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2 PETER 1:4 "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises."

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1 CORINTHIANS 2:9 "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

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HEBREWS 3:14 "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end."

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HEBREWS 9:15 "And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance."

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HEBREWS 4:1 "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it."

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HEBREWS 10:36-37 "For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry."

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2 PETER 3:9,13-14 "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, look for a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless."

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COLOSSIANS 3:24"Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord."

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HEBREWS 10:23"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for He is faithful that promised."

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1 JOHN 2:25 "And this is the promise that he hath promised us, eternal life."

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