

## **Paul, Timothy and Troubled Times Part 12**

This morning we are looking at the last of the three statements Paul made to Timothy as he anticipated his execution. **“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” 2 Timothy 4:7.** We are talking about keeping the faith.

Paul stated in his first letter to Timothy, **“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith...” 1 Timothy 4:1.** Again in that letter he writes, **“Some people, eager for money have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” 1 Timothy 6:10**

Paul kept the faith while others abandoned or wandered from the faith. Exactly what was he referring to when he speaks of the faith? Let me suggest three things. First, **Paul kept the faith: a deep moral conviction regarding religious truth.** We sometimes say to one another, “keep the faith.” We are saying, “Keep believing the truth, keep believing that right is right, that justice will prevail, that good will overcome evil. Keep doing the right thing. Keep the faith.”

The faith for Paul was this deep conviction that what was right was right because God was who he said he was and God’s word was true. Paul was a Pharisee by birth and training - a very strict religious sect of Judaism. He knew God’s word, respected it, probably had the first five books of the Old Testament memorized and a good portion if not all of the Psalms and the prophets also. He was passionate in his defense of God’s word. He had an intellectual faith, a strong conviction but something was lacking in that faith. He needed a personal, first-hand experience with God. We spoke last week about his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. When Paul met Jesus, everything changed. His knowledge of God then was married to an experience with God that resulted in a new level of faith, a deepened conviction. Oral Roberts used to say “I know that I know that I know.” It was that kind of faith, that conviction that God is and that God’s word is true. Nothing can shake what I know by intellect and by experience.

That faith became foundational for the apostle. Bedrock. The word of God, made alive by the presence of the risen Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in his life, made this faith the guiding principle, the guiding light of his life. Everything Paul did, every decision he made was guided by the faith, this deep, living conviction that God and his word are true. This was the heart of the faith that he held onto so that thirty-five years after that encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, sitting in a prison cell in Rome dictating this final letter to Timothy, Paul can

affirm again, “I have kept the faith. I’ve guarded it and watched over it and held it in highest regard and it has held me! It is still alive. God is, his word is true, and that conviction is stronger than ever. It is still keeping me, sustaining me and encouraging me regardless of my circumstances.” We need that kind of bedrock faith, that solid conviction that God and his word are true and nothing can overturn that faith. Keep the faith!

Not only was the faith Paul kept a deep conviction, **Paul kept the faith: a reliance upon Christ alone for salvation.** This is the essence of that faith, the essence of our faith. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ. This is our faith.

Remember Paul was raised as a Pharisee, attempting to rigidly keep every aspect of the law in hopes of pleasing God, but somehow he realized even as a Pharisee his righteousness was not enough and his best works couldn’t earn God’s favor. Through Christ, Paul found salvation by grace through faith. Paul writes, **“But now a righteousness from God apart from law has been made known to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.” Romans 3:21-25.** This is what Paul believed. This is the essence of that faith that Paul guarded and kept, that while we were sinners, Christ died for us and now, through repentance and faith in Jesus, our sins have been forgiven. We are justified, declared innocent, forgiven, by our faith in him and in his sacrifice for us. Our redemption came by Christ Jesus. His death atoned for us and for our sins. This is the faith Paul kept, the faith he guarded, and not just as a belief for his personal salvation, but Paul guarded this doctrine for the church and for all of us!

Paul fought battles with people wanting to add things to the gospel, to grace, to the faith. Some wanted to add requirements for salvation. Salvation comes by grace through faith in Christ, plus keeping all the law, eating kosher, celebrating holy days, keeping the Sabbath on Saturday, physical circumcision for men. Some argued that salvation came by faith in Christ and by becoming more Jewish. There are still some who insist you encounter God through a Jewish experience. Some try to insist you get saved through faith in Christ but then you have to be baptized a certain way, or with a certain formula, or you have to speak in tongues, or you need to

dress a certain way, but Paul insisted that nothing else saves us or makes us presentable to God. Salvation is by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the faith!

You know one of my favorite verses. **“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy...This is a trustworthy saying.” Titus 3:4-8** Thank God! Hold on to the faith, the gospel of God’s saving grace. We don’t go to heaven by what we’ve done but by what He has done. Nothing else can get you to heaven but his grace. Let me add, the good works and acts of discipline and holiness, those aren’t in order to save you, those are in response to being saved. I’m saved, so I live a holy life and I live in ways that please the Lord. Not in order to be saved, but because I’m saved by grace!

Finally, **Paul kept the faith: The whole body of biblical truth, the whole gospel.** The faith Paul kept was the whole truth: God’s word, the teaching of the prophets and the apostles, the lifestyle of godliness and holiness, the tradition of the church, the church itself, the hope we have in Christ and in his mercy and grace, the truth that’s been preserved and kept and handed down to us over the centuries, the collective wisdom of the church fathers and elders, the way we deal with the world and culture around us as believers, the list could go on, but all of this wrapped together in some sense is the faith that we hold to. It was more than just one thing, it was everything. The word, the worship, the life, the liturgy, the hope, the knowledge, the experience, the tradition, the wisdom, the life of the Spirit, the faith. It was the faith Paul lived by, the faith that had kept him through the troubled times and it was the faith he would die by. He lived it, defended it and was ready to die for it. Paul kept the faith.

Paul knew the faith had and would always stand the tests of experience and time. The faith, that Jude said was “delivered to the saints” – that gospel, that hope, that body of truth, that way of life, we have to keep and guard that faith. The faith, hallowed by the blood of martyrs from every tribe and nation in every century, that faith, delivered to us by faithful men and women, that faith, proclaimed faithfully and uncompromisingly in spite of persecution and hardship, that is the faith that we must guard and keep. That faith is under attack in a multitude of ways. It’s under attack from without as attempts are made to silence the voice and role of faith in the public square and in our society. It’s under attack from within as biblical standards of holiness are compromised by church denominations and church members. God help us to

keep the faith! Which brings me to this final point. Paul said he kept the faith, which implies we have a choice, we can either keep the faith or not.

We mentioned the Scriptures from 1 Timothy about abandoning the faith or wandering from the faith. The bible speaks of a day of apostasy. Apostasy means a defection, a falling away from what you once believed. We are seeing it happen. People abandoning the faith. I pray we will see an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and a time of great harvest and signs and wonders but at the same time I believe we will see a falling away and people abandoning the faith. Does that falling away happen all at once or is it a process over time? I think it's a process. Let me share something Don Stamps wrote in the Full Life Study Bible concerning the steps to apostasy.

Believers fail to take the truths, the warnings, commandments, promises and teachings of God seriously. It just doesn't matter anymore. They just don't care and disregard God's word.

The realities of the world become greater than the realities of God and his heavenly kingdom. Believers gradually stop drawing near to God through Christ. You stop praying, stop worshipping, stop obeying, stop listening, stop responding.

Through the deceitfulness of sin, you become increasingly tolerant of sin and compromise in your own life. You no longer love righteousness and hate wickedness.

Through the gradual hardening of your heart and rejecting God's ways, you ignore the voice and calling and conviction of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, the Holy Spirit is grieved, His fire is put out (extinguished), his temple is violated, all conviction of sin is ignored, the choice is made and the faith is rejected and abandoned and the Spirit of the Lord departs from the former believer and he is lost.

What a tragedy, that the faith is abandoned. It's not an accident, it's a choice, but it's a choice no one should make. Understand, the bible says God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. If you've wandered from the faith, if you've abandoned the faith, there is still redemption and forgiveness available for you. It's time for you to come home to Jesus, come home to the faith.

Perhaps you find yourself in one of these steps toward abandoning the faith. Paul writes, **“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you – unless of course, you fail the test?” 2 Corinthians 13:5** Eugene Peterson paraphrased that passage like this. **“Test yourselves to make sure you are solid in the**

**faith. Don't drift along taking everything for granted. Give yourselves regular checkups. You need firsthand evidence, not mere hearsay, that Jesus Christ is in you. Test it out. If you fail the test, do something about it." 2 Corinthians 13:5 The Message Bible**

Paul kept the faith, that deep conviction about God and his word, that assurance that salvation was through faith in Christ alone. He kept the faith, that whole body of truth, that whole way of life that is found in Christ and living in obedience to His word, that whole life in the Spirit. That's how he lived and how he finished. How about you? Are you keeping the faith? Have you started to wander from it, allowing compromise to creep into some area of your life? Don't drift along. Give yourself a checkup. Are you keeping the faith? Are you living in obedience to God and his word? "If you fail the test, do something about it!" Keep the faith!

Let me read something I wrote about twenty years ago. "We live in a church culture that just wants to be blessed, affirmed, pampered and then have our rebellion and sins excused and explained away. We want to just go right ahead with our lives, living as we choose, disregarding His word. Still go to church, still shout with the rest of them, dance during worship, carry a big bible, a book of God's top 100 promises for any and every occasion with a bottle of anointing oil in our pocket or purse and every other word we speak is in tongues...but when we stop believing this book, when we stop obeying this book, when we start honoring the flesh and stop listening to His Holy Spirit, when we start looking for short cuts to God and his blessings, when we substitute formulas for intercessory prayer, positive confession for holiness in our daily lives, religious gimmickry for true repentance, we have abandoned the faith."

God help us to examine our hearts, to keep the faith as individuals and as a church! The faith is under an ever increasing attack. Don't drift, don't compromise, don't stop. If you are drifting from the faith, do something about it! Stop the drift. Renew your faith, your devotion to the Lord. Fight the good fight, finish the course, keep the faith!