

"KEEPING THE FAITH"

Near the end of the apostle Paul's life, he states:

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

Notice that, as Paul reminisces, he does not simply acknowledge that he has faith, but rather he has "kept the faith." The word translated, "kept," is a compound Greek word meaning to watch or guard "by keeping the eye upon;" to detain or to keep in custody (Strong's). Paul could look forward to life after death because he had done much more than just believe; he guarded and kept a close watch upon the revelation of Truth given to him by God.

Jude exhorts that we "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). The "faith" spoken of by both Jude and Paul is a reference to the system of faith, revealed in God's Word, by which one can be reconciled to God (Rom. 5:10) and be saved. Quoting Scripture, Paul says, "the just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:17) and explains in verse 16 that this just way of living ("by faith") is found in the Gospel of Christ. In order to "keep" the faith, therefore, one must be obedient to God's Word. In the parable of the sower, Jesus says, "the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the Word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15, emph. B.G.). Jesus also says, "Blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it" (Luke 11:28, emph. B.G.).

God's Word is precious and valuable. The wise man Solomon extols, "buy the truth, and sell it not" (Pro. 23:23). Its value is far above any earthly possession. It is by God's Word that one can find salvation (Rom. 1:16). For this reason, God's Word must be "kept" exactly as it is written, adding nothing and subtracting nothing (Rev. 22:18-19). When Noah was commanded to build an ark, he "kept" God's Word. He added nothing and subtracted nothing—"according to all that God commanded him, so did he" (Gen. 6:22).

After the death of Moses, Joshua was entrusted with the responsibility of leading God's people into the Land of Promise. God told Joshua,

Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest (Jos. 1:6-7, emph. B.G.).

In order to be obedient to God, Joshua and the children of Israel had to "keep" God's Word.

Knowing that some had "erred concerning the faith" (i.e., they no longer were keeping the faith by ceasing to be obedient to God's Word), Paul encourages Timothy to "keep that which is committed to thy trust" (1 Tim. 6:20-21). In Paul's second letter to Timothy, Paul exhorts, "hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us" (2 Tim. 1:13-14). "That good thing" Timothy was to "keep" (i.e., guard, protect, watch over, obey) was God's Word. In being faithful to God's Word, and thus "keeping" the faith, Timothy would be saved and help save others. Paul again commends, "take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4:16). Paul's definition of "keeping" the faith is here expressed as taking heed and continuing in obedience to doctrine (God's Word).

Let us take heed to protect and guard God's Word as it has been given to us in the New Testament—adding or subtracting nothing. Let us take heed to be obedient to the Gospel of Christ, which "is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom. 1:16). Let us live a life in harmony with "the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3, ASV) so that we, like Paul, will be able to proclaim, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."