

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Bible Student* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bible-student_01.php



"The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light"

C O N T E N T S

| | |
|---|-----|
| THE FIVE "FAITHFUL SAYINGS" | 145 |
| THE TESTIMONY OF BIBLE PROPHECY ... | 154 |
| WORLD LEADERS IN THE FINAL CRISES | 161 |
| THE THEOPHANIES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT | 166 |
| NOTES ON HEBREWS | 171 |
| THE HEBREW PSALTER | 178 |
| HOW TO STUDY AND UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE | 184 |
| EXEGETICAL STUDY OF COLOSSIANS ... | 190 |

The Bible Student

Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD

NEW SERIES

OCTOBER 1951

VOL. XXII No. 4

THE FIVE "FAITHFUL SAYINGS"

BY THE EDITOR

One very interesting feature of the three pastoral Epistles, which we find nowhere else in the N.T., are the five "faithful sayings", so called because they each have the formula, "*Faithful is the saying*", attached, either at the beginning or at the end of the "saying". The expression "*pistos ho logos*" is unique. Somewhat of a parallel, viz., "*These words are faithful and true*", occurs twice, in Revelation (21:5 and 22:6), but the difference is obvious and so are the contexts. It is also interesting to compare Christ's repeated "*Verily, verily*" ("truly, truly") found in John's Gospel.

The relevant passages are as follows, taken from the R.V.:—

1. "Faithful is the saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (I. Tim. 1: 15).

2. "Faithful is the saying, If a man seeketh the office of a bishop (overseer), he desireth a good work." (I. Tim. 3: 1).

3. "Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come. Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptation." (I. Tim. 4: 8, 9).

4. "Faithful is the saying: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we endure, we shall also reign with Him, etc. (II. Tim. 2: 11-13).

5. "When the kindness of God our Saviour, and his love toward man, appeared . . . according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost . . . that . . . we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Faithful is the saying . . ." (Titus 3: 4-8).

(NOTE: *All* the verses given in *each* reference are included in the "saying".)

Let us note certain initial points:—

(1) The R.V. rendering of the phrase or formula is the more correct, for the emphasis in the Greek is on the word "faithful"—

"*faithful is the saying*". Faithful is used in the sense of *trustworthy*; that upon which the fullest reliance can be placed, and therefore demands our acceptance.

(2) This is further strengthened in two references by the addition of "worthy of all acceptance" (1 Tim. 1:15; 4:9). The word "acceptation" does not occur again in the Gk. N.T., but we have "*acceptable in the sight of God*" twice (1 Tim. 2:3; 5:4). The "all" means *everyone*.

(3) In three of the references the formula comes *before* the attached "saying" or statement (i.e. in Nos. 1, 2, 4); whilst in Nos. 3 and 5 it comes at the *end*. This is the order most generally accepted by the best commentators, but there are those who differ from this view. For example, a few would refer the formula in Nos. 2 and 4 to what *precedes* it; and in Nos. 3 and 5 to what *follows* it. Humphreys (in *Camb. Bible for Schools* series) holds that the formula refers in *all* cases to the sentences *following* it. We have however felt confident in adopting the more widely held opinion as indicated above; but the serious student will wish to examine for himself by careful study.

(4) The interesting question arises regarding the nature of these "faithful sayings". The general opinion has been that they were current "sayings" among the early Christians, which Paul quotes, and endorses with his emphatic "faithful". It is not possible to dogmatize, but there is something in the suggestion that they originally derive from some simple creed or catechism, either written or probably only taught orally in the scattered assemblies.

No. 5 may even have been taken from some well-known hymn, for we may presume that "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" were already in use in the churches (see Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; James 5:13). Dr. Cox (in his *Expositions*) asserts that in all probability some of these were "prophetic sayings; sayings first uttered by the 'prophets' of the church (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28)". He goes on to say: "If we remember that these sayings are found only in the Pastoral Epistles, and that these epistles were not written till more than 30 years after Pentecost, i.e. after the Christian 'prophets' had commenced their work, we shall at least admit that there had been ample time for some of their sayings to have crept into common use, to have won general acceptance

as true, trustworthy and most happy expressions of the fundamental truths of the Gospel." Whatever their origin, the manner in which the apostle cites these "Sayings" in confirmation of his own words indicates their more or less "authoritative" character.

Turning to the more detailed study of the passages, we may profitably consider them as a definite *body* of Christian teaching. They have a fairly obvious progressive development of subject matter which seems to link them together. Viewed thus they may be described as the "sign-marks" of the Christian "Way", as the latter term is used characteristically by Luke several times in the Acts (see R.V. of Acts 9:2; 18:25, 26; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22).* Those early Christians, were known as followers of Him who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6). Their whole life testimony proclaimed their allegiance to the Lord Christ—the "File-leader" (*archēgon*, Heb. 12:2) in this new "Way". They wore no distinctive badge or garment (as some are fond of doing today) but they could be recognised by their outstanding character and conduct. There was no mistaking them in any environment.

Thus we may summarise the teaching of the whole group as follows (the numbering corresponds with that already given on page 145 above).

- No. 1. *Christ's Coming*—the Means of Sin's Forgiveness: The initial entrance into the "Way".
- No. 2. *Christ's Ministry*—the Privilege of Spiritual Service.
- No. 3. *Christ's Life*—the Mark of Holy Character.
- No. 4. *Christ's Fellowship*—the Way of enduring Witness.
- No. 5. *Christ's Salvation*—the Foundation of the New Life, present and future.

Taking them in this order, we shall examine each briefly:

No. 1 *Christ's Coming*: In this first "Saying" the apostle sets out two important matters concerning Christ Himself: He affirms His *pre-existence* and His *mission*. "Jesus Christ came into (*hēlthen eis*) the world" can only mean He must have existed in heaven

* In the R.V. the word is printed with a capital "W" to indicate its distinctive usage by Luke, viz., that it was the *new mode of thought and life* of the early Christians as a result of Christ's work and teaching; so different from their former life, and from the prevailing Judaism of the Pharisees. In this sense "Way" could be equivalent to "cult" or "culture" in the highest *spiritual* sense.

before He came. The phrase occurs frequently in John's Gospel, and each reference carries that connotation, specially ch. 16:28—"I came out from the Father (which has the force, "*from beside the Father*") and am come into the world" (cf. also Ch. 1:9; 12:46). The Son "*knew* whence He came and whither He went" (John 8:14). This point fittingly comes first in the "Sayings", for it establishes both the deity of Jesus and the object of His mission, "to save sinners". None but One so qualified could accomplish salvation and all it implied for mankind at large.

In addition, the personal note added by the apostle focuses attention on the individuality of this salvation,—“of whom *I* am chief” classes him with all the rest of mankind as sinners, for whom Christ came to die. He could never lose sight of *his* own former state as the enemy of God and His Son the Saviour, for it demonstrated the wondrous grace of God towards every such individual sinner in rebellion against God. The next verse brings this out even more clearly—“that in *me as chief* (of sinners) might Jesus Christ shew forth all His longsuffering”, (or as Dr. Vaughan translates—“His *all-patience*”). Hence the “Way” is open to *all*, but each needs to enter by the “wicket gate” of repentance and salvation for himself.

No. 2 *Christ's Ministry*: The A.V. here needlessly varies the formula, which the R.V. correctly renders—“faithful is the saying”. The chief lesson here is the privilege of spiritual service, with the underlying point of contrast to the *old* service of self, sin, and Satan. Whilst the special reference is to overseership in the Assembly, we must not forget that in the N.T. it is not so much the sphere but the *spirit* in which all service for God is rendered that is of supreme importance.

The A.V. also errs in rendering two different words by “desire”, which mars the whole point of the apostle's exhortation. The first word is the Greek *oregetai*, which means actually “stretches forward to”, not in any ambitious or grasping sense, but rather as a legitimate moral aspiration, the outcome of the Holy Spirit's inworking. The second term really means “aspires to”. Underlying both words is the latent yet obvious necessity of *growth* in spiritual maturity, progressing from the lesser to the greater sphere of activity. No one begins at the top; there must be a beginning in lowlier service where the aspirant learns initial lessons which

can alone qualify him for more responsible spheres of service, particularly in the things of the spiritual life.

This, we suggest, is the important general teaching of the "Saying" for all of us. And the verses which follow (2-13) indicate the spiritual qualifications which need to be cultivated in *any* service for God. Addressed as it is to a young man in the faith, it serves as a challenge to the Christian youth of today who have a wonderful opportunity to qualify for such service for God *within the church*. There is an increasing demand for true spiritual leadership in the assemblies of God's people, along the lines particularly dealt with in this chapter. Evangelism, vigorous and strong, is needed in abundance, but it is within the church itself that guidance, directive, and sane moral judgment on matters connected with the collective testimony to a distraught world, and to an increasingly ineffective and debilitated ecclesiasticism, is even more needed.

It is well to point out before leaving this subject, that the particular phrase occurring here, "*the office of a bishop*", is a misleading translation of the original. Alford in dealing with this point acknowledges here that, "the *episcopoi* (overseers) of the N.T. have officially *nothing in common with our bishops*" (our italics). And no less a commentator than Ellicott remarks without reserve: "It seems proper to remark that we must fairly, acknowledge with Jerome that in the Pastoral epistles, the terms *episcopos* and *presbyteros* (cf. Tit. 1:5) are applied indifferently to the same persons." To these we may usefully add Lilley's remarks on the same subject: "The terms 'episcopate' or 'office of a bishop', though etymologically accurate, is really inadmissible, because it suggests the features of 'singularity in succession and superiority in ordination', which had no place in the primitive conception of the office." He continues: "The 'official' here spoken of was one of a body that was jointly responsible for the 'oversight' of the flock, and the qualifications desiderated had to be found in one and all." In any study of the subject of leadership in the church or local assembly these points are of utmost importance. The apostle was not dealing with anything like "officialism" within the assembly, he was dealing with the godly responsibility of spiritual leadership and care of the assembly as a whole.

No. 3 *Christ's Life*: It is worth noting that the R.V. of the

previous verse 7 begins a new sentence in the *middle* with the words, "And exercise thyself unto godliness." This connects, therefore, directly with verse 8 which continues the same thought and expands it. The main subject of the "Saying" is *godliness*, and the necessity to be "*disciplined*" therein. The word *godliness* (*usebeia*) occurs in the Pastorals ten times but in none other of Paul's epistles. The cognate *theosebeia*, also translated "godliness", is found in 1 Tim. 2:10 and nowhere else. Both Greek words are formed from the verb *sebomai*, to worship, or to reverence—a word much used by Luke in the Acts of the "devout" Jews living in their midst. Both are used in the same sense, the devout worship and service of God. Godliness is not the mere belief in God and acknowledgment of Him in outward ceremonial or ritual. It is practical religion, only with a God-ward devotion and aspiration and is exhibited in godly character and behaviour, indicative of the reality of the new life within. In 1 Tim. 6:3 it is the test of *true* doctrine, contrasting "the doctrine which is *according to godliness*" with the teaching that leads to envy and strife. The same test is alluded to in Tit. 1:1, concerning the "knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness." Moreover there is such a thing as "holding a form of godliness", yet "denying the power thereof" (2 Tim. 3:5), "supposing that godliness is a way of gain" (1 Tim. 4:8).

The apostle appeals, therefore, for an energetic, purposive cultivation of the true godliness. This has to be a daily habit. The whole spiritual nature is involved; the mind, heart, and will. The apostle uses the verb *gumnazō*, "exercise", in v. 7, and the noun *gymnasia* in v. 8 from which we get our "gymnastics" and "gymnasium" and all that they imply in the training of the athlete, the soldier, etc. The similar thought is found in Chap. 6:11, where Timothy is urged to "*flee* from" the multifarious hindrances of the previous verses, and to "follow after (*diōko*) righteousness, godliness", etc. The strong ethical force of *diōko* is illustrated further in Phil. 3, where it occurs three times, in v. 6, "persecuting"; in vs. 12 and 14, "I press on". And Paul himself sets the example of such a spirit of strenuous discipline in 1 Cor. 9:25, 27 (R.V.), where the Greek *agonizomai* ("striveth") gives us our word *agonize*, and "buffet" really means "bruise into shape".

Such is the "vivid" and "strenuous" holiness of character to which we are summoned—a true "sign-mark" of "The Way" which leads to glory!

No. 4 *Christ's Fellowship*: Paul has been exhorting Timothy in the previous verses of this passage (2 Tim. 2:3-10) to be a brave soldier, strenuous as an athlete, laborious as a husbandman. He cites the example of Christ, and then his own example: "I suffer hardship unto bonds . . . I endure all things for the elect's sake . . ." (v. 9). Now we would encourage Timothy to the same spirit of loyalty and endurance in the same noble cause, in the face of persecution.

The successive clauses are carefully balanced; the first two dealing with *faith*, and last two with *unbelief*. It is this rhythmic form which lends colour to the suggestion it is part of a well-known hymn. The present and future effects of faith are here blended together, with perhaps some emphasis on the latter, but it is not easy to separate them for the one are the roots of the other. They may be set out as follows, transliterated from the Greek:—

If we died with Him, we
shall also live with Him.
If we endure, we shall also
reign with Him.
If we shall deny Him, He
also will deny us.
If we are faithless, He
abideth faithful.

It has been pointed out that clauses 1, 2 and 4, appear to have their roots in the epistle to the Romans. The words of clause 1 are similar to those in Romans 6:8, but while in Romans the thought is of baptism as typifying a death to sin, here the reference seems to be to death by martyrdom. But we may also connect it with 2 Cor. 4:10, where Paul avers he was "always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus"; that is, his was, as ours should be, a "daily dying" (1 Cor. 15:31) in order to "fill up the sufferings of Christ" (Col. 1:24) for "His body's sake", i.e., the Church.

Then the *second* clause seems to reflect the thought of Rom. 8:17; whilst the *third* is more reminiscent of the Lord's words in Matt. 10:33. But the tense of the verb here is *future*, implying a contingency to be shunned, and not to be contemplated: "Never even *think* of denying Him however great the trial." The final clause is the most solemn, for it implies not just "untrueness" or

“unfaithfulness”, the “denials of our weaker moments”, but definitely unbelief (Ellicott. Cf. Mark 16:11, 16). But God abides faithful alike to His unchangeable purpose, His promises and His warnings: He cannot deny His nature, His name, nor His antagonism to sin (see Rom. 3:3).

We have in this “Saying”, therefore, mingled encouragement and warning, the grand possibilities of faith, feeble though it be, if only it is true; and the solemn warning against unfaithfulness; of denying Him whom we thought to trust, until the enemy became too strong! We cannot play fast and loose with the longsufferings, the tender mercies, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Though there is pardon and final recovery for the truly born-of-the-Spirit believer, let such remember the tremendous “loss” we incur by “living on the edge” spiritually between “life and death”. But the loss of those who, having once professed and then have gone back, is beyond description in its tragedy. Let us *live ever* in the first two stanzas of this great “Saying”.

No. 5 *Christ's Salvation*: Although the second epistle to Timothy was written after the one to Titus, the “Saying” it contains would seem to be in its moral order, containing as it does a somewhat comprehensive statement of salvation in its origin, present channel, and future hope. We cannot consider it in detail but confine our study to a few points.

It will be observed how the three Persons of the Trinity are fundamentally and equally active in the divine scheme of salvation. The Source is found in God's “kindness” (*chrēstotēs*) and “love-for-man” (*philanthropia*). The former word is used again in Rom. 2:4, the “riches of His goodness” (kindness), and in Eph. 2:7 it is coupled with the “riches of His grace”, as revealed through Christ. God's “mercy” is also mentioned, as so constantly in the Psalms.

Then follow two phrases which are related with the Holy Spirit, the “washing of regeneration” and the “renewing”. The first has nothing to do with baptism, though a number of commentators so connect it because of their ecclesiastical view-point. Baptism is never referred to in the N.T. as a “cleansing” medium, but solely as an *act* of confession of having “died with Christ to sin”, and being raised again to “walk in newness of life” with Him (Rom. 6:3, 4). Its value is nil until the new birth has

become a reality in experience through the Holy Spirit's operation. Whether it is exegetically correct to consider "regeneration" here as equivalent to the new birth is not easily determined, though many so view it. The only other occurrence of the word in the N.T. is in Matt. 19:28 with a very different connotation. What is perfectly clear, however, is that the Holy Spirit is the "Agent" of the new birth, which implies a new life altogether different to the old, and that He is ever *renewing* it to a fuller growth and manifestation in all its aspects (cf. John 3:5-8; 16:13, 14; 1 Cor. 2:10-14; 2 Cor. 4:16; Col. 3:10; Rom. 12:2). Further, the "medium" through which the Holy Spirit cleanses and renews is the Word itself (Eph. 5:26, 27). Nothing can make up for the neglect of the Scriptures.

Thus the Holy Spirit is said to be "*poured out* upon us richly", which is probably a reference to His first coming recorded in Acts 2:33, where the same aorist tense is used indicative of an accomplished fact once for all, but in which "all His successive giving was potentially included."

Finally, all this is said to come "through Jesus Christ", the One who made it possible by His death, resurrection, and ascension to the right of the Father. The words 'justified' and 'heirs', are the two great themes of the epistles to the Romans and Galatians, as well as other passages, which are devoted to the exposition of the standing of the believer in Christ (cf. Rom. 5:1, 2; 8:1-11, etc.). We have, therefore, in this "Saying" a remarkable though condensed presentation of the foundation upon which our whole salvation rests. It remains for us to demonstrate in life and in word that we are not only followers in "The Way", but that these "Sign-marks" are attractively "displayed" in and by us for the help, succour and encouragement of those who may be seeking the Way to the Eternal City of our God.

RESOLVED: "We will go by the King's High Way, we will not turn to the right hand nor to the left, until we have passed!" (Numbers 20:17).