

A PLEA FOR FAITHFULNESS

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

A faithful person is one who is trustworthy in the transaction of business, the execution of commands, or the discharge of duties. Faithfulness is one of the most beautiful things in the world. It elicits our admiration wherever we find it. The measure of one's worth is his faithfulness to duty. Every noble quality and high virtue draw their life and strength from faithfulness. It is a great thing to be able to awaken in others the realization and assurance that you are dependable.

Through the lives and services of godly, dedicated, capable, faithful and dependable deacons many of the Lord's churches have been greatly blessed, and the cause of Christ has been advanced, and our church is one of that number.

The six brethren who were elected by our church at the June business meeting are to be congratulated upon their election to this scriptural office for this particular task for the next four years. Their election is simply and definitely a call from God through His church to service. This office is not simply a post of honor or authority, but it is a medium of service. Those of you who have been elected to this office now occupy a position of trust, honor, influence and responsibility. Brother Cornett, upon your ordination, you will be inaugurated into a highly important service for God, your church, and others. We hope that your ordination will be a significant event in your life and in the life of our church. How honorable and useful a deacon you will be is going to be determined by your attitude, spirit, and manner of doing your work. The esteem in which you will be held in the church, and the extent of your influence in the future, will be determined by you in response to the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

I. Faithfulness To Christ.

Christ is the author of our beings, the healer of our diseases, the comforter of our sorrows, and the guide of our lives. He walks with us, talks with us, enlightens us, ennobles us, sustains us, guides us, and empowers us. He strengthens our courage, brightens our hopes, illumines our faith, and warms our hearts. He is adequate and available for all our needs. His living presence is the real inspiration to holy living, to heroic endeavor, and to high achievement. He is anxious for each of us to give Him His rightful place in the heart and life.

In His gracious characterization of believers Christ says, "I have called you friends," Now, what do you call being faithful to a friend? It is to have such a real love for him that we shall seek his company and delight in it. Let it be so with Christ. Seek His face and listen to Him daily.

Faithfulness to Christ includes faithfulness to the church. Some have thought, and mistakenly so, that being faithful to Christ is one thing and faithfulness to the church is another, but Christ knows and teaches otherwise. We cannot be loyal, faithful and true to Christ without being the same to His church. By our attitude toward and relationship to the church we prove our relationship to Christ.

II. Faithfulness To Duty.

The most sacred duty is that of obedience to God's Word and conformity to God's will, everywhere and at all times. We should be faithful to duty, whatever the Word of God or the providence of God shows it to be. The Lord expects us to be faithful to duty through all temptations, opposition and suffering. We certainly admire the steady faithfulness of those who have wrought well for the Lord through the centuries.

Moses was one man who was faithful in God's service. God could and did depend on him.

John the Baptist was faithful and loyal to Christ even though he had to go to jail to prove his fidelity.

We admire the faithfulness to Christ and to duty which Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, demonstrated. He declared his purpose in life when he said, "I magnify mine office" (Romans 11:13). Even when Paul was stoned, or beaten with rods, or stranded on the sea, or incarcerated in prison, or was facing death, he could declare: "I magnify mine office." What a glorious statement for a man to be able to make!

This splendid declaration, "I magnify mine office," speaks the language of hope, keeps faith with the heart, and marches with the tread of a triumphant victor. Such a purpose should influence men to launch out into the depths of Christian experience, to attempt heroic exploits for God, and to do their very best. This is the standard of the Christian religion. It is the challenge to a supreme excellence. It is a royal motto which is appropriate for any heart devoted to Christ. Paul's life was geared to the highest power that ever controlled a human being, so he did not hesitate to say, "I magnify mine office."

This attitude helped Paul to endure his many hardships. It also helped him to achieve. He was never ready to rest nor willing to surrender. He simply had an undying passion to magnify his office. To the glorious task of propagating the gospel Paul gave the best that he had. He was not willing to be less than the best within his reach, or to do less than all he could.

Just as in Paul's day, God needs men who are lovingly and loyally devoted to Him to the extent that they are willing and ready to magnify the office of a Christian in service for the glory of Christ and the salvation of others.

Each Christian has an office to fill. An office is a special trust, position or duty which is conferred by authority for a definite purpose. Every Christian should magnify his office. He should do so because of Him Who has appointed him to that office and service. The child of God should magnify his office because of the importance of the work to be done. Our Lord will appreciate and reward those who faithfully fill their offices.

According to the teachings of the Scriptures, there are some things which you as a deacon should do. You should grow as a Christian through Bible study, prayer and public worship, help fill the church pews, care for the sick and needy, enlist the unenlisted, greet visitors, help create a good fellowship, look after the church finances, give some time to the church, be willing to do some disagreeable tasks, and do your best.

For this type of service your reward will be the consciousness of a task well done, the appreciation of your pastor and people, joy over helpful service rendered, another opportunity for similar service in the future, the blessing of our Lord upon you and your efforts, and a crown of glory.

III. Faithfulness Unto Death.

This does not mean to the end of your life, but rather "to the worst which the enemy can inflict upon thee, even to death itself." Be faithful enough to die for Me if necessary. "Keep on proving faithful unto death" as the martyrs have done. At the close of the first century all of the apostles except John had died as martyrs. Then followed two centuries during which the Roman Empire sought to abolish Christianity with violence. Many outstanding instances of suffering, martyrdom and victory occurred.

At times Christians were killed until the weapons were dulled. So many were destroyed by ferocious lions that at times these animals, filled with human flesh and blood, refused to continue their attacks. Christians, before packed amphitheatres and surrounded by roaring lions, went to death with triumphant praying, singing and testimony. Others

were known to arise in balconies, declare their faith in Christ, and ask for the privilege of dying for Christ. Their requests were granted at times by their being tossed over the balconies into the arena.

Polycarp, the aged pastor of the church at Smyrna, was a good example of one who was faithful unto death and died as a martyr. In the year 167 a cruel persecution broke out against the Christians. Polycarp wanted to await at his post the fate which threatened him, but his people compelled him to shelter himself in a quiet retreat, where he might hide in safety they thought. For a while he remained undiscovered, and spent his time in prayer and intercession for the persecuted Christians. At last his enemies seized one of his children, and, by torture, compelled him to make known where his father was hiding. Satisfied now that his hour had arrived, Polycarp refused further flight, saying, "The will of God be done."

He came from the upper story of the house to meet his captors, ordered them as much refreshment as they might desire, and only asked of them this favor, that they would grant him yet one hour of undisturbed prayer, which they granted. He was then conveyed back to the city of Smyrna and was tried on the charge of being a Christian. The officer before whom he appeared tried to persuade him to yield to the demand of offering a sacrifice to the emperor. But not for one moment would the venerable Polycarp consent. When he appeared in the amphitheatre, the one in charge said to him that if he would curse Christ he would set him free. But the old minister answered, "Eighty and six years have I served Christ, and He has never done me wrong; how, then, can I deny Him, my King and my Saviour?" In vain was Polycarp threatened with being thrown to the wild beasts or burned alive; and at last the fatal proclamation was made that, "Polycarp confessed himself a Christian." This was the death warrant. He was condemned to be burned alive.

Jews and Gentiles alike hastened in rage and fury to collect wood from the baths and workshops for the funeral pile. The old man laid aside his garments, and took his place in the midst of the fuel. When they would have nailed him to the stake, he said to them, "Leave me thus, I pray, unfastened; He Who has enabled me to brave the fire will give me strength also to endure its fierceness." He then uttered this brief prayer: "O Lord, Almighty God, the Father of Thy beloved Son Jesus Christ, through Whom we have received a knowledge of Thee, God of the angels and of the whole creation, of the whole race of man, and of the saints who live before Thy presence; I thank Thee that Thou hast thought me worthy, this day and this hour, to share the cup of Thy Christ among the number of Thy witnesses!" The fire was kindled, but a high wind drove the flame to one side, and prolonged his sufferings; and at last the executioner slew him with a sword. Thus did one of Christ's saints at Smyrna die, "faithful unto death," and winner of "the crown of life," and never to "be hurt of the second death."

If you will be faithful in the performance of your duties as a deacon, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have done your duty, the realization that you have honored Christ and advanced His cause, the consciousness that you have helped others, the appreciation of some of the people to whom your services have been helpful, and the assurance of the commendation of the Lord in the words: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."