

Digging Deeper :

Persecution has occurred many times in the past and continues today. Several times the persecution has done far less damage than its aftermath.

A fierce persecution arose under the Roman Emperor Diocletian about 300AD. In North Africa the Governor was more lenient. Christians were not required publicly to renounce their faith but were required to hand over their copies of the Scriptures. Some complied, and were known thereafter as *traditores*, those who 'handed over'. Others, often the poorer believers, refused. The problem that arose was what to do as the persecution subsided. Should the *traditores* be allowed back into the church. Many who had suffered so much said not. The whole issue got tied up in questions about penance, in what circumstances could someone be forgiven for sins committed as a believer.

The matter was particularly acute with clergy who were *traditores* and whether they should continue to minister. When an alleged *traditores* Bishop was involved in consecrating a new Bishop of Carthage the stricter believers objected and appointed their own Bishop in opposition.

Inevitably the lines hardened. The Bishop who followed the first alternative one was called Donatus Magnus and the stricter group eventually became known as Donatists. With time they were denounced by the wider church and they responded in kind. A century later they were still strong in North Africa and only seem to have disappeared after the spread of Islam.

Do you think the stricter party were right in their attitude?
Are their situations in which people should be barred or suspended from ministry or from membership?
Should there be a mechanism by which they can then be restored and in what situations would this be or not be a full restoration to the same position as before?

David Phillips, May 2012

The Fruit of the Spirit is ... faithfulness ...

Bible Study 7 on Gal 5.22-23



The Greek word *pistis* is usually translated as "faith". It is the word found in Galatians 5.22 but is usually translated as faithfulness because all the other fruit are virtues. The related verb, *pisteuo*, means to believe. The equivalent family of Hebrew words in the Old Testament include the word *amen* - truly.

To be faithful means to be trustworthy and true. To believe in someone means to accept that person as faithful, trustworthy and true.

The faithful God

Read Deuteronomy ch 7 vv 7-11

Why did God choose Israel?

Had they done anything to deserve it?

This is what we mean by grace. In what ways is it parallel to how we are saved through Christ?

How is God's faithfulness described in these verses?

What can we learn from this about what it means to be faithful ourselves?

Having set his affection on Israel what did God require of them?

Does this suggest that God is not always faithful? Read Rom 3.1-4 to see what Paul has to say on the matter.

Faith

The letter of Paul to the Galatians has much to say about faith, in large part because the Galatians were being tempted to turn away from faith and trust in works and in rituals. Chapter 3 alone contains 17 instances of the faith family of words (faith, believe etc) and you might like to read it in preparation.

Read Galatians ch 2 v 15-16

If someone asked you to explain what you mean by 'putting your faith in Jesus' what would you say?

What does it mean to say we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ (v15)?

What is the relationship between our faith and Jesus' faithfulness?

Over the summer mornings we will be looking at some of the titles of Jesus from the Book of Revelation, one which occurs several times in slightly different wording is 'Faithful and True'.

If you can remember a time, or can remember that far back, were you conscious of the faithfulness of Jesus when you put your faith in Him? What would you say it means to say that Jesus is faithful? (If you get stuck have a look at Hebrews 3.1-2.)

Faithfulness

Read Revelation ch 2 vv 8-10

If you had been a member of the Church of Smyrna and had heard these words what do you think your reaction would have been?

What does being faithful involve in a such a situation? What would being unfaithful involve in such a situation?

In what ways would the example of Christ's faithfulness (eg Heb. 3.1-2) be of help to these Smyrnans or to others who come to such testing?

In what ways does the promise given in verse 10 help in being faithful under such testing? Is this promise, of the crown of life, something of which you are conscious?

Read Matthew ch 25 vv 14-30

What is the difference between being faithful and being unfaithful in this parable?

Jesus appears to have told this parable in responding to a question about His return at the end of the age (ch 24 v 3). He says we need to be ready (24.44 & 25.15). He then tells three parables which seem to be about this - faithful servant (end of ch 24), the wise virgins (ch 25.1-13) and the talents (ch 25.14-30). If you have time look at each of them and ask what in what ways were people faithful and unfaithful.

What lessons can we therefore learn from these parables about being faithful now whilst we wait?

Do you feel that you are making good use of what has been entrusted to you? Are there things you should do? Is there help anyone could give you in trying to think this through?

If enough people have the same Bible translation you may like to close by reading together Psalm 89 vv 1-8.