

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

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This exegetical paper will explain a perspective of the passage of 2 Timothy 2:13 "If we are unfaithful he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself." In this passage St. Paul imitates God's fidelity, though his relational and paternal love. God expresses his fidelity through his relationship with each of us, through his paternal love, and most of all through sending us his only Son. Christ comes to us in the mystery of the Incarnation as a reflection of the Father's love for each of us. God calls St. Paul to guide and protect many of the early Churches. St. Paul fulfills this mission through an imitation of the Father's fidelity, in his relational love and paternal love for those who have been entrusted to his care.



Consider the pastoral letters that St. Paul is addressing to Timothy to advise this young disciple on how to shepherd the flock against false teachings, household guidelines or advice and encouragement to persevere. The Historical context of this message is St. Paul's guidance to the young Church of Ephesus that is under the care of St. Timothy in Paul's absence. There seems to be teachings opposing the Gospel in Ephesus; although it is not completely clear if they are directly against St. Paul or a collection of outlandish ideas. The goal of the Second Letter of St. Timothy is to bring about fidelity to Christ at all cost. Montague refers to 2 Tim 2:11-13 as the "Heart of the Letter"¹This core of the message of St. Paul is inspired by God's example of fidelity. "The letter repeatedly expresses fidelity with Christ, means victory with the Lord, especially in terms of the reward for faithful service."² Fidelity to God does bring victory.

Contemplate these three characteristics of God and how St. Paul imitates each one. God is in constant relationship with the Blessed Trinity, God is a family, and he is a part of an active community of the Blessed Trinity. God, the Father's role in this relationship and family is paternity in the Blessed Trinity and over all his creation. Lastly, God is faithful, not only faith filled but God is faithfulness itself in his existence. Likewise, St. Paul is in relationship with God's people, it is a relationship of love so much so that it he often expresses his love in a paternal manner. St. Paul imitates God's fidelity with those whom he has been entrusted.

God cannot be unfaithful; it would oppose his very nature. In other words he cannot deny himself, this 'cannot' is not a sign of weakness but rather testifies to his great power.³ Logically God's faithfulness differs from ours since we are not faithfulness itself, after the fall we actually tend toward unfaithfulness through concupiscence. "He cannot deny Himself, that is, His own Being. We may say that He is not; though such is not the fact. It is not in His nature, it is not possible for Him not to be, that is, to go into nonentity. His subsistence always abides, always is."⁴ What is faithfulness, and what does it require of us? Faith is a gift from God that is received supernaturally. "Faith is infused into the soul by almighty God. God is the cause of faith."⁵ The Greek word for faith can be translated as *pistis*, or *pistóti* and in Hebrew various forms of the verb 'aman. "In Hebrew it expresses the notion of firmness, solidity, and constancy. It could be rendered 'to make oneself firm and secure' and in this case to have one's firmness and security based on God."⁶

Since faith is beyond the human power of reason we must look to God to learn how to practice this gift of faith. God demonstrates his fidelity to his creatures all throughout salvation history, beginning with our creation in the Garden of Eden. Unfortunately, our first parents, Adam and Eve did not understand and were unable to remain faithful to God's request. But this did not stop God from leading, guiding, loving and preparing his 'chosen people', throughout the whole Old Testament in preparation for the coming of His Son. As his prophet Isaiah declared, "The LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen you."⁷ This choice made by God remained even when his chosen disobeyed or betrayed his love and kindness. "Understand, then, that the LORD, your God, is God indeed, the faithful God who keeps his merciful covenant down to the thousandth generation toward those who love him and keep his commandments"⁸ Again through the prophet Jeremiah, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you."⁹ As seen throughout all the scriptures, in the lives of the prophets, and especially through the incarnation of Jesus. The coming of Christ is an ultimate expression of God's faithful love.

Through his coming and death on the cross is what brought us salvation and spiritual adoption to become not only God's chosen ones but his beloved children.

Many of St. Paul's Letters discuss God's fidelity; this is most likely because St. Paul deeply experienced God's fidelity and mercy in his own life. Even when St. Paul himself was unfaithful, God sought him and called him to himself. St. Paul's letters are continuing the theme of God's fidelity that is proclaimed throughout salvation history and sacred scripture. In St. Paul's letters to Timothy he mentions fidelity over 15 times. As well as his other letters, to the Corinthians "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord;"¹⁰ "God is faithful;"¹¹ and to the Thessalonians, "He who calls you is faithful and he will do it;"¹² Again, "But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from evil."¹³ Paul imitates the fidelity of God, when those he is guiding turn from the Lord and he continues to seek them. He continues to write, visit, guide, pray and sacrifice for those who have betrayed God as a witness of God's fidelity. He frankly calls them out, "O foolish Galatians!...Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?"¹⁴ This calling out is to call them back to the fidelity of the Lord, for them to be faithful as the Lord is to them. St. Paul imitates the fidelity of God through his words but also in his deeds. He suffered and endured much for the people of God as Christ did on the cross, he could have given up but he remained faithful.

Furthermore God's great love for his children is shown in a relationship. God could have saved us in any manner but he chose to send his only Son to become like us in all things except sin.¹⁵ God, the Son came to us as a baby humbling himself, speaking our language, eating our food, suffering realities. He not only desired for us to learn of his plan for our lives; which he could have imparted to us in many ways, he desired to commune with us, to give of his very self, and to suffer for our salvation. St. Paul similarly, went to those God had entrusted to him. He traveled near and far through difficult circumstances to encourage and instruct the early Christians. He not only imparted facts to them but "being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us."¹⁶ This passage is one of many where Paul expresses his love for those the Lord has called him to be in relationship with. Again like God, he could have shared the faith with them in many ways but he chose to come to them and live among them, sharing in their joys, struggles, strife and accomplishments. "Brethren, I beg you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are."¹⁷ He comes to them in order to lead them to where his is closer to Christ. In this sharing he grew in relationship with them and expressed his great care and love in Christ for each them. For in relationship he gave of his very self as Christ did for us.

The fidelity of God is expressed through his paternal love for his chosen people Israel, all throughout the Old Testament. "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to Baal, and burning incense to idols." The response of Israel, God's chosen people has not always been a response of filial love but this does not stop God from pursuing them to lavish his love upon them as a father does. His paternal love towards his creation is a reflection of his fidelity but his actions also reveal to us his nature. For example when God called the prophet Ezekiel to speak to the hours of Israel, he clarified that God acted in the manner he did not only for the sake of the people but for the sake of who God is. Remember that God is faithful and he cannot betray himself. "Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came."¹⁸ God chooses to spare his people for the sake of his name; this also reflects his paternal love for his people. A father needs to have disciple with his child to guide them in the right path.

St. Paul's relationship to the early church correspondingly reflects a paternal love for those he serves. Many times his letters are addressed to his sons or beloved children, "To Timothy my beloved child."¹⁹ His relationship of fidelity has grown to the point that it is expressed in paternal love, in imitation of God the Father's love for his children. This language is not a rarity in Paul's letters rather it becomes the norm of how he expresses himself and his love. For example; To the Galatians, he says, "My little children of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you! I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you."²⁰ And to the Thessalonians, "As when a nurse cherish her children,..."²¹ And to Titus, "To my beloved son;"²² and to Philemon, in like manner. This paternal love is patient and faithful as the Father's is with us for even when people oppose St. Paul he continues to love them and seek their good as a father would. He even declares to the Thessalonians, "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy"²³ And to Philemon, "I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become in my imprisonment. I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart."²⁴ Those St. Paul serves become his joy and his spiritual children in the faith.

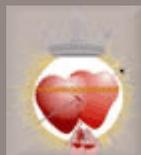
In conclusion the passage in the second chapter of St. Paul's letter to Timothy, "If we are unfaithful he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself," conveys St. Paul's imitation of God's fidelity through his relational and paternal love. Being witnesses and recipients of this great faithful love that cannot be denied we are charged with the task and responsibility to share this love with other in a like manner. Just as God the Father has expressed his faithful love with us through sending God the Son, to gain a relationship with us we are to seek Christ centered relationships with others and share in God's faithful love. St. Paul again exhorts us, "And what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."²⁵

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- 1 Montague, George, SM, *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture, First and Second Timothy and Titus*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids MI, 2008, p. 166
 - 2 Neyrey, Jerome, S.J., *Collegeville Bible Commentary, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 1983, p. 34—see also 2 Tim 1:15-18; 4:1,8, 17-18.*
 - 3 Gorday, Peter, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Vol. IX, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2000, p. 146*
 - 4 Chysostom, John, *St. Homily 5, 2 Timothy 2:11-14, New Advent Church Fathers, newadvent.org*
 - 5 Glenn, Paul, *Msgn, Tour of the Summa, Summa 2b, Question 6, Article 2, Catholictheology.info*
 - 6 *The New World Dictionary—Concordance to the New American Bible, World Publisher, 1970, p. 183.*
 - 7 *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, USCCB.org, New American Translation, Is 49:7*
 - 8 USCCB, *Deut. 7:9*
 - 9 USCCB, *Jeremiah 31:3*
 - 10 USCCB, *1 Cor. 1:9*
 - 11 USCCB, *1 Cor. 10:13*
 - 12 USCCB, *1 Thes 5:24*
 - 13 USCCB, *2 Thes 3:3*
 - 14 USCCB, *Galatians 3:1,3*
 - 15 Cf: *Heb 4:15*
 - 16 USCCB, *1 Thes 2:8*
 - 17 USCCB, *Galatians 4:12*
 - 18 USCCB, *Ezekiel 36:22*
 - 19 USCCB, *2 Tim. 1:2*
 - 20 USCCB *Gal. 4:19-20*
 - 21 USCCB, *1 Thes 2:7*
 - 22 USCCB, *Titus 1:4*
 - 23 USCCB, *1 Thes 2:19*
 - 24 USCCB, *Phil 1:10-11*
 - 25 USCCB, *2 Tim 2:2*

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