

2 Thessalonians

Bible Study

The Lord is Faithful

2 Thessalonians 3:1—3

Paul's experience in Thessalonica is not all good. There were many who did not want him to be spreading his gospel message and would do what they could to hinder him. Those who were hindering Paul were adamant in preventing him from freely sharing Christ. Many of them were sent from Jerusalem by the religious leaders. Acts graphically shows us the opposition that Paul had to endure at the hands of those who were jealous that Paul had such a large number of people who were following him. According to Acts 17:5, The Jews became jealous and formed a mob that persecuted believers. These same evil Jews followed Paul to Berea and forced him to leave for Athens (Acts 17:13). This would explain why Paul requested for the Thessalonians to pray that the word of the Lord would be able to spread rapidly and that he would be rescued from wicked men.

Faith

What does it mean to be faithful? It describes a person who can be trusted or relied upon. A faithful person will keep their word at all costs. To be found faithful requires that a person has taken action in the past to fulfill promises made. The faithful servant (Matthew 24:45—47; 25:21—23; Luke 19:17) has proven himself by his actions, which is why he is called faithful. Abraham proved he was faithful by doing the works that God put before him (Galatians 3:9). Paul was called faithful by the Lord because he carried out the task of bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles (1 Timothy 1:12).

Paul proclaims that the Lord is faithful (1 Corinthians 1:9; 2 Timothy 2:15). Paul asks for prayer, from the Thessalonians, that he would be free to present the word of the Lord, and to be delivered from wicked men. However, notice that he is not judging God faithful or unfaithful by whether or not he is saved from these men, or the word of the Lord freely goes out. He continues by saying that in spite of the opposition, that God is faithful to establish the Thessalonians and keep them from evil. God never promised safety, but that He would give them what they needed to advance in their spiritual maturity.

In spite of suffering beatings, imprisonment, harassment, and other hardships, Paul proclaims that the Lord is faithful. Please note that God is faithful, not because of what He does, but because of who He is. Faithfulness is part of His character. He cannot not be faithful. He demonstrates His character by what He does. We know we can trust Him because He has proven that He is faithful to His word (Hebrews 10:23).

Faith of Christ or faith in Christ?

There are two phrases that look very similar, but are completely different in meaning, "faith in Christ" and "faith of Christ." Most understand what it means to have faith in Christ. When we believed, we put our complete faith in Christ. We believed in the Person of Christ as being deity, and we had faith that our salvation was dependent on His death, burial and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1—4). Galatians 3:26 states that we are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. This is pretty straight forward and understandable. Those who are saved are ones who have put their trust (faith) in Christ.

The other, more obscure phrase is "faith of Christ." I believe this one is harder to understand because there is a lack of teaching concerning it. We just don't hear this phrase used. It helps for us to think in terms of the faithfulness of Christ. Faith in Christ is connected with the faith of Christ. We put our faith in Christ because of the faithfulness of Christ. He is the object of our faith because He has proven Himself to be faithful. He is faithful because that is His very nature, He cannot be otherwise.

Romans 3:3 clearly shows what the faith of God is. "For what if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?" It would not make sense to use faith in God here because the context of this passage is not focusing on our faith in God, rather upon the faithfulness of

God. The verse is asking if it would make any difference in God's faithfulness if someone didn't believe. God is faithful regardless of whether someone believes or doesn't believe.

Unfortunately, it's not always so simple. Not all translations agree if a verse should be translated with "in" or "of" because the underlying Greek doesn't always make it clear. More often than not, a literal translation of the Greek would appear as "faith God," "faith Jesus" or "faith Christ." There is no indication of which preposition to use, other than the context. This problem becomes evident when comparing translations. The King James Bible uses "faith of..." when referring to God, eight times, while the NASB does so only once. Even though either translation could be correct, there can only be one intended meaning. Those who stand by the King James Bible often claim that God supernaturally told the translators which word to add to the original Greek to make it readable in English. In actuality, they were no more insightful than a gifted Bible teacher today. So, how can it be determined what the translation should be?

The best way to determine the proper translation is by examining the context of the verse. For instance, Galatians 2:16 says:

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Notice that both phrases "faith in" and "faith of" are used in one sentence. Many translations use "faith in" three times while the King James Bible uses "faith of" twice and "faith in" once. In context, we were justified by the faithfulness of Christ and His death on the cross (Romans 5:9), and by our faith in Christ. While it is not entirely theologically incorrect to insert "faith in" in place of "faith of," I believe the King James Bible correctly translated this verse.

Another example can be found in Ephesians 3:12, "In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him." Once again, the King James Bible parts from many other translations by using "faith of Him" instead of the more common "faith in Him." This also seems to be the proper translation because, looking at the context, verse 11 is speaking of the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. The eternal purpose was, I believe, God's plan of redemption, which hinged upon the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.

Space prevents us from looking at all the usages of "faith of..." verses. While there is not always a definitive answer, and either "in" or "of" could be used in a number of verses, I stand with the King James Bible with their translational choices in their use of "faith of..." When studying about the faith of Christ, or the faithfulness of Christ, it brings out a richness that is lost in many translations. It shifts the focus off of me and what I did (putting my faith in Christ) and puts it upon the sacrifice Christ made for mankind. It is a subtle, but important distinction. It seems, especially in this age, that churches are always focusing on how God can benefit individuals. Worship songs almost always focus on what God did for me. Many churches carry this to extremes claiming that God wants to bless me, heal me, strengthen me, love me, carry me through difficulties, lavish wonderful physical blessing upon me, and nauseate me. People often are moved from expecting God's blessings to demanding His outpouring. In this particular area, the King James Bible helps the believer to shift their focus away from themselves and their little world to the God of the universe. It should cause us to marvel at the breadth, length, depth and height of God's love toward us (Ephesians 3:10—21).

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