

NOT ALL, NOT ALL KEEP THE FAITH!

I. Our Faith Is Our Life

II. Our Faith Sets Our Priorities

III. The End of Our Faith Is Paradise

1 Corinthians 9:24-10:5

SUNDAY, JANUARY 31, 2021 | PRE-LENT

SEPTUAGESIMA

<i>Old Testament</i>	Jeremiah 1:4-10
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 145, CW p. 119
<i>Epistle</i>	1 Corinthians 9:24–10:5
<i>Gospel</i>	Matthew 20:1–16
<i>Chief Hymn</i>	ELH 227

GRANTS PASS Divine Service, Rite Two, p. 60

The Entrance Hymn or Introit – ELH 61 My Heart is Longing

Chief Hymn – ELH 226 vv. 1-4 By Grace I'm Saved

Distribution Hymn – ELH 329 The Death of Jesus Christ, Our Lord

Closing Hymn – ELH 327 v. 2 O Lord, We Praise Thee

MEDFORD Common Order, p. 15

Psalm 145, p. 119

Opening Hymn - CW 364 My Heart Is Longing

Hymn of the Day – CW 384 By Grace I'm Saved

Distribution Hymn - CW 135 The Death of Jesus Christ, Our Lord

Closing Hymn – CW 317 v. 2 O Lord, We Praise You

1 Corinthians 9:24–10:5 (CSB)

²⁴ **Don't you know that the runners in a stadium all race, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way to win the prize.** ²⁵ **Now everyone who competes exercises self-control in everything. They do it to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable crown.** ²⁶ **So I do not run like one who runs aimlessly or box like one beating the air.** ²⁷ **Instead, I discipline my body and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified.**

¹⁰ **Now I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, all passed through the sea, ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.** ³ **They all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ.** ⁵ **Nevertheless God was not pleased with most of them, since they were struck down in the wilderness.**

Dear fellow redeemed: The lessons that we will be dwelling on today and the next two Sundays teach us how we Christians live as Christians in troubled times, in the light of Christ's redemption and resurrection.¹ In this Sunday's Lesson, Paul teaches us that we are caught up in the same cosmic war that has been raging since Satan's assault on God's perfect creation in Eden.

He pleads for us to take it seriously, really! Take it seriously! For not all who are at some time Christians remain faithful. No...

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I. Our Faith Is Our Life

To say that some people don't keep the faith is to say that they lose their Christian faith; they die spiritually; they lose the righteousness of Christ that is by faith, and so when they die, according to Jesus, God says on judgment day, "*I never knew you.*" The picture He paints is grim: ⁴¹ ***The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will gather from his kingdom all who cause sin and those guilty of lawlessness.*** ⁴² ***They will throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*** Matthew 13:41–43 (CSB) Not to mention, ¹³ ***"Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him up hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'*** Matthew 22:13 (CSB)

To lose your faith is to die forever when you die, to die and go to hell

Faith is spiritual life. It is a spiritual condition, not an intellectual or emotional condition, although our spiritual life drives our emotional and intellectual life. So, faith is not a mere opinion and losing one's faith is not just a change in opinion. So Paul tells us to cling to Christ, Who gives us life.

II. Our Faith Sets Our Priorities

There are different ways to lose the faith, to lose our spiritual life, either through the deceit of our minds or the seduction of our flesh, through the pride of our intellect or the lust of the flesh. But also, as Jesus says in the Parable of the Sower, the lack of depth in the word (the seed on the rocky soil) or messing up our priorities with the worries, riches, and pleasures of life displacing the word in our lives.

¹ These lessons were added to the Historic Lectionary in the year 568, when the pagan Lombards (think Germanic Vikings) were descending onto a defenseless Italy, ruining and pillaging as they went. (Reed, Luther, The Lutheran Liturgy)

This is where Paul steps in with a comparison. He describes the Isthmian games, held every two years. He probably saw the Isthmian games in Corinth in 51. When I went to Turkey, I saw that every Greco-Roman city had a stadium for the games, including races, wrestling, boxing, javelin, discus, and others. To compete, you entered training ten months before the games and your whole life at that time was devoted to training.

This is the background for Paul's comments, ²⁴ **Don't you know that the runners in a stadium all race, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way to win the prize.** ²⁵ **Now everyone who competes exercises self-control in everything. They do it to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable crown.**

The crown or wreath at the games was supposed to reveal how fleeting was the glory. At various times it was wilted celery or laurel leaves that turned brown overnight, or other greenery that lasted but a little while. And yet for that fleeting glory, people would invest their lives.

If that is what people do for something that is fleeting, how can we possibly be blasé about something that lasts forever? If you do not take your faith seriously, it is a very real danger that you will lose it, as Paul continues, ²⁶ **So I do not run like one who runs aimlessly or box like one beating the air.** ²⁷ **Instead, I discipline my body and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified.** If Paul acknowledges that he could lose the faith, then what about you and me?

Now, he ISN'T saying that now that you know the stakes, be good and don't mess up. We all know that if our salvation depended upon anything in us, including our earnestness, our seriousness about our faith, then we would be without hope. Anybody you know every perfectly kept resolutions?

If we are to remain in the faith, it means that we are to be in the word for the Spirit's strength, lest we be deceived, that we are to be regular in our repentance and savoring forgiveness, lest we become hardened in sin or self-righteous, and we are to heed the call to be with our fellow Christians and encourage one another. If we take our faith seriously as Paul says, we don't try to BE STRONG, we are diligent in finding our strength in Christ.

Marry a Christian. Be in church. Raise your children in the Christian worldview, preferably in a Christian school.

Here's the danger: The Christian guy an unbeliever dates because he's lonely. The dad misses church wants to provide better for his family, the parents feel education belongs to the "experts" (and besides, we pay taxes). They all have bought the idea that today's choice is worth sacrificing eternity.

And those who think that their church work saves them also need to be careful, like the Pharisees. We don't confess the sins of others, but our own sins.

This is where Paul is going with the second part of our text. **10 Now I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, all passed through the sea, ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³ They all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless God was not pleased with most of them, since they were struck down in the wilderness.**

The children of Israel saw the power of God and the grace of God, but most of them fell short, and did not enter the Promised Land. For all the power and mercy God had shown, their hope was in themselves. That is a warning to us all. Because of the grace of God, like Moses, many who fell in the desert may still have been saved in heaven – some of them – but this is still a warning for us.

III. The End of Our Faith Is Paradise

So what should we do?

Paul tells us to focus upon the end of our faith, the imperishable crown of everlasting life.

We ended last week with Peter's comforting words, "***Though you have not seen him, you love him; though not seeing him now, you believe in him, and you rejoice with inexpressible and glorious joy, because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.***" (1 Peter 1:8–9, CSB)

If we are to keep perspective, if we are to keep our priorities straight, then let us be diligent and disciplined to keep our eyes upon the mercies of God, the Grace of Christ, the free gift of everlasting life, in spite of everything: "***Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. Look, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will experience affliction for ten days. Be faithful to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.***" (Revelation 2:10, CSB)

Life is hard right now for Christians. It seems we are all alone. It seems that we must have it wrong because we are objects of hatred and ridicule. It seems that "real life" is more important. And, seductively, it seems that if we can just take a little pleasure as it comes, and indulge the flesh and please ourselves, that nobody gets hurt, and it's no big deal.

If that's what you think, then you have not thought enough about the glory that awaits you (or the danger of eternal despair).

The end of our faith is everlasting life, and that doesn't mean an eternity of life as it is now, but life as we were created for. A life of everlasting love, a life in which the warmest embrace is the norm. A life in which all our greatest aspirations are fulfilled. A life in which we have no guilt, no sorrow, no pain. A life in which every good impulse is our glory, and in which there is no disapproval. A life in which there is no sorrow, no regret, no anxiety. A world in which all fruits are perfect, all songs are beautiful, all labor is pleasant, and all life is love.

This is the crown of life for which we contend, in contending for the faith, for which we treasure Christ's word and promises. This is the crown of life for which we give up all things.

AMEN