

**June 14, 2020**  
**The one who calls you is faithful**  
**1 Thessalonians 5:23-28**

What is the good news?

When we ask that question, we may immediately shoot back with John 3:16 – *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* That's a good place to start. It's a hugely important component of the gospel. But John 3:16 comes from a bigger, deeper, even more profound truth ...

The bigger, deeper, even more profound place from which the good news about God's love and Jesus' death and resurrection comes is this: *"The One who calls you is faithful ..."*

- It is because God is faithful that He still loves His creation and hasn't just given up on us. I've been working through Genesis these days: if I were God I would long ago have given up on humanity, but God is faithful and stubbornly refuses to walk away from His creation.
- It is because God is faithful that He gives us His Son, Jesus, to die for the forgiveness of our sins, and to give us new life in His Spirit.
- It is because God is faithful that He establishes the Church as His people, saved by His Son, empowered by His Spirit, and inspired to be His good news to the world.

Paul has a lot to say about our responsibility to choose to put our faith in Jesus, about our calling to be people who are "fluent" in the language, values, and ethics of the Kingdom of God, but underlying this all is the faithfulness of God. *"The One who calls you is faithful ..."*

So, when Paul says to us (last week, 5:16-18)

- *"Rejoice always."* And we wonder how this is possible, we need to keep in mind the truth that *"The One who calls you is faithful ..."*
- *"Pray continually."* And we struggle, we need to remember, *"The One who calls you is faithful ..."*
- *"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus,"* and we find that difficult, we choose to practice gratitude because *"The One who calls you is faithful ..."*
- *"Do not quench the Spirit,"* Paul says. Why? Because *"The One who calls you is faithful ..."*

In our text today, Paul says, *"May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."* That sounds great. As Paul said back in chapter 3, *"May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father ..."* (3:12-13).

That all sounds great, too. But how realistic is that? It sounds like each of us has to simply try really, really hard to behave, to be good, and hope for the best.

But immediately Paul adds, *"The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it."*

### ***A Case Study***

Corrie Ten Boom, whose family hid Jewish people in the Netherlands, during World War 2, is a living example of the truth that "the One who call us is faithful." She and her sister ended up in a concentration camp in Ravensbrück, where her sister died. She wrote about her experience in a book, titled *The Hiding Place*. She talks about speaking in Munich, Germany, shortly after the war, in 1947:<sup>1</sup>

*"It was in a church in Munich that I saw him, a balding heavysset man in a gray overcoat, a brown felt hat clutched between his hands. People were filing out of the basement room where I had just spoken, moving along the rows of wooden chairs to the door at the rear.*

*It was 1947 and I had come from Holland to defeated Germany with the message that God forgives.*

*It was the truth they needed most to hear in that bitter, bombed-out land, and I gave them my favorite mental picture. Maybe because the sea is never far from a Hollander's mind, I liked to think that that's where forgiven sins were thrown.*

*"When we confess our sins," I said, "God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever."*

*The solemn faces stared back at me, not quite daring to believe. There were never questions after a talk in Germany in 1947. People stood up in silence, in silence collected their wraps, in silence left the room.*

*And that's when I saw him, working his way forward against the others. One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat; the next, a blue uniform and a visored cap with its skull and crossbones.*

*It came back with a rush: the huge room with its harsh overhead lights, the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor, the shame of walking naked past this man. I could see my sister's frail form ahead of me, ribs sharp beneath the parchment skin. Betsie, how thin you were!*

*Betsie and I had been arrested for concealing Jews in our home during the Nazi occupation of Holland; this man had been a guard at Ravensbrück concentration camp where we were sent.*

*Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out: "A fine message, fräulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!"*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.guideposts.org/better-living/positive-living/guideposts-classics-corrie-ten-boom-on-forgiveness>

*And I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course—how could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women?*

*But I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. It was the first time since my release that I had been face to face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze.*

*"You mentioned Ravensbrück in your talk," he was saying. "I was a guard in there." No, he did not remember me.*

*"But since that time," he went on, "I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fräulein" – again the hand came out – "will you forgive me?"*

*And I stood there—I whose sins had every day to be forgiven—and could not. Betsie had died in that place—could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?*

*It could not have been many seconds that he stood there, hand held out, but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do.*

*For I had to do it – I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us. "If you do not forgive men their trespasses," Jesus says, "neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."*

*I knew it not only as a commandment of God, but as a daily experience. Since the end of the war I had had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality.*

*Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able also to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and as horrible as that.*

*And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion—I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart.*

*"Jesus, help me!" I prayed silently. "I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling."*

*And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.*

*"I forgive you, brother!" I cried. "With all my heart!"*

*For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then.*

*And having thus learned to forgive in this hardest of situations, I never again had difficulty in forgiving: I wish I could say it! I wish I could say that merciful and charitable thoughts just naturally flowed from me from then on. But they didn't.*

*If there's one thing I've learned at 80 years of age, it's that I can't store up good feelings and behaviour – but only draw them fresh from God each day."*

We think we're in tough because we have to socially isolate for a couple of months, but "*The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.*" We can find ourselves in much harder places, facing major health or personal challenges, but "*The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.*" He will get you through.

### ***What is the Good News?***

God is faithful:

- Yes, God so loves His world (and YOU are part of His wonderful world – He loves you!)
- Yes, He does forgive your sins. He sets us free from the guilt and shame of the past.
- Yes, we are saved and one day, some day we will be with Him forever.
- AND, He gives us the ability to "*be sanctified through and through.*" Through His faithfulness, "*Our whole spirit, soul and body can be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" He doesn't expect us simply to try really, really hard and hope we can do it. "*The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.*" His Spirit will empower us to make the changes, practice the disciplines, live the ethics, and love with the love of the Kingdom. We cannot do this on our own. But He can do it in us.
- AND, He invites us to be His good news of hope and love in the world.

Paul concludes his letter with this simple benediction/blessing: "*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.*" This is a prayer that

1. we would know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ IS with us – wherever we go, wherever we find ourselves, we would be very aware of and find our identity ***in His grace***: His love, His mercy, His forgiveness, His Spirit, AND
2. as we go about our lives, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ will ***be in US*** – that we would model His grace: His love, His mercy, His forgiveness, and His Spirit as well.

Practically, Jesus can help us be gracious people: people who call one another, encourage one another, build one another up, care for one another, forgive one another, do acts of kindness for one another ... "*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.*"