

# Waiting for God – Psalm 25:21

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## *Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for Thee – Psalm 25:21*

As we said earlier, waiting on God is not easy. It requires certain character traits, and in this next-to-last verse of Psalm 25 David mentions two of those traits, *integrity* and *uprightness*. For the third time in this psalm David remarks that his attitude is one of waiting. It is an expression of his confident, resolute expectation, and that he is looking to God for an answer. While he hopes for a speedy answer David does not dictate, but is content to wait. The longer we wait for an answer, the more we are tempted to doubt God's goodness, mistrust His methods, and resort to our own wisdom and our own schemes. David was committed to waiting on God with "*integrity and uprightness*". Nothing else will expose that we are not who we think we are, or reveal the strength or littleness of our faith as effectively as waiting on God.

David was well aware of his need for divine protection while he awaited God's answer. He was conscious of his own frailty, he knew his flesh was weak; he appreciated the difficulties and temptations he would face while waiting on God. David understood that he was totally dependent on God to "*preserve*" him while he waited on God. The Hebrew verb translated "*preserve*" means "*to watch over, keep, guard from danger*", and is in the imperfect tense meaning his dependence on God's preservation was continuous and constant. In fact, it was his waiting for God which David gives as the cause or reason for his need of divine protection; "*for*" (i.e. "*because*") *I wait for Thee*. There is something about waiting for God that leaves us particularly vulnerable to the assaults of Satan and our own unbelief for which we require divine preservation.

God's preservation was dependent on David possessing certain character traits, the first of which is *integrity*. The word itself means "*complete; whole; undivided*". The first verse of the very next psalm, Psalm 26, gives a perfect description of integrity; "*Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity; and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering*" (Ps 26:1). David trusted in God *without wavering*, literally, without *slipping, sliding, drifting, or giving way*. His loyalty was undivided. His trust was completely and wholly in God's nature and God's word. His feet were firmly planted in the character and nature of God revealed in His word. He didn't allow his circumstances to dictate his view of God rather David's confidence in God's immutable nature dictated how he viewed his circumstances. When David composed Psalm 25 he was "*lonely and afflicted. The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me out of my distresses. Look upon my affliction and trouble, and forgive all my sins...Guard my soul and deliver me*; (Ps 25:16-18, 20). Like Job David maintained his integrity even in the face of unimaginably grueling and debilitating circumstances (Job 2:3, 7), and like Abraham he never allowed his temporal circumstances to weaken his trust in God's promise (Rm 4:18-21). Spiritual integrity is what stony-ground hearers are lacking – those professing Christians who, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, capitulate to the culture, adopt the mindset of the world, and pander to fleshly desires (Mt 13:21). Integrity and uprightness will preserve us more than all the world has to offer; more than wealth, power, and influence. They are a greater guarantor of preservation than our own schemes or any power invented by man. We cannot

expect to be safe any longer than we continue in integrity and uprightness.

People tend to treat symptoms, not the disease. They try to amend or better their circumstances and ignore the cause of their circumstances. It is assumed that if you eliminate the symptoms you have cured the disease, but it is the symptoms which call attention to the presence and nature of the disease. To merely treat symptoms may provide some momentary relief, but the symptoms will always resurface and grow worse because the disease itself goes undiagnosed and untreated. For instance, people who have struggled with consumer debt are often advised to get rid of their credit cards, as though the cards were to blame for their debt instead of their own sinful greed and discontentment. By eliminating the symptom the disease remains untreated and grows worse, manifesting itself in other, more destructive ways. The greed is deferred, not cured. People do not like the consequences of sin, so they work tirelessly to find a way to avoid the consequences without having to relinquish the sin they love.

The church has been trying to eliminate the symptoms of its weakness without dealing with the root cause, and as a result it has grown worse. The disease is unbelief in God's word, and therefore unbelief in God Himself. There is no trust, no confidence in God's word; therefore there is little true preaching and teaching, and even less doctrine. The church has slipped into a reliance on its own schemes and gimmickry, and wavered in its trust in God's word. The church is too drugged on the opiate of worldly pleasure, success, and entertainment to notice it is dying. It is too busy vainly primping in order to display an attractive, alluring, and seductive façade to notice that its heart for God, His word, and His Son has withered and decayed. While it has been majoring on style and keeping up with the latest fads, it has ignored the cultivation of character. The disease has metastasized to the extent that precious little of the body remains that has not been ravaged with the disease. Only God's divine purpose and promise keeps it from totally succumbing. He preserves a remnant. A faint pulse still remains.

Only an infusion of spiritual life will restore the church to health and vigor, and spiritual life is only infused through the faithful preaching and teaching of God's word. But most of the professing church is so addicted to and dependent on its drugs of superficial spirituality, success, self-indulgence, emotionalism, self-improvement, and entertainment that to cut them off and return to true biblical preaching would result in a mass exodus and flight to the nearest provider of the opiate to which they have become so dependent. The church has bred sickly congregations which have a religious shell but a carnal, worldly, and unbelieving heart and that are intolerant of sound doctrine and impatient with true preaching. The fruit of spiritual adultery manifests itself the same in every generation that drifts from its biblical moorings.

As it was with Israel, so it is with the church; *"Their deeds will not allow them to return to their God. For a spirit of harlotry is within them, and they do not know the LORD"* (Hosea 5:4). Like Israel most of the church has turned to the world for the solution to its problems; *"When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria and sent to King Jareb. But he is unable to heal you, or to cure you of your wound"* (Hosea 5:13). To return to God would mean forsaking the sin they love; it would mean departing from worldly gimmicks that pander to the flesh; it would mean ostracization rather than popularity, influence, and worldly success. The majority of the church has so much invested in a worldly system of religion that if it were to truly return to God it would be catastrophic for their system. Could Roman Catholicism renounce the papal system, its hierarchy of priests, bishops, and cardinals, its worship of Mary, its doctrine of purgatory, and its system of works righteousness without dismantling the entire system? Can the shallow, superficial church that panders to people's

desire for self-fulfillment and self-gratification still survive if it trades its message of self-esteem, self-improvement, personal empowerment, and motivational messages for biblical preaching? Could the majority of what professes to be the church today have any longevity if it began to truly teach, preach, and practice the unadulterated word of God? Their deeds will not allow them to return to the God of the Bible. So in order to retain the people on which the survival of their system depends, people who profess to be physicians of the soul refuse to administer the only cure for the disease that is ravaging the souls under their care, and instead they keep treating symptoms and dispensing sugar-coated placebos, leaving the disease undisturbed.

Such incompetent and self-serving physicians are guilty of the most heinous form of malpractice – spiritual malpractice – for which the penalty is terrifying (cf. Ezk. 34 1-10; 2 Pt 2:21; Jude 4). Only those who are themselves infected with the disease have no fear of the consequences and are emboldened to commit the crime. If they took seriously God’s warnings and threats they could not do as they do. God has no attribute and has given no assurance of divine protection that would give cause for hope to anyone who withholds or tampers with the only remedy God has graciously provided for the disease which infects the heart, mind, and soul of fallen man. Such spiritual malpractice simply exposes a conspicuous absence of spiritual integrity, which manifests itself in a refusal to wait on God.

Waiting on God requires integrity, a character trait which has all but disappeared from the modern church. The overwhelming majority of the professing church today has slipped, it has wavered, and given way to pragmatism and the demands of the culture; it is unwilling to wait on God to bless the faithful teaching and preaching of His word and produce the fruit of an unwavering ministry; it is unwilling to sacrifice size for faithfulness, but more than willing to sacrifice faithfulness for size. As one mega-church pastor in Florida recently commented, “You can’t teach complementarianism (i.e., the biblical distinction between the roles of men and women) and grow a church”. The same, however, could be said for virtually every biblical doctrine, which is why doctrine has become taboo; it is just too divisive. Of course we all know it is more important to grow than be biblical. I recently drove past a large church displaying big, bold banners which read, “*Would you come to church this Sunday if it would improve your marriage.*” I’m sure the people who responded to this gimmick would have patronized a bar if it promised to improve their marriage. Gimmicks which appeal to people’s carnal, narcissistic desires for self-gratification and self-improvement only expose an appalling lack of spiritual integrity. As Charles H. Spurgeon once remarked, “*The very church which the world likes best is sure to be that which God abhors.*”

Recently an old fallacy, the error of Antinomianism, has reappeared in a brand new package. This version however is more subtle. In a nutshell, this movement uses the truth of Christ’s imputed righteousness to minimize or deny the necessity on the part of a Christian to pursue a holy life. Since all Christians have had the righteousness of Christ imputed to them at justification they can never become more holy, so quit trying and just embrace what God has already completed. According to this movement sanctification is fully accomplished and any attempts to promote a holy life are branded as legalism. No need to burden ourselves with the responsibility to “*cleanse ourselves from all defilements of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God*” (2 Cor 7:1). It is unnecessary to live “*As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves in all your behavior;*” (1 Peter 1:14, 15). You’re being too hard on yourself and

don't understand your position in Christ if you "*discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness*" (1 Tm 4:7). We can even discount the entire book of James and virtually all the imperatives for holy living, or at least redefine them, as this movement does.

This teaching intentionally subsumes progressive sanctification into positional sanctification, thereby confusing righteousness with holiness, and in so doing redefines saving faith. It is a different gospel. A faith that does not result in the pursuit of a holy life and gives license to use profanity from the pulpit is not saving faith. Some ungodly implications of this teaching, which sometimes flies under the banner of New Calvinism, or Young, Restless, and Reformed is that it ascribes to the flesh the purifying and cleansing work of the Holy Spirit, and it also robs Christians of one of the primary assurances of salvation – a genuine heart-felt desire for obedience to God's word. All Christians are equally righteous, but not all are equally holy. Loving obedience to the commands of Scripture will not make a Christian more righteous, but it does make us more holy, and where this desire for obedience and holiness is lacking so is saving faith. The primary attraction to this movement is that it dispenses with Jesus' demands of discipleship and appeals to our carnal nature. The title of a book by one of the movements most popular promoters Tullian Tchividjian tells it all – *Jesus + Nothing = Everything*. Just to show that there is nothing new about this false teaching consider the following quote from a sermon by the great Puritan pastor and scholar John Owen published posthumously in 1721,

*We are Solifidians<sup>1</sup> as to justification: - Christ, grace, and faith are all....Such Solifidians as exclude or deny the necessity of works and gospel obedience to him that is justified, - or that say, a true and justifying faith may consist without holiness, works, and obedience, - are condemned by all the apostles, and James in particular.<sup>2</sup>*

There is nothing new about redefining the biblical doctrine of sanctification and confusing what distinguishes true saving faith from a counterfeit faith. To redefine sanctification is to redefine what it is to **be** a Christian. A faith that does not result in the pursuit of a holy life is not saving faith, but a different gospel, and those who promote it are false teachers. False teachers have been adding to, denying, distorting, and reinterpreting Scripture and sound doctrine from the beginning of the church (cf. 2 Peter 2: 1-3, 18-22; 1 Tm 6: 3-5). The same lack of spiritual integrity is just as prevalent today. However, the biblical and theological illiteracy which characterizes the church today allows most of this to fly under the radar undetected and infiltrate the church. Most of the church today is too busy being hip, cool, relevant, and missional to concern itself with being biblical.

The apostle Paul had to defend his integrity against attacks by members of the church in Corinth, and in 2 Corinthians 4 Paul lists the traits which make for a life of spiritual integrity; "*but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God*" (2 Cor 4:2). First, Paul renounced all hidden sins. There were no skeletons in his closet. His life was an open book. It is impossible to have spiritual integrity and still cherish sin in your life, but today most of the church and all of society have mastered the art of hiding their sin. We have become proficient at justifying, rationalizing, redefining, and minimizing sin. Virtually every sin has been psychologized into a disease or

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<sup>1</sup> A name derived from two Latin words meaning *faith alone* and used to describe those who held to Reformed theology.

<sup>2</sup> John Owen, *The Works of John Owen: Sermons to the Church*, Vol. 9 (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 26.

addiction for which we are not personally responsible, or blamed on some sort of demonic influence instead of our own fallen flesh, or had its sinfulness whitewashed with social acceptability, or cloaked in the garb of some noble-sounding cause, or justified under the banner of Christian liberty, or even turned into a virtue. When one sin is rationalized it becomes easier to rationalize others, and once people have rationalized and redefined sin they will never tolerate having it identified as sin. Hidden sin will always lead to the next destroyer of spiritual integrity, “*walking in craftiness*”.

The word *craftiness* originates from two stems, the first stem meaning “all” and the second “work”. Together they give the basic sense of “capable of all work” from which the word derives its most common New Testament meaning of “*capable of anything, slyness, cunning*”. It describes a person who is adept at the art of misrepresentation and twisting the truth to trick people for their own self-seeking ends (cf. Lk 20:23; 1 Cor 3:19; 2 Cor 11:3; Eph 4:14). Their teaching may be sprinkled with Bible verses, usually taken out of context or given a new twist. People who have hidden sins become very skilled at this, as do those who are more concerned with furthering themselves rather than the gospel, and advancing their own goals and agenda rather than biblical truth. The life of the church today is dominated by the “*craftiness*” of pragmatism – a willingness to do virtually anything to attract a crowd, like distorting biblical doctrines, pandering to carnal desires and self-gratification, or a willingness to partner with enemies of the gospel to defend a social agenda – and as such it has compromised its spiritual integrity.

Paul also refused to *adulterate the word of God*. The word *adulterate* is derived from a word which means “to bait” and means “*to falsify, to cause to be false by deception or distortion*”. It was often used to describe wine that had been watered down by unscrupulous merchants who sold it as pure, undiluted wine. Paul refused to dilute or distort the truth of Scripture and the demands of the gospel simply to make its message more acceptable and more appealing to a broader audience or to accommodate new cultural norms, or make Christianity more inclusive. He refused to distort his message in order to pander to people’s fleshly desires, and he repudiated the practice of playing to people’s emotions. He maintained his spiritual integrity “*by the manifestation of truth*” – preaching the unadulterated message of the gospel and the whole counsel of God. He commended himself to every man’s *conscience*, because it is the conscience which is convicted by God’s word, rather than manipulating people’s emotions or pandering to their self-interest. Sadly, most of what purports to be the church today shows little reluctance to adulterating the word of God, to diluting and distorting biblical truth, even at the expense of its spiritual integrity. It justifies its capitulation to the culture, its distortion of biblical truth, its dilution of God’s demands and pursuit of carnality under the noble-sounding guises of evangelism, church growth, relevance, and Christian liberty. It will adulterate the biblical teaching of sanctification and distort the imperatives of Scripture so as to appeal to a demographic that is unaccustomed to having any demands placed on their life. It rationalizes alliances with cults and enemies of the gospel with principled and patriotic goals of preserving religious freedom and family values, and in so doing it compromises and often forfeits its spiritual integrity. It will never allow its lack of integrity to be identified for what it is – the sin of unbelief.

Spiritual integrity is much harder to preserve than moral or ethical integrity, and both of the latter are often confused with the former. A person can have moral and ethical integrity and still lack spiritual integrity. Unbelievers can have moral and ethical integrity, but spiritual

integrity is beyond the ability of the natural man. Spiritual integrity involves trusting in the Lord without wavering – trusting in His ways and means, in His nature and attributes, in His principles and promises, and obedience to His prescriptions and commands – all without wavering. Unwavering spiritual integrity can only be maintained by a total dependence on God to preserve, keep, and guard us in it. It is not something we can do on our own and it is often unknowingly and unwittingly compromised.

The second character trait needed by David while he waited on God was “*uprightness*”. At its root the word means “*straight*”, and as such it takes on ethical dimensions. It is a quality of heart and mind, particularly in one’s dealings with people. It denotes honorable, sincere, honest, and ethical conduct towards others. Without uprightness it is impossible to maintain any level of integrity.

How can a person who is insincere, dishonest, unethical, and dishonorable in their dealings with people and Scripture make any claim to spiritual integrity? How can those who prey on desperate and despairing people and fraudulently claim to possess the ability to heal people of diseases own any spiritual integrity? How can those who deceitfully represent the workings of their own imagination as new revelation from God retain any spiritual integrity? Is there any conceivable way in which it is ethical to adulterate the gospel into a means of self-improvement or to dilute salvation by adding human works and ability to grace alone? Is it possible by any stretch of the imagination to contrive a way in which it is honorable to desecrate and corrupt the worship of God by craftily turning it into an emotionally-driven entertainment venue? Is there anything ethical in the practice of tricking people into thinking they are Christians merely because they were emotionally manipulated or peer-pressured into saying a prayer or making a “decision”? Is there anything honorable and sincere about exploiting and pandering to the fleshly and carnal desires of people simply to get them to come to your church? Is there any honesty in branding as legalism the Bible’s demands for holiness? What is honest about misrepresenting, twisting, misinterpreting, and ignoring entire passages of Scripture because they conflict with individual preferences, chosen lifestyles, denominational dogma, personal presuppositions, or political correctness? Is it ethical and honorable for Christians to partner with enemies of the gospel in an attempt to ward off the assaults on our society’s moral fabric; is the preservation of cultural morality and religious freedom so precious as to supersede biblical truth and the gospel itself? The Reformers and martyrs did not think so. Why should God preserve what we as a society have used against Him?

Waiting on God requires not only spiritual integrity with God but spiritual uprightness in our dealings with people, but, as can be seen, uprightness, like integrity, is a character trait that is in short supply within most of the modern church and the abandonment of which has been rationalized with virtuous-sounding motives. After all, didn’t the religious rulers justify the murder of Jesus under the noble-sounding guise of national and cultural interest? *If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation*” (Jn 11:48; cf. 11 49, 50). And once these religious leaders had rationalized their sin they were not about to tolerate having it identified as sin (cf. Ac 5:28-33; 7:52-54). What God condemns as sin people now demand as a civil right or insist upon as a Christian liberty, and to deny them their sin and identify it as sin is considered an infringement on their liberties, judgmental, legalistic, and unloving. When did obedience to God’s word and the pursuit of holiness go from being an expression of genuine love for God (cf. Jn 14:15, 21, 23, 24) to legalism? The same time spiritual integrity and uprightness were forfeited.

It requires uprightness to speak the truth in love and not capitulate to shifts in the culture, religious fads, or political and moral agendas. It requires integrity and uprightness to teach sound doctrine, to expose false teaching, and to identify sin as sin. To live an upright life is to live a life patterned after the life of Jesus, *“the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked”* (1 Jn 2:6). And how did Jesus walk, what was the pattern of His life? It can be summed up in one word – submission – perfect obedience and submission to the Father; *“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me (Jn 6:38)....”* *“My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work”* (Jn 4:34).... *“I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me”* (Jn 5:30).... *“Behold, I have come to do Thy will”* (Hb 10:9). No church has a mandate from God to build a big ministry or a big building, but every Christian has a divine mandate to carry out God’s will as revealed in Scripture. Uprightness is mandatory if we are to submit our will, our desires, our plans, and our minds to the will of God. Jesus told people the truth about themselves and about God, and as a result most rejected Him and His message. Men and women’s hearts have not changed since the time of Jesus, we have the same hearts as Old Testament Israel; people still do not like to hear the truth about God or themselves. The only way to make the God of the Bible and the message of the Bible popular and palatable to the world is to dishonestly alter both and accommodate both to our preferences, prejudices, and self-serving goals, thus exposing a serious lack of uprightness.

Integrity and uprightness are our best security while we wait on God. Both are required. Where one is missing the other will be found conspicuously absent. Both are essential character traits for successfully waiting on God. If while waiting on God it is discovered that one of these is deficient, it is probable that what you are waiting for is not God, but an idol, and the security offered by idols is only an illusion.

Many Christians will trust God up to a point, then they waver at His promises; they limit God’s power, mistrust His methods, or doubt His sincerity. They grow weary of waiting on God. All unbelief can be attributed to doubting one or more of God’s attributes. If while waiting on God a Christian notices a lack of integrity and uprightness in their own life, this is one of the blessings which the waiting was meant to work. In this mirror we see our spiritual impotency. What need would we have for God to preserve us but for the fact that we cannot preserve ourselves? In waiting on God we discover our universal impotency and total inability for spiritual integrity, spiritual uprightness, or living up to His will. As was stated earlier, nothing so effectively exposes that we are not who we think we are as does waiting on God. Such discovery should cause us to flee to Christ in humble dependence on Him to supply us with the spiritual integrity and uprightness that alone will preserve us while we wait for God – *Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for Thee.*