

2 Timothy 2:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.

Analysis

If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself. The hymn's final couplet addresses believer unfaithfulness versus Christ's faithfulness. "If we believe not" (*ei apistoumen, εἰ ἀπιστοῦμεν*) can mean either "if we are faithless" or "if we disbelieve." Context favors "are faithless"—failing to trust fully, wavering in faith, showing weakness. This differs from verse 12's outright denial. Here Paul addresses struggling believers whose faith wavers but doesn't wholly fail.

The promise: "yet he abideth faithful" (*ekeinos pistos menei, ἔκεινος πιστὸς μένει*). The pronoun *ekeinos* (*ἔκεινος*) emphasizes Christ—"that one," contrasting human faithlessness with divine faithfulness. The verb *menō* (*μένω*) means remain, continue, abide—Christ's faithfulness is unchanging, permanent, not dependent on human faithfulness. Even when believers falter, Christ remains faithful to His covenant promises.

The basis: "he cannot deny himself" (*arnēsasthai gar heauton ou dynatai, ἀρνήσασθαι γάρ ἑαυτὸν οὐ δύναται*). Christ's faithfulness stems from His unchanging character—He cannot act contrary to His nature. To abandon His elect people would contradict His covenant promises and divine character. God's faithfulness doesn't depend on human performance but on His immutable nature (Numbers 23:19, Hebrews 6:18).

Historical Context

This verse provided crucial pastoral comfort in persecution. Many Christians experienced fear, doubts, wavering faith when facing torture and death. Did temporary weakness mean loss of salvation? Paul reassures: Christ remains faithful even when believers struggle. This echoes Old Testament covenant theology where God remained faithful despite Israel's repeated failures. The doctrine of perseverance of the saints rests here: true believers may falter but cannot finally fall away because Christ holds them (John 10:28-29, Philippians 1:6).

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. When your faith wavers or you struggle with doubts, do you rest in Christ's unchanging faithfulness or spiral into despair over your weakness?
2. How does understanding that salvation depends on Christ's faithfulness rather than yours provide both comfort and motivation for obedience?
3. In what areas of Christian life do you need to trust Christ's faithfulness more than your own ability to remain faithful?

Interlinear Text

εἰ	ἀπιστοῦμεν	ἐκεῖνος	πιστὸς	μένει	ἀρνήσασθαι	ἐαυτὸν
If	we believe not	yet he	faithful	abideth	deny	himself
G1487	G569	G1565	G4103	G3306	G720	G1438

οὐ δύναται
he cannot

G1410

G3756

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 23:19 (Parallel theme): God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

Romans 3:3 (Faith): For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?

2 Thessalonians 3:3 (Faith): But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil.

Titus 1:2 (Parallel theme): In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;

1 Thessalonians 5:24 (Faith): Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.

1 Corinthians 1:9 (Faith): God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Hebrews 6:18 (Parallel theme): That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:

Matthew 24:35 (Parallel theme): Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

Romans 9:6 (Parallel theme): Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel:

Isaiah 25:1 (Faith): O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.