

Terms and Conditions May Apply(?)

You know from your own life experiences that when you hear “*terms and conditions may apply*,” ***you need to be on guard***. Things are ***never*** as they seem when terms and conditions apply. Those fine-print terms and conditions always seem to have a way of making the “sweet deal” really not so sweet at all.

ALWAYS read the fine print! We know this when it comes to things like buying insurance or leasing cars or getting credit cards or purchasing memberships to the gym or Sam’s Club or the country club. But... what about things like marriage? What if rather than vow to love you in good times and in bad times, richer, poorer, in sickness and in health, your spouse-to-be instead states, “*I will love you so long as.... Terms and conditions may apply.*” ***Run away!*** Caveats and conditions are not suitable substitutes for marriage vows.

What about when it comes to matters of faith? I know Thomas immediately comes into the crosshairs with these questions, ***and rightly so***. Thomas himself lays out his terms and conditions, stating that he would never believe **UNTIL** he saw proof that Jesus was indeed alive. He would have to first put his fingers into the wounds of the living Christ (like the other disciples got to do) **BEFORE** he would ever believe. His faith had terms and conditions, which isn’t really faith at all. Faith trusts in what is not seen. Thomas, on the other hand, would ***only*** trust... ***provided*** he first had proof and reason to believe.

But...this is where Christians with the best intentions tend to go off track. I say it every year, and I’ll say it again: Today is often treated as “Pick on Thomas Day.” It’s easy, right? “*Don’t be like Doubting Thomas.*” But... just like we don’t pick on the women at the tomb that first Easter morning who forgot (and doubted) Christ’s own Word regarding His resurrection on the third day, deep-down we also don’t really like to pick on Thomas for his unbelief/doubt. ***After all, we can relate to Thomas. We understand. We get it.*** So... instead, we often wind up making excuses for Thomas; even condoning Thomas’ unbelief because deep-down, he’s just like us. “*Thomas is a guy after my own heart! The other guys got to see the resurrected Jesus, and Thomas wasn’t there when that happened. Thomas only wanted the same experience as them.*” I get it. I do. ***BUT...so now it’s okay to not believe, so long as we have good reason?*** Folks: unbelief is **never** okay with Jesus! There is **never** a situation/circumstance in which unbelief/failure to trust in God above all things is permissible/condoned. Your Lord **never** blesses unbelief, no matter the circumstance.

“*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.*” With these words of our Lord, all excuses for “situational unbelief” are shot down. With these words, our Lord makes crystal clear that a ***quatenus-type faith*** (Latin for “in so far as,” as in “*I believe, in so far as/as long as...*”) is ***never*** okay—**EVER**. (This stands in

contrast to a *quia-type faith*; i.e., a faith that believes **BECAUSE** the hammer and anvil and God's Word is in charge; i.e., "*I believe because God says so.*")

In a loving but firm way, your Lord necessarily calls out Thomas and his unbelief. (And that's what it is: UNBELIEF, situational or otherwise.) ***He doesn't let it slide, and He certainly doesn't condone it, as if it's okay in this particular circumstance.*** The Gospel immediately goes on to tell us that Jesus had done many other miraculous things in the presence of the disciples that weren't recorded, "*but these are recorded so that you may believe...and by believing you may have life in His name.*" This is the whole point of today's lessons. Faith comes through hearing; hearing (and believing) the Word of Christ. To make excuses; to inject "satisfactory terms and conditions" for Thomas' unbelief ***misses this point!***

What about us? Remember: All these things; i.e., the entire canon of holy Scripture, are written so that we may believe and eternal life. ***Think of how often our faith is more quatenus in nature than quia.*** More than we care to admit, we believe... but only in so far as we agree with or like what we hear. For instance, what has God said about marriage, sex, sexuality? What has He said about gossip/murder, adultery, or covetousness? Our whole political system is based on covetousness! We cast our vote for the person who promises to give us what we want or feel like we deserve... what we covet. We're against covetousness... until we're not; until it benefits us.

What has God said about something as simple as being active and regular in worship? "*Honor the Sabbath by keeping it holy. *Terms and conditions apply; e.g., Honor the Sabbath... unless the fish are biting.*" ***Yeah... that's not how it goes. And yet... that's how we often treat it.*** "*I absolutely believe what my God and Lord says, BUT... nice weather, inclement weather, too early, money's tight, the fish are biting, the lawn needs mowing, I'm just not feeling it today. It's not traditional enough. It's too traditional.*" So... terms and conditions do apply to honoring the Sabbath; to not neglecting to meet together; to gathering together to hear God's Word, pray, and sharing in the breaking of bread? ***They don't... and yet... somehow we always see to it that in our particular case they do.*** And we do this, not just with the 3rd Commandment, but with ***all*** of God's Word.

Just think of what so often gets passed off as "faithfulness" to our Lord in this day and age. Many a Christian boldly boasts of their faithfulness. "*I love my Lord with all my heart, soul, and mind!*" And yet the fruits they bear in their lives shows forth a faith that's more, "*I will absolutely take up my cross and follow Jesus wherever He leads... provided it doesn't involve any sort of inconvenience or discomfort on my part. I am willing to be MARTYRED for Jesus and the faith..., but terms and conditions do apply.*"

What does the Word of God say? Keep in mind: When I say this, I'm not referring to what I think the Word says. I'm not even referring to just the words in a book written so long ago (which is how the devil working in conjunction with our Old Adam nature gets us to doubt the Word). I'm referring to Christ Himself, the Word of God who became flesh and died and rose again. Jesus Christ is proof that God is faithful to His Word. God kept His Word... in spite of us. No caveats. No conditions. *"Tell you what I'm gonna do... provided you do your part."* Nope. *"While we were still dead in our sin, Christ died for us."* What has this same almighty Word of God already said? ***"IT IS FINISHED!"*** No terms or conditions. Quite the opposite. ***Unconditional mercy. Unconditional grace.*** We don't get what we justly deserve (death and damnation), and instead we get what we most certainly do ***not*** deserve (life and salvation). Folks: This is the same Word of God in resurrected flesh, who bid Thomas to ***touch and see and believe.*** It is this same Word of God in the flesh who comes to us today in, with, and under the ***mere and unassuming means of Word, water, bread and wine, to take and eat, take and drink, to taste and see the goodness of the Lord.***

Think about that. Jesus Himself declares, *"Blessed are those who believe and yet have not seen,"* and yet He still comes to us in very real and tangible forms; things we can see, touch, taste, and feel. Like He did with Thomas, He bids us to come and taste and see that He is our Lord, and that He is still keeping His promise to be with us always. ***He comes to us in the midst of our weaknesses, our doubts, and our despairs, bidding us to come and taste and see that He is our very good and very present God and Lord.*** Look no further than this altar...and listen to His Word and Promise. *"As often as you do this, remember what I have said. This is My Body/Blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of all your sin."* It is so because He says so. Not even the gates of hell can prevail against this Christocentric fact. Terms and conditions do not apply.

Folks: Here is Christ, right where He calls you to be/receive, right where He promises to be, holding out to you His free and unmerited and unconditional gifts of Divine mercy, grace, and peace. Here is He who died and rose again for you and your salvation, no strings attached, no terms, no conditions, no caveats! That said, may this almighty Word of God breathe His life and peace ***into you.*** May your eyes and ears of faith be always opened—no terms and no conditions—to ***recognize and rejoice*** that your resurrected Bridegroom is in your midst and with you always, loving you unconditionally; in good times and in bad times, for richer and for poorer, in sickness, in health, whether you live, whether you die, and everything in between. May this Christ-centered Good News give you peace, and may this peace, which surpasses all human understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Him—no terms, no conditions—now and into all eternity.

AMEN