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## THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

#169

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## THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

**A.W. Pink**

UNFAITHFULNESS is one of the most outstanding sins of these evil days. In the business world, a man's word is, with exceedingly rare exceptions, no longer his bond. In the social world, marital infidelity abounds on every hand, the sacred bonds of wedlock being broken with as little regard as the discarding of an old garment. In the ecclesiastical realm, thousands who have solemnly covenanted to preach the truth make no scruple to attack and deny it. Nor can reader or writer claim complete immunity from this fearful sin: in how many ways have we been unfaithful to Christ, and to the light and privileges which God has entrusted to us! How refreshing, then, how unspeakably blessed, to lift our eyes above this scene of ruin, and behold One who is faithful, faithful in all things, faithful at all times.

"Know therefore that the Lord Thy God, He is God, the faithful God" (Deut 7:9). This quality is essential to His being, without it He would not be God. For God to be unfaithful would be to act contrary to His nature, which were impossible: "if we believe not, yet He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself" (II Tim 2:13).

Faithfulness is one of the glorious perfections of His being. He is as it were clothed with it: "O Lord God of hosts, who is a strong Lord like unto Thee? or to Thy faithfulness round about Thee?" (Psa 89:8). So too when God became incarnate it was said, "Righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins, and faithfulness the girdle of His reins" (Isa 11:5).

What a word is that in Psalms 36:5, "Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; and Thy faithfulness unto the clouds." Far above all finite comprehension is the unchanging faithfulness of God. Everything about God is great, vast, incomparable. He never forgets, never fails, never falters, never forfeits His word. To every declaration of promise or prophecy the Lord has exactly adhered, every engagement of covenant or threatening He will make good, for "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?" (Num 23:19). Therefore does the believer exclaim, "His compassions fail not, they are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness" (Lam 3:22-23).

Scripture abounds in illustrations of God's faithfulness. More than four thousand years ago He said, "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter and day and night shall not cease" (Gen 8:22). Every year that comes furnishes a fresh witness to God's fulfillment of this promise. In Genesis 15 we find that Jehovah declared unto Abraham, "Thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them...But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again" (vv.13-16). Centuries ran their weary course. Abraham's descendants groaned amid the brick-kilns of Egypt. Had God forgotten His promise? No, indeed. Read Exodus 12:41, "And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt." Through Isaiah the Lord declared, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel" (7:14). Again centuries past, but "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman" (Gal 4:4).

God is true. His Word of Promise is sure. In all His relations with His people God is faithful. He may be safely relied upon. No one ever yet really trusted Him in vain. We find this precious truth expressed almost everywhere in the Scriptures, for His people need to know that faithfulness is an essential part of the Divine character. This is the basis of our confidence in Him. But it is one thing to accept the faithfulness of God as a Divine truth, it is quite another to act upon it. God has given us many "exceeding great and precious promises," but are we really counting on His fulfillment of them? Are we actually expecting Him to do for us all that He has said? Are we resting with implicit assurance on these words, "He is faithful that promised" (Heb 10:23)?

There are seasons in the lives of all when it is not easy, no not even for Christians, to believe that God is faithful. Our faith is sorely tried, our eyes bedimmed with tears, and we can no longer trace the outworkings of His love. Our ears are distracted with the noises of the world, harassed by the atheistic whisperings of Satan, and we can no longer hear the sweet accents of His still small voice. Cherished plans have been thwarted, friends on whom we relied have failed us, a professed brother or sister in Christ has betrayed us. We are staggered. We sought to be faithful to God, and now a dark cloud hides Him from us. We find it difficult, yea, impossible, for carnal reason to harmonize His frowning providence with His gracious promises. Ah, faltering soul, severely tried fellow pilgrim, seek grace to heed Isaiah 50:10, "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God."

When you are tempted to doubt the faithfulness of God, cry out, "Get thee hence, Satan." Though you cannot now harmonize God's mysterious dealings with the avowals of His love, wait on Him for more light. In His own good time He will make it plain to you. "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter" (John 13:7). The sequel will yet demonstrate that God has neither forsaken nor deceived His child. "And therefore will the Lord wait that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted, that He may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgement: blessed are all they that wait for Him" (Isa 30:18).

"Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, But trust Him for His grace, Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face. Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take, The clouds ye so much dread, Are rich with mercy, and shall break In blessing o'er your head."

"Thy testimonies which Thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful" (Psa 119:138). God has not only told us the best, but He has not withheld the worst. He has faithfully described the ruin which the Fall has effected. He has faithfully diagnosed the terrible state which sin has produced. He has faithfully made known his inveterate hatred of evil, and that He must punish the same. He has faithfully warned us that He is "a consuming fire" (Heb 12:29). Not only does His Word abound in illustrations of His fidelity in fulfilling His promises, but it also records numerous examples of His faithfulness in making good His threatenings. Every stage of Israel's history exemplifies that solemn fact. So it was with individuals: Pharaoh, Korah, Achan and a host of others are so many proofs. And thus it will be with you, my reader: unless you have fled or do flee to Christ for refuge, the everlasting burning of the Lake of Fire will be your sure and certain portion. God is faithful.

God is faithful in preserving His people. "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son" (I Cor 1:9). In the previous verse promise was made that God would confirm unto the end His own people. The Apostle's confidence in the absolute security of believers was founded not on the strength of their resolutions or ability to persevere, but on the veracity of Him that cannot lie. Since God has promised to His Son a certain people for His inheritance, to deliver them from sin and condemnation, and to make them participants of eternal life in glory, it is certain that He will not allow any of them to perish.

God is faithful in disciplining His people. He is faithful in what He withholds, no less than in what He gives. He is faithful in sending sorrow as well as in giving joy. The faithfulness of God is a truth to be confessed by us not only when we are at ease, but also when we are smarting under the sharpest rebuke. Nor must this confession be merely of our mouths, but of our hearts, too. When God smites us with the rod of chastisement, it is faithfulness which wields it. To acknowledge this means that we humble ourselves before Him, own that we fully deserve His correction, and instead of murmuring, we thank Him for it. God never afflicts without a reason. "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you" (I Cor 11:30), says Paul, illustrating this principle. When His rod falls upon us let us say with Daniel, "O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto Thee, but unto us confusion of faces" (9:7).

"I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me" (Psa 119:75). Trouble and affliction are not only consistent with God's love pledged in the everlasting covenant, but they are parts of the administration of the same. God is not only faithful notwithstanding afflictions, but faithful in sending them. "Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless My lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer My faithfulness to fail" (Psa 89:32-33). Chastening is not only reconcilable with God's lovingkindness, but it is the effect and expression of it. It would much quiet the minds of God's people if they would remember that His covenant love binds Him to lay on them seasonable correction. Afflictions are necessary for us: "In their affliction they will seek Me early" (Hosea 5:15).

God is faithful in glorifying His people. "Faithful is He which calleth you, who also will do" (I Thess 5:24). The immediate reference here is to the saints being "preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." God deals with us not on the ground of our merits (for we have none), but for His own great name's sake. God is constant to Himself and to His own purpose of grace: "whom He called...them He also glorified" (Rom 8:30). God gives a full demonstration of the constancy of His everlasting goodness toward His elect by effectually calling them out of darkness into His marvelous light, and this should fully assure them of the certain continuance of it. "The foundation of God standeth sure" (II Tim 2:19). Paul was resting on the faithfulness of God when he said, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day" (II Tim 1:12).

The apprehension of this blessed truth will preserve us from worry. To be full of care, to view our situation with dark forebodings, to anticipate the morrow with sad anxiety, is to reflect poorly upon the faithfulness of God. He who has cared for His child through all the years will not forsake him in old age. He who has heard your

prayers in the past will not refuse to supply your need in the present emergency. Rest on Job 5:19, "He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee."

The apprehension of this blessed truth will check our murmurings. The Lord knows what is best for each one of us, and one effect of resting on this truth will be the silencing of our petulant complainings. God is greatly honored when, under trial and chastening, we have good thoughts of Him, vindicate His wisdom and justice, and recognize His love in His very rebukes.

The apprehension of this blessed truth will beget increasing confidence in God. "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator" (I Pet 4:19). When we trustfully resign ourselves, and all our affairs into God's hands, fully persuaded of His love and faithfulness, the sooner shall we be satisfied with His providences and realize that "He doeth all things well."

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## GOD IS FAITHFUL BECAUSE HE IS UNCHANGEABLE

Edward Pearse

*"For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed."*—Malachi 3:6

As God's unchangeableness calls for much duty, so it ministers much sweet comfort to His poor church and people. The truth is, there is scarcely any such spring and treasury of comfort as this is. "God's immutability (said one) is the best cordial to refresh a fainting soul." The great cordial God sent Israel in their distress was this: "I AM THAT I AM" (Exodus 3:14), or "I am an unchangeable God"; and indeed that was enough for them. But more particularly there are several consolatory conclusions which flow from God's unchangeableness, conclusions which carry strong consolation in them:

1. God being unchangeable, His glory shall live and in due time shine forth conspicuously before all. See this in these words: "I am the Lord, I am Jehovah" (Isaiah 42:8); that is, "I am He who was, and is, and is to come." He is the unchangeable God; and what then? Why, "My glory will I not give to another, nor My praise to graven images." In other words, "My glory shall not die but live, My glory shall not be always veiled and eclipsed; but it shall shine forth in perfect luster and splendor."

One of the great burdens that lie upon the people of God is the sufferings of His name and glory. "The reproaches of them that reproached Thee are fallen upon me," said David in Psalm 69:9. God's glory is veiled. His name is blasphemed. His worship is interrupted. His providence is denied, all His attributes are obscured, and His honor is in every way thrown in the dust, which makes holy souls go mourning from day to day. But, my beloved, here is that which may comfort the soul: God is unchangeable, and therefore His glory shall live and shine forth again. The veil shall in due time be taken away, and His glory shall appear; yes, it shall be as eminently illustrated and displayed as ever it has been veiled and eclipsed.

You know how God speaks in reference to the glory of His name in answer to Christ's prayer: "Father, glorify Thy name" (John 12:28). What answer does the Father give Him? "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." That is, "I have hitherto taken care of My glory, and I will take care of it still." O my beloved, God's glory has hitherto been dear to Him, and He has hitherto maintained it in the world, and He is unchangeable,

and therefore His glory is as dear to Him as ever it was. He is as jealous for it as ever. He is also every bit as able to vindicate and maintain it as ever He was. Assure yourselves, were it not that He knows how to make it shine forth so much the more illustriously and conspicuously afterwards, He would not suffer it to be so veiled and eclipsed as sometimes He does. Yes, let me say that He is always carrying on-as the interest of His people's happiness, so the concerns of His own glory.

2. God being unchangeable, His church shall be preserved and delivered-preserved under, and in due time delivered out of, all her troubles and afflictions; and what a sweet thing is that! The poor church of God is oftentimes plunged into very deep and sore distress, such as are ready to sink and overwhelm her. She is oftentimes "afflicted, tossed with tempests, and not comforted" (Isaiah 54:11). Such indeed is her condition at this day; and as good old "Eli sat trembling for the ark of God" (1 Samuel 4:13), a type of the church, so it may be that some may now sit trembling for the Church of God, fearing how it will go with her; and indeed he is not one of Zion's children, that is not concerned for Zion's afflictions. But lo! my beloved, in the midst of all such fears and tremblings of heart, there is strong consolation. God is unchangeable, and, being unchangeable, He will certainly support and deliver His Church, and that in the best way and fittest season.

God has never yet failed His Church in her afflictions. Yes, it is admirable to consider how hitherto He has carried it towards her under all her distress; how sweetly He has supported her, and how seasonably He has delivered her. When they were in Egypt in the iron furnace; when they were in the wilderness; when they were in the Red Sea; when they were in Babylon, in Haman's time and in Herod's time; when the neck of the whole Church of God was upon the block at once, as it were, and also all down, through the times of anti-christian tyranny and persecution to this very day, oh, how admirably has God wrought for them in supporting and delivering them! And, certainly, what He has done, that He can and will do for them again as the case shall require. God is unchangeable. "His hand is not shortened, that He cannot save; nor His ear grown heavy, that He cannot hear" (Isaiah 59:1).

God being unchangeable, He is as tender of, and careful for, His Church and people as ever He was. Being unchangeable, He is in every way the same to His people now as He was formerly; the same in His love to them, His jealousy for them, His sympathy with them, and His interest in them. He stands in the same covenant relation to them as ever He did. He is their King, their Head, their Husband, their Friend, their Father, their Shepherd, now as well as heretofore. He is in every way as able to help them, and accordingly will support and, in due time, deliver them; and faith sees and rests assured of this. "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old; art Thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Art Thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?" (Isaiah 51:9-10). So again, "But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead: who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us" (2 Corinthians 1:9-10).

Mark, faith, you see, argues from what God has done to what He will do for His poor Church and people; and what ground has it to do so but His unchangeableness? Let Zion, therefore, the Church and people of God, take heed of that language which they spoke of old: "Zion said, 'The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me'" (Isaiah 49:14). Or as Jacob elsewhere said, "My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgement is passed over by my God." But God must change, if this were to be. True, God may permit His Church to be sorely afflicted, as at this day, but it is but to illustrate His own glory the more in her support and deliverance.

3. God being unchangeable, His enemies shall be destroyed; they shall all die and perish. I mean His incorrigible, implacable enemies who will not stoop to the scepter of His kingdom. God may, and sometimes does, permit His and His people's enemies to practice and prosper, and for a long time together He lets them alone in their sins and oppositions against both Himself and them; yes, He even "fills their belly with His hid treasure" (as you have it in Psalm 17:14). He lets them enjoy some of the best of outward comforts and

contentments, and that in great fullness, which oftentimes proves a great burden and temptation to His poor, afflicted people, such as are ready to sin and bear them down.

So it was with the psalmist in Psalm 73, and it is so many times with us; but remember that God is unchangeable, and, being unchangeable, though He may permit His and His people's enemies to practice and prosper for a time, yet not always. No, they shall be destroyed, and that with a great destruction. Pray observe how things issued at last in that very psalm: "Surely Thou didst set them in slippery places, Thou castest them down into destruction; how are they brought into desolation as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors" (Psalm 73:18-19). Pray observe, he was not more offended at, nor was he more ready to envy their prosperity before, than now he wonders at their ruin and destruction. "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree, yet he passed away, and lo! he was not. Yea, I sought him, but he could not be found; the transgressors shall be destroyed together; the end of the wicked shall be cut off" (Psalm 37:35-38). God says, in reference to His and His people's enemies, "To Me belongeth vengeance and recompense; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things which shall come upon them make haste, for the Lord shall judge His people" (Deuteronomy 32:35-36). Still, you see, though God permits His and His people's enemies to prosper for a time, yet at last they are destroyed; and as sure as God is unchangeable, they shall be destroyed.

Pray, compare my text for this book with the verse immediately preceding: "I will come near to you to judgment (says God), and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against all that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, and that fear not Me,' saith the Lord" (Malachi 3:5). "I will suddenly and terribly destroy all My enemies, all that go on in their sinning against Me." But how shall we be assured of this? He tells you in the next words, for "I am the Lord, I change not." It is as if He had said, "As sure as I am God and unchangeable, they shall be destroyed."

O sirs, though God permits His and His people's enemies to prosper for a time, yet He always certainly destroys them in the conclusion, and He will do so still, because He is unchangeable. God is in every way the same as ever He was, the same in holiness, jealousy, justice, power, that ever He was. He is as holy now as ever He was, and so hates sin as much as ever He did. He is as just now as ever He was, and so as ready and disposed to take vengeance as ever. He is as jealous now, as jealous for His name, worship, gospel, and people, as ever He was, and so will as little bear with the opposers and abusers of them. He is as wise and powerful now as ever, and so as able to deal with His enemies. It is a great Scripture that says, "He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength; who ever hardened himself against Him and prospered?" (Job 9:4). Oh, never any yet did, and never any shall. No, but "He will wound the head of His enemies, and the hairy scalp of such a one as goeth on still in his trespasses" (Psalm 68:21). Oh, that all the enemies of God and His people, and all rebellious, impenitent ones, would lay this to heart.

4. God being unchangeable, the purposes and promises of His grace to His Church and people shall certainly be accomplished. God's heart, my beloved, has been full of counsels and purposes of love toward His people from all eternity, and He has also made many blessed promises to them, "promises that are exceeding great and precious" (2 Peter 1:4), because they are full of exceedingly great and precious things. Greatness and preciousness do not often meet together; many things are great, but then they are not precious; and many things are precious, but then they are not great. But in the promises of God to His Church and people, greatness and preciousness meet.

Now, whatever purposes God has had in His heart, and whatever promises He has made in this world to His people, they shall all be accomplished because He is an unchangeable God. He is the same now as He was when He took up those purposes and made those promises, and therefore will assuredly make them all good in due season. And so much He tells us: "I am God, and there is none else. I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, 'My

counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.' I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I also will do it" (Isaiah 46:9-11).

Mark, first He asserts His Godhead and unchangeableness, and then He tells you all His pleasure shall stand and be accomplished. God being unchangeable, first, none can turn Him or make Him alter His mind. "He is in one mind, and who can turn Him? And what His soul desireth, even that He doeth: for He performeth the thing that is appointed for me" (Job 23:13-14). The wisest and most resolved among men may possibly be wrought upon, and brought over from what they purposed; but it is not so with God.

Second, none can hinder Him from or in His making good His purposes and promises. "Before the day was, I am He; and there is none that can deliver out of My hand: I will work, and who shall let it?" (Isaiah 43:13). Poor soul, whoever you are, who are one of the Lord's people, look back to the eternal counsels and purposes of His love towards you, and you will find them a great deep, a fountain of infinite sweetness. In them you will see heaps of love and treasures of grace; and then turn your eye to the promises of His covenant, which you will find inexpressibly sweet and exactly suitable to your condition, to all your wants, and then know assuredly that the whole, both of the one and the other, shall be accomplished to you in due season. It is true indeed, His counsels may seem to us to be frustrated, and His promises may for a time be deferred and delayed, insomuch that our hasty unbelieving hearts may be ready to conclude that they will never be accomplished, saying with the psalmist, "Does His promise fail for evermore?" (Psalm 77:8). But, soul, wait a while, and they shall all be made good to a tittle.

Has He promised to pardon you, to cleanse you, to give you a new heart and a new spirit, and to write His law in your heart? Has He promised to save you and lodge you at last in His own bosom? Then know it shall all be accomplished. Oh, how sweet is this! Oh, to fasten upon a promise and see it surely to be made good, as in God's unchangeableness we may. There we may see all as sure, as if it were already accomplished. Oh, what strong consolation does this afford! What inexpressible sweetness will this give unto a soul!

5. God being unchangeable, the saints are unchangeably happy, and have a blessed asylum to flee unto under all those changes and emergencies that may at any time come upon them. Pray mark, my beloved, God is the saints' God and portion. And in Him their happiness lies. He therefore being unchangeable, they have an unchangeable happiness; they are a happy people, and they will be unchangeably so. "The counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations"; and what then? "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom He hath chosen for His own inheritance" (Psalm 33:11-12).

The saints (as one well observed) are in all respects a blessed people. They are blessed in the pardon of their sins: "Blessed is the man whose sins are forgiven" (Psalm 32:1). They are blessed in regard to the disposition of their souls: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the meek, blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness" (Matthew 5:3, 5-6). They are blessed in their obedience and walking with God: "Blessed are the undefiled in the way" (Psalm 119:1). They are blessed in their hopes and expectations: "Blessed are they that wait for God" (Isaiah 30:18). Thus they are in every way, and in all respects, a blessed people; but here lies the perfection and crowning glory of their blessedness, and what indeed comprehends all the rest in it, namely, that the unchangeable God is their God and portion. "Happy is the people whose God is the Lord" (Psalm 144:15). Oh, this speaks them to be infinitely and unchangeably happy, and accordingly they should live upon Him, and that under all their strains and difficulties.

Oh, sirs, what is there that this will not support and comfort you under? Do your friends and comforts here change? However, God, your best friend and comfort, changes not, and that is enough. Do times and seasons change, and that for the worse, from sunshine to storms? Well, however, soul, your God changes not, and that is enough to sweeten all. Do you yourself change? Changes and war are upon you, and, which is the worst of it, your spirit changes; it will not keep even with God one hour. Well, still your God changes not, and that is enough. Do new temptations arise and old corruptions break out anew? Does guilt revive and recur upon you?

Be it so, yet your God is unchangeable, and so can and will relieve and succor you now as well as formerly, and that is enough.

Yes, do God's dispensations change towards you? He did smile, now He frowns. He did lift up, now He casts down. The light of His countenance did shine brightly upon you, now it is veiled and clouded. However, your God Himself changes not: His heart, His counsel, His covenant, and His love are still the same towards you as ever they were, howbeit the dispensation is changed. Oh, this one word, "God is mine, and He is unchangeable," has infinite sweetness in it, and it speaks to me to be infinitely and unchangeably happy. Oh, you who are the people of God, labor to see and rejoice in this happiness of yours. That you may the better do this, let me add only two short words to this, and I will close the whole discourse:

First, consider that as your God is unchangeable, so you are unchangeably interested in Him. This unchangeable God is unchangeably your God.

However, though God is unchangeable, some poor soul may say, "What will that avail me? My interest in Him, I fear, will change and fail; there will be shortly an end of that."

No, soul, the unchangeable God being indeed yours, He is yours forever. So the church said, "This God is our God forever and ever" (Psalm 48:14). O soul, you, through infinite, free, and rich grace, have a covenant interest in and relation to the unchangeable God, and this interest and relation of yours is a firm, lasting, and unchangeable interest and relation. Nothing that either men, devils, or lusts can do can possibly break or crack it.

I shall here only add a saying or two of Augustine. "The chief good, which is God, is neither given to such as are unwilling to have Him, nor taken away from such as are unwilling to part with Him." And elsewhere, "No man does or can lose Thee, O God, unless he is willing to lose Thee and go without Thee. And he that willingly parts with Thee, whither does he go? Whither does he flee, but from Thee smiling to Thee frowning; from Thee a reconciled Father to Thee an angry judge?"

Oh, soul, as long as you are willing to have God as yours, so long He shall be yours; yes, more, your interest in Him depends not upon your willingness for it, but upon His unchangeable love and covenant; and His love and covenant both must change before your interest in Him can fade and change.

Second, consider, as your God is unchangeable, so after a while you shall unchangeably enjoy Him and be with Him; your vision and fruition of Him shall be unchangeable. "Our happiness (said Augustine) is begun here in election, but it is perfected hereafter in fruition." You who have chosen the unchangeable God, you shall, after a few days, enjoy the God whom you have chosen; your happiness is great in your choosing of Him, but how much more great will it be in your enjoying of Him! "Thou shalt guide me by Thy counsels, and afterwards receive me unto glory. Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee" (Psalm 73:24-25). "I have chosen, and I do again choose Thee for my God and portion. Some enjoyment I have of Thee here, and more I shall have hereafter in heaven. I shall ere long be taken to enjoy Thee in Thy glory, fully, immediately, and forever, for Thou art mine, and I have made a solemn choice of Thee."

O saints! The unchangeable God is yours, and some communion you have with Him here in the ways of His grace, which is sweet and happy, but after you have enjoyed Him in the ways of His grace a while here, you shall be taken to the unchangeable enjoyment of Him in His glory above, which will be infinitely more sweet and happy. Your enjoyment of Him here is low and remote, as well as changeable and inconstant; but your enjoyment of Him above will be full, close, and unchangeable.

Here you have, now and then, a gracious visit from Him. He visits you in this duty and that ordinance, in this mercy and in that affliction; but, oh, how short many times are those visits of His! Alas! He is gone again in a

moment. But after a while you shall enjoy Him in His glory, and there you shall not have a short visit now and then only, but His constant presence forever. "So shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess 4: 17).

O blessed souls! There He will unchangeably delight in you, unchangeably shine upon you, unchangeably communicate Himself in His grace and glory to you. Oh, how sweet and blessed will this be!

Well, to close all. Saints, the unchangeable God is unchangeably your God, and howbeit your visions of Him are yet but dark, and your communion with Him but low, yet wait a while and the day will break, and all your shadows shall flee away. You shall exchange your ebbing waters for a full tide, your glimmerings and dawnings for a noonday, your imperfect beginnings for a full and perfect consummation of communion with Him. Howbeit there is now a veil upon His face so that you cannot behold Him, yet wait a while and the veil shall be taken away, and you shall behold His face, His glory forever; and that so as to be fully changed into the image thereof, and eternally solaced and satisfied therein, suitable to that word.

I shall close all with this: "As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness" (Psalm 17:15). Amen. (Editors note: I will too say Amen: Amen! Praise the Lord!)

Taken from his book "A beam of Divine Glory" - published by Soli Deo Gloria Publications.

## GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IN AFFLICTING HIS PEOPLE

Charles Bridges

*"I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me"*—Psalm 119:75

This is the Christian's acknowledgment-fully satisfied with the dispensation of God. This is his confidence; so invigorating to his own soul; so cheering to the church. The Lord's dealings are called his judgments, not as having judicial curses, but as the acts of his justice in the chastening of sin. "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17). Perhaps also; as the administration of his wise judgments in their measure and application. "O LORD, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing" (Jer 10:24). But here is not only the confession of the Lord's general judgment, but of his especial faithfulness to himself. And this he knew; not from the dictates of the flesh (which would have given a contrary verdict), but from the testimony of the word, and the witness of his own experience. "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he" (Deut 32:4). "Righteous art thou, O LORD, and upright are thy judgments" (Psa 119:137). "The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works" (Psa 145:17). It could not be doubted-much less denied.

The Christian says again, 'I know, O Lord, that thy rules of proceeding are agreeable to thy perfect justice and wisdom; and I am equally satisfied, that the afflictions that thou hast laid upon me from time to time, are only to fulfil thy gracious and faithful promise of making me eternally happy in thyself.' Blessed fruit of affliction! when we can thus "see the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy," that his "thoughts towards us are thoughts of peace, and not of evil!" (James 5:11; Jer 29:11). "The patience and faith of the saints" teach this difficult but most consoling lesson, in deciphering the mysterious lines in God's providence and faithfulness.

The child of God under the severest chastisement must acknowledge justice. Our gracious reward is always more: our "punishment always less, than our iniquities deserve." (Ezra 9:13. Comp. Job 11:6). "Wherefore should a living man complain?" (Lam 3:39). In trouble he is indeed! but not in hell. If he complain, let it be of none but himself, and his own wayward choice. I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and who can doubt the wisdom? Who would charge the operator with cruelty, in cutting out the proud flesh, that was bringing death upon the man? Who would not acknowledge the right judgment of his piercing work? Thus, when the Lord's painful work separates us from our sin, weans us from the world, and brings us nearer to himself, what remains for us, but thankfully to acknowledge his righteousness and truth? Unbelief is put to rebuke; and we, if we have indulged suspicion "that God hath forgotten to be gracious," must confess, "This is our infirmity." (Psa 77:7-10).

This assurance of the Lord's perfect justice, wisdom, and intimate knowledge of our respective cases, leads us to yield to his appointments in dutiful silence. Thus Aaron, under his most afflictive domestic calamity, "held his peace" (Lev 10:1-3). Job under a similar dispensation was enabled to say-"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord!" (Job 1:21. Comp. 2:10). Eli's language in the same trial was, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good" (1 Sam 3:18). David hushed his impatient spirit-"I was dumb; I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it." And when Shimei cursed him, he said, "Let him alone; let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him" (Psa 39:9; 2 Sam 16:11,12). The Shunamite, in the meek resignation of faith, acknowledged-"It is well" (2 Kings 4:26). Hezekiah kissed the rod, while it was smiting him to the dust: Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken" (Isa 39:8). Thus uniform is the language of the Lord's people under chastisement. I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right.

But the confession of justice may be mere natural conviction. "And Pharaoh sent, and called for Moses and Aaron, and said unto them, I have sinned this time: the LORD is righteous, and I and my people are wicked" (Exod 9:27) (compare Judges 1:7; 2 Chron 12:6). Faith goes further, and speaks of faithfulness. David not only acknowledges God's right to deal with him as he saw fit, and even his wisdom in dealing with him as he actually had done, but his faithfulness in afflicting-not his faithfulness though he afflicted-but in afflicting him; not as if it were consistent with his love, but as the very fruit of his love. It is not enough to justify God. What abundant cause is there to praise him! It is not enough to forbear to murmur. How exciting is the display of God's faithfulness and love! Yes, the trials appointed for us are none else than the faithful performance of his everlasting engagements. And to this cause we may always trace (and it is our privilege to believe it, where we cannot visibly trace it) the reason of much that is painful to the flesh. "Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end" (Deut 8:16). Let us only mark its gracious effects in our restoration-instruction (Psa 119:71), healing of our backslidings (Hos 2:6,7,14), and the continual purging of sins (Isa 27:9; Zech 13:9; John 15:2); and then say 'Is not the faithfulness of God gloriously displayed?' The Philistines could not understand Samson's riddle, how, "Meat could come out of the eater, and sweetness out of the strong" (Judg 14:14). As little can the world comprehend the fruitfulness of the Christian's trials; how his gracious Lord sweetens to him the bitter waters of Marah (see Exod 15:23-25), and makes the cross not so much the punishment as the remedy of sin. He finds therefore no inclination, and he feels that he has no interest in having any change made in the Lord's appointments, revolting as they may be to the flesh. He readily acknowledges that his merciful designs could not have been accomplished in any other way; while under trials many sweet tokens of love are vouchsafed, which, under circumstances of outward prosperity, could not have been received with the same gratitude and delight.

You that are living at ease in the indulgence of what this poor world can afford, how little does the Christian envy your portion! How surely in some future day will you be taught by experience to envy his! The world's riches are daily becoming poorer, and its pleasures more tasteless; and what will they be, and how will they appear, when eternity is at hand! Whereas affliction is the special token of our Father's love (Heb 12:6; Rev 3:19), conformity to the image of Jesus, and preparation for his service and kingdom. It is the only blessing that the Lord gives, without requiring us to ask for it. We receive it, therefore, as promised, not as threatened; and

when the "peaceable fruits of righteousness," which it worketh in God's time and way, spring up in our hearts, humbly and gratefully will we acknowledge the righteousness of his judgments, and the faithfulness of his corrections.

*"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Heb 12:11).*

*"And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Rom 5:3-5).*

## THE RIGHTEOUS MAN'S REFUGE - THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

John Flavel

*Opening that glorious attribute of Divine faithfulness as a third chamber of security to the people of God, in times of distress and danger.*

Having viewed the saint's refuge in the power and wisdom of God, we next proceed to a third chamber of safety for the saints refuge: The faithfulness of God.

In this attribute is our safety and rest, amidst the confusions of the world, and daily disappointments we are vexed withal, through the vanity and falseness of the creature; as to creatures, the very best of them are but vanity, yea, vanity of vanity, the vainest vanity, (Eccl 1:2) "Every man in his best estate is altogether vanity," (Psa 39:5). Yea, those that we expect most from, give us most trouble, (Mic 7:5). Nearest relations bring up the rear of sorrows, (Job 6:15). "My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook." Especially their deceit appears most, when we have most need of their help, (Psa 142:4). How great a mercy is it then to have a refuge in the faithfulness of God as David had; "I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul." And likewise the church, (Mic 7:7). "I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me." A time may come, when you shall not know where to trust in all this world. Let me therefore open to you this chamber of rest in the faithfulness of God against such a day, and this I shall do in a twofold consideration of it.

I. Absolutely in its own nature.

II. Relatively in the promises and providences of God.

I. Absolutely, and so the faithfulness of God is his sincerity, firmness, and constancy in performing his word to his people in all times and cases. So Moses describes him to Israel, (Deut 7:9). "Know therefore, that the Lord thy God he is God, the faithful God." And Joshua appeals to their experience for the vindication of it, (Josh 23:14). "Ye know in all your hearts, and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass, and not one thing hath failed thereof." And it is also fully asserted, (Jer 31:35,36,37) and greatly admired even in the darkest day, (Lam 3:23). Great is thy faithfulness. And it is well for us that his faithfulness is great, for great is that weight that leans upon it, even all our hopes for both worlds, for this world, and for that to come, (Tit 1:2). "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began."

Now God is faithful, and that will appear by these following evidences of it.

1. By his exact fulfilling of his promises of the longest date. So, (Acts 7:6) four hundred and thirty years were run out before the promise of Israel's deliverance out of Egypt was accomplished; yet, (Acts 7:17) when the time of the promise was come, God was punctual to a day. Seventy years in Babylon, and at the expiration of that time, they returned (2 Chron 36:21). Men may forget, but God cannot (Isa 49:15,16).

2. By making way for his promises through the greatest difficulties, and seeming impossibilities. So to Abraham when old (Gen 18:13,14). "Is there any thing too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time will I return unto thee, according to the time of life; and Sarah shall have a son." And likewise to the Israelites, "Can these dry bones live?" (Ezek 37:3). Difficulties are for men, not God, (Gen 18:14). What art thou, O great mountain (Zech 4:7). "If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the Lord of hosts" (Zech 8:6).

3. By fulfilling promises to his people, when their hopes and expectations have been given up. So (Ezek 37:11). "Our bones are dry, our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts." And (Isa 49:14) "Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." There may be much unbelief in good men, their faith may be sorely staggered, yet God is faithful; men may question his promises, yet God cannot deny himself (2 Tim 2:13).

4. By God's appealing to his people, and referring the matter to their own judgment (Mic 6:3,4,5). "O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me. For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord." If I have failed in any way of my promise, shew it: Did not Balak and Balaam court me, and try all ways to win me over to them by multitudes of sacrifices? yet I did not desert you. So (Jer 2:31) "O generation, see ye the word of the Lord: Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness? Wherefore say my people, We are lords; we will come no more unto thee?" also "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God: Which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is: which keepeth truth for ever" (Isa 44:8).

5. The faithfulness of God is abundantly cleared by the constant testimonies given unto it in all ages by them that have tried it, they have all witnessed for God, and attested his unspotted faithfulness to the generations that were to come. So did Joshua, (chap 23:14) "All is come to pass," and so did Daniel, (chap 9:4) "O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him," with which David's testimony concurs, (Psa 146:5, 6) "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God, which made the heaven and earth, the sea, and all that therein is, which keepeth truth for ever." Thus his people have been witnesses in all generations, unto the faithfulness of God in his promises; the consideration whereof leaves no doubt or objection behind it.

And if we enquire into the grounds and reasons why God is, and ever must be most faithful in performing his promises, we shall find it is built upon stable and unshaken pillars:

1. The holiness of his nature.
2. The all sufficiency of his power.
3. The honour of his name.
4. The unchangeableness of his nature.

1. The faithfulness of God is built upon the perfect holiness of his nature, by reason whereof it is impossible for God to lie, (Tit 1:2; Heb 6:11). The deceitfulness of a man flows from the corruption of the human nature, but "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?" (Num 23:19). If there be no defect in his being, there can be none in his working; if his nature be pure holiness, all his ways must be perfect faithfulness.

2. It is built upon the all-sufficiency of his power; whatsoever he hath promised to his people, he is able to perform it; men sometimes falsify their promises through the defects of ability to perform them; but God never out promised himself; if he will work, none can let, (Isa 43:13). He can do whatsoever he pleaseth to do (Psa 135:6). The holiness of his nature engageth, and the Almightyness of his power enables him to be faithful.

3. The glory and honour of his name may assure us of his faithfulness, in making good the promises, and all that good which is in the promises, to a tittle; for wherever you find a promise of God, you also find the name and honour of God given as a security for the performance of it; and so his name hath ever been pleaded with him by his people, as a mighty argument to work for them (Josh 7:9). What wilt thou do for thy great name; Lord Thine honour is a thousand times more than our lives, it is no such great matter what becomes of us; but ah, Lord, it is of infinite concernment that the glory of thy name be secured, and thy faithfulness kept pure and unspotted in the world. So again (Exo 32:11,12) "And Moses besought the Lord his God, and said, Lord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people which thou hast brought out of the land of Egypt, with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, for mischief did he bring them out to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people." It will be sad enough for the hands of the Egyptians to fall upon thy people, but infinitely worse for the tongues of the Egyptians to fall upon thy name.

4. The unchangeableness of his nature gives us the fullest assurance of his faithfulness in the promises (Mal 3:6). "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." God's unchangeableness is his people's indemnity, and best security in the midst of dangers; as there is not yea and nay with God, neither should it be so with our faith; that which gives steadiness to the promises should give steadiness also to our expectations for the performance of them: and so much, briefly, of the faithfulness of God, absolutely considered in the nature and grounds of it.

II. Next let us view the faithfulness of God, as it relates to the many great and precious promises made unto his people for their security, both in their

1. Temporal Concernments
2. Spiritual Concernments

We find the faithfulness of God pledged for the security of his people, their spiritual and eternal concernments against all their dangers and fears, threatening them on that account, and that more especially in these three respects.

1. It is given them as their great and best security for the pardon of their sins (1 John 1:9). "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Our greatest danger comes from sin; guilt is a fountain of tears, a pardoned soul only can look other troubles in the face boldly: as guilt begets fear, so pardon produces courage, and God's faithfulness in the covenant is, as it were, that pardon-office from whence we fetch our discharges and acquittances (Isa 43:25). "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake." The promises of remission are made for Christ's sake, and when made, they must be fulfilled for his own, that is, his faithfulness sake.

2. It is engaged for the perseverance of the saints, and their continuance in the ways of God in the most hazardous and difficult times; this was the encouragement given them (1 Cor 1:8,9). "Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ; God is faithful by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." Ah Lord! might those Corinthians say, the powers of the world are against us, suffering and death are before us, a treacherous and fearful heart within us. Ay, but yet fear not, Christ shall confirm you whosoever opposes you; though the world and your own hearts be deceitful, yet comfort yourselves with this, your God is faithful.

3. The faithfulness of God is given by promise for his people's security in, and encouragement against all their sufferings and afflictions in this world (2 Thess 3:2,3). "That we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men, for all men have not faith; but the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil." He prays they may be delivered from absurd, treacherous, and unfaithful men, who would crush and betray them to ruin; but this is proposed as their relief, that when the treachery of men shall bring them into troubles, the faithfulness of God shall support them under, and deliver them out of those troubles; they shall have spiritual supports from God under their deepest sufferings from men (1 Pet 4:19).

God's faithfulness is engaged for his people's indemnity and security, amidst the temporal and outward evils whereunto they are liable in this world; and that, either to preserve them from troubles (Psa 91:1-4) or to open a seasonable door of deliverance out of trouble (1 Cor 10:13). In both, or either of which, the hearts of Christians may be at rest in this troublesome world; for what need those troubles fright us, which either shall never touch us, or if they do, shall never hurt, much less ruin us?

III. Having taken a short view of God's faithfulness in the promises, it will be a lovely sight to take one view of it more, as it is actuated, and exerted in his providences over his people. Believe it, Christians, the faithfulness of God runs through all his works of providence, whenever he goes forth to work in the world. "Faithfulness is the girdle of his reigns," (Isa 11:5). It is an allusion to workmen who going forth in the morning to their labour, gird their loins or reins with a girdle; now there is no work wrought by God in this world, but his faithfulness is as the girdle of his loins: The consideration whereof should make the most despondent believer, Gird up the loins of his mind, that is, encourage and strengthen his drooping and discouraged heart. Those works of God which are wrought in faithfulness, and in pursuit of his eternal purposes and gracious promises, should rather delight than affright us, in beholding them. It plucks out the sting of David's affliction, when he considered it was in very faithfulness that God had afflicted him, (Psa 119:89,90). But more particularly, let us behold with delight the faithfulness of God, making good six sorts of promises to his people, in the days of their affliction and trouble: 1. The promises of preservation. 2. The promises of support. 3. The promises of direction. 4. The promises of provision. 5. The promises of deliverance. 6. The promises of ordering and directing the event to their advantage.

1. There are promises in the word for your preservation from ruin, and what you read in those promises, you daily see the same fulfilled in your own experiences. You have a promise in Psalm 57:3 "He shall send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up. Selah. God shall send forth his mercy and truth." Say now, have you not found it so? When hell hath sent forth its temptations to defile you, the world its persecutions to destroy you, your own heart its unbelieving fears to distract and sink you, hath not your God sent forth all his mercy and his truth to save you? Hath not his truth been your shield and buckler? (Psa 91:4). May you not say with the church, it is of his mercy you are not consumed, his mercies are new every morning, and great is his faithfulness, (Lam 3:23).(Editors note: I say Amen! Praise the Lord!)

2. As you have seen it actually fulfilling the promises for your preservation, so you may see it making good all the promises in his word for your support in troubles. That is a sweet promise, (Psa 91:15). "I will be with him in trouble: I will deliver him." You have also a very supporting promise in (Isa 41:10). "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." Oh! how evidently hath the faithfulness of God shone forth in the performance of his word to you in this respect? you are his witnesses, you would have sunk in the deep waters of trouble if it had not been so. So speaks David, (Psa 73:26). "My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." Have you not found it so with you as it is in 2 Cor 12:10. "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong." God's strength hath been made perfect in your weakness, by this you have been carried through all your troubles: hitherto hath he helped you.

3. As you have seen it faithfully fulfilling the promises for your preservation and support; so you have seen it in the direction of your ways. So runs that promise, (Psa 32:8). "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way that thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye." Certain it is "that the way of man is not in himself," (Jer 10:23). O how faithfully hath your God guided you, and stood by you in all the difficult cases of your life! Is not that promise, (Heb 13:5). faithfully fulfilled to a tittle, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee?" Surely you can set your seal to that in John 17:17. "Thy word is truth;" had you been left to your own counsels you had certainly perished; as it is said of them in Psa 81:12. "I gave them up unto their own hearts lusts: and they walked in their own counsels."

4. As there are promises in the word for your preservation, support, and direction; so in the fourth place, there are promises for your provision, as in Psa 34:9. The Lord hath promised that they that fear him shall not want. When they are driven to extremity, he will provide, (Isa 41:17). "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, when their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them." And is not this faithfully performed? "He hath given meat unto them that fear him: he will ever be mindful of his covenant," (Psa 111:5). In all the exigencies of your lives you have found him faithful to this day; you are his witnesses that his providences never failed you, his care hath been renewed every morning for you; how great is his faithfulness!

5. You also find in the word some reviving promises for your deliverances. You have a very sweet promise in Psalm 91:14. "Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him" and again, (Psa 50:15). "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee" You have done so, and he hath made a way to escape. Our lives are so many monuments of mercy; we have lived among lions, yet preserved, (Psa 57:4). The burning bush was an emblem of the church miraculously preserved.

6. There are promises in the world for the ordering and directing all the occurrences of providence to your great advantage; so it is promised, (Rom 8:28). "That all things shall work together for good to them that love God." Fear not, Christians, however you find it now; whilst you are tossing to and fro upon the unstable waves of this world; you shall find, to be sure, when you come to heaven, that all the troubles of your lives were guided as steadily by this promise as ever any ship at sea was directed to its port, by the compass or north star.

And now what remains but that I press you as before,

1. To enter into this chamber of Divine faithfulness.
2. To shut the door after you.
3. And then to live comfortably on it in evil days.

1. Enter into this chamber of God's faithfulness by faith, and hide yourselves there. Every man is a lie, but God is true, eternally and unchangeably faithful. Oh! exercise your faith upon it, be at rest in it.

Now there are two great and weighty arguments to press you to enter into this chamber of Divine faithfulness.

The first is based upon the nature of God, "who cannot lie" (Tit 1:2). "He 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?" (Num 23:19). Remember upon what everlasting, steady grounds the faithfulness of God is built. These are immutable things, (Heb 6:18). This Abraham built upon, (Rom 4:21). "being fully persuaded, that what he had promised, he was able also to perform." He accounted him faithful that promised. What would you expect or require in the person that you are to trust?

You would expect a clear promise; and lo! you have a thousand all the scripture over, fitted to all the cases of your souls and bodies. Thus you may plead with God, as David, (Psa 119:49). "Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope." So Jacob pleaded, (Gen 32:12). "Thou saidst I will surely do thee good." These are God's bonds and obligations.

You would expect sufficient power to make good what he promiseth. This is in God as a fair foundation of faith, (Isa 26:4). "Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength" Because of thy strength we will wait upon thee: creatures cannot, but God can do what he will.

You would expect infinite goodness and mercy inclining him to help and save you. Why, so it is here, (Psa 130:7). "Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption." So Moses, (Exo 33:18). "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory." The request was, a view of God's glory: The answer is, my goodness shall pass before thee; which hints to us, that though all God's attributes be glorious, yet that which he most glories in, is his goodness.

You would expect that none of his promises were ever blotted or stained by his unfaithfulness at any time; and so it is here, (Josh 23:14). Not one thing hath failed: all are come to pass, all ages have sealed this conclusion, Thy word is truth, thy word is truth.

The second is grounded in the encouragement of all former experiences, both of others and of your own, as an argument to press you to enter into this chamber of safety, the faithfulness of God.

You have the experiences of others. Saints have reckoned the experiences of others that lived a thousand years before them, as excellent arguments to quicken their faith: So (Hos 12:4). He had power over the angel, and prevailed; he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us. Remember there was a Joseph with us in prison, a Jeremiah in the dungeon, a Daniel in the den, a Peter in chains, an Hezekiah upon the blink of the grave; and they all found the help of God most faithfully protecting them, and saving them in all their troubles. Suitable to this is that in (Psa 22:4,5). "Our fathers trusted in thee; they trusted, and thou deliveredst them; they cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded."

Your own experiences may encourage your faith: So David's did, (1 Sam 17:37). "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine." So did Paul's experience encourage his faith, in 2 Cor 1:10. "Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us." Thus enter into the faithfulness of God by faith.

Let me beg you to be sure to shut the doors after you, against all unbelieving doubts, jealousies, and suspicions of the faithfulness of God; the best men may find temptations of that nature; so did good Asaph, though an eminent saint, (Psa 77:7,8). "Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for ever more?" These jealousies are apt to creep in upon the minds of men, especially when, God delays to answer our prayers as soon as we expect the return of them; we are all in haste for a speedy answer, forgetting that seasons of prayer are our seed-times; and when we have sown that precious seed, we must wait for the harvest as the husbandman doth. Even a precious Heman may find a faint quail of unbelief and despondency seizing him by the long suspension of God's answers, (Psa 88:9,10,11).

It will be hard to shut the door upon unbelief, when all things in the eye of our sense and reason seem to work against the promise; it will require an Abraham's faith at such a time to glorify God by believing in hope against hope, (Rom 4:18). If ever thou hopest to enjoy the sweet repose and rest of a Christian in evil times, thou must resolve, whatever thine eyes do see, or thy senses report, to hold fast this as a most sure conclusion; God is faithful and his word is sure; and that although "clouds and darkness be round about him, yet righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne," (Psa 97:2).

Oh! that you would once learn firmly to depend on God's faithfulness, and fetch your daily reliefs and supports thence, whensoever you are oppressed and assaulted!

1. By spiritual troubles. When you walk in darkness and have no light, then you are to live by acts of trust and complete dependance upon the most faithful one, (Isa 50:10).

2. By temporal distresses; so did the people of God of old, (Heb 11:17,18,19). He lived by faith on this attribute, when all visible comforts and supplies were out of sight.

But especially, let me warn and caution you against five principal enemies to your repose upon the faithfulness of God!

1. Distracting cares, which divide the mind, and eat out the peace and comfort of the heart, and which is worst of all, they reflect very dishonourably upon God who hath pledged his faithfulness and truth for our security; against which, I pray you bar the door by those two scriptures, (Phil 4:6): "Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." And that in (1 Pet 5:7). "Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you."

2. Bar the door against unchristian despondency, another enemy to the sweet repose of your souls in this comfortable and quiet chamber of Divine faithfulness: you will find this unbecoming and uncomfortable distemper of mind insinuating and creeping in upon you, except you believe and reason it out, as David did, (Psa 42:11). "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him."

3. Bar the door of your heart against carnal policies and sinful shifts, which war against your own faith, and God's faithfulness as much as any other enemy whatsoever. This was the fault of good David in a day of trouble, (1 Sam 27:1). "And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul; there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines." Alas poor David! Nothing better than this? Time was when thou couldst think on a better way, when thou couldst say, at what time I am afraid I will trust in thee. How dost thou forget thyself in this strait! doth thy old refuge in God fail thee now? can the Philistines secure thee better than the promises? wilt thou fly from thy best friend to thy worst enemies? but what need we wonder at David, who find the same distemper almost unavoidable to ourselves in like cases.

4. Shut the door against discontents at, and murmurings against the dispositions of providence, whatever you feel or fear: I persuade you not to a stoical apathy, and senselessness of the evils of the times; that would preclude the exercise of patience. If the martyrs had all had the dead palsy before they came to the fire, their faith and patience had not triumphed so gloriously as they did; but on the contrary, beware of grudgings against the ways and will of God, than which, nothing militates more against your faith, and the peace and quietness of your hearts.

5. To conclude, shut the door against all suspicions and jealousies of the firmness and stability of the promises, when you find all sensible comforts shaking and trembling under your feet; have a care of such dangerous questions as that, (Psa 77:8). "Doth his promise fail?" These are the things which undermine the foundation both of your faith and comfort.

In a word, having sheltered your souls in this chamber of rest, and thus shut the doors behind you, all that you have to do is to take your rest in God, and enjoy the pleasure of a soul resigned into the hands of a faithful Creator, by opposing the faithfulness of God to all the fickleness and unfaithfulness you will daily find in men, (Mic 7:6,7) yea, to the weakness and fading of your own natural strength and ability; (Psa 73:26). "My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

# THE SAINTS HIDING PLACE IN THE EVIL DAY

Richard Sibbes

*"Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God,  
commit their souls to him in well-doing, as to a faithful Creator"—1 Peter 4:19*

I am now to treat of that attribute of God, which should move us to trust in him, namely, as he is a faithful Creator. Now God is faithful, 1. In his nature. He is I AM, always like himself, immutable and unchangeable. 2. In his word. He expresseth himself as he is. The word that comes from God is an expression of the faithfulness of his nature. 3. In his works. 'Thou art good, and dost good,' as the psalmist saith, (Psa 119:68). God being faithful in himself, all must needs be so that proceeds from him. Whatsoever relation God takes upon him, he is faithful therein. As he is a Creator, so he preserves and maintains his own work. As he is a Father, he is faithful in discharging that duty to the full, for his children's good. As he is our Friend, he likewise performs all the duties of that relation. And why doth God stoop so low to take these relations upon him, but only to shew that he will certainly accomplish the same to the utmost? Whence is it that men are faithful in their relations one towards another, that the father is faithful to his child? Is it not from God, the chief Father? That a friend should be faithful to his friend, is it not from God, the great Friend?

All his ways are mercy and truth. They are not only merciful and good and gracious, but mercy and truth itself. If he shew himself to be a Father, he is a true father, a true friend, a true creator and protector. As one saith, 'Shall I cause others to fear, and be a tyrant myself?' All other faithfulness is but a beam of that which is in God. Shall not he be most faithful that makes other things faithful?

Now, this faithfulness of God is here a ground of this duty of committing ourselves to him; and we may well trust him whose word hath been seven times tried in the fire, (Psa 12:6). There is no dross in it. Every word of God is a sure word; his truth is a shield and buckler; we may well trust in it. Therefore, when you read of any singular promise in the New Testament, it is said, 'This is a faithful saying,' &c., (1 Tim 1:15); that is, this is such a speech as we may trust to; it is the speech of a faithful Creator.

Considering, therefore, that God is so faithful every way in his promises and in his deeds, let us make especial use of it. Treasure up all the promises we can of the forgiveness of sins, of protection and preservation; that he will never leave us, but be our God to death, &c., and then consider withal that he is faithful in performing the same. When we are affrighted by his majesty and his justice, and other attributes, then think of his mercy and truth. He hath clothed himself with faithfulness, as the psalmist saith. In all the unfaithfulness of men whom thou trustest, depend upon this, that God is still the same, and will not deceive thee.

When we have man's word, we have his sufficiency in mind, for men's words are as themselves are. What will not the word of a king do? If a man be mighty and great, his word is answerable. This is the reason why we should make so much of the word of God, because it is the word of Jehovah, a mighty Creator, who gives a being to all things, and can only be Lord and Master of his word. We know God's meaning in no other way than by his word. Till we come to the knowledge of vision in heaven, we must be content with the knowledge of revelation in the word.

And in every promise, single out that which best suiteth with thy present condition. If thou art in any great distress, think upon the almighty power of God. Lord, thou hast made me of nothing, and canst deliver me out of this estate. Behold, I fly unto thee for succour. If thou art in perplexity for want of direction, and knowest not what to do, single out the attribute of God's wisdom, and desire him to teach thee the way that thou shouldst go. If thou art wronged, fly to his justice, and say, O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, hear and help thy servant.

If thou be surprised with distrust and staggering, then go to his truth and faithfulness. Thou shalt always find in God something to support thy soul in the greatest extremity that can befall thee; for if there were not in God a fulness to supply every pressing need that we are in, he were not to be worshipped, he were not to be trusted.

Man is lighter than vanity in the balance. Every man is a liar, that is, he is false. We may be so, and yet be men too, but God is essentially true. He cannot deceive and be God too. Therefore ever, when thou art disappointed with men, retire to God and to his promises, and build upon this, that the Lord will not be wanting in anything that may do thee good. With men there is breach of covenant, nation with nation, and man with man. There is little trust to be had in any; but in all confusions here is comfort. A religious person may cast himself boldly into the arms of the Almighty, and go to him in any distress, as to a faithful Creator that will not forsake him.

Oh, let us be ashamed that we should dishonour him who is ready to pawn his faithfulness and truth for us. If we confess our sins, 'God is faithful to forgive them,' (1 John 1:9). He will not suffer us to be tempted 'above that which we are able,' (1 Cor 10:13). When we perplex ourselves with doubts and fears whether he will make good his promise or not, we disable His Majesty. Do we not think God stands upon his truth and faithfulness? Undoubtedly he doth and we cannot dishonour him more than to distrust him, especially in his evangelical promises. We make him a liar, and rob him of that which he most glories in, his mercy and faithfulness, if we rest not securely upon him.

See the baseness of man's nature. God hath made all other things faithful that are so, and we can trust them; but are ever and anon questioning the truth of his promise. We may justly take up Salvian's complaint in his time, 'Who hath made the earth faithful to bring forth fruit,' saith he, 'but God? Yet we can trust the ground with sowing our seed. Who makes man faithful, who is by nature the most slippery and unconstant creature of all other, but God only? Yet we can trust a vain man, whose breath is in his nostrils, and look for great matters at his hands, before an all-sufficient God, that changeth not. Who makes the seas and the winds faithful, that they do not hurt us, but God? And yet we are apt to trust the wind and weather sooner than God, as we see many seamen that will thrust forth their goods into the wide ocean in a small bark, to shift any way, rather than trust God with them.'

Yea, let Satan, by his wicked instruments, draw a man to some cursed politic reasons, for the devil doth not immediately converse with the world, but in his instruments, and he will sooner trust him than God himself. So prone are our hearts to distrust the Almighty, to call his truth in question, and to trust the lies of our own hearts and other men's, before him. Let us, therefore, lament our infidelity, that having such an omnipotent and faithful creator to rely upon, yet we cannot bring our hearts to trust in him. There are two main pillars of a Christian's faith: The power of God and the goodness of God.

These two, like Aaron and Hur, hold up the arms of our prayers. Let our estate be never so desperate, yet God is a Creator still. Let our sins and infirmities be never so great, yet he hath power to heal them. Oh, how should this cheer up our souls, and support our drooping spirits in all our strivings and conflicts with sin and Satan, that we yield not to the least temptation, having such an almighty God to fly unto for succour.

## **GOD'S FAITHFULNESS FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION**

**Thomas Manton**

*"Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth"*—Psalm 119:90

THESE words contain a truth which is-(1.) Confirmed by experience; (2.) Represented by a fit and lively emblem, thou hast established the earth, and it abideth. He had before said, 'Thy word is settled in the heavens;' now he speaketh of it as manifested in the earth. There the constancy of God's promises was set forth by the duration and equal motion of the heavenly bodies, now by the firmness and immovableness of the earth. God's powerful word and providence reacheth to the whole world, this lower part here upon earth, as well as the upper part in heaven.

The Doctrine: That in all ages God ever showed himself a true God, and faithful in all his promises. It is here confirmed by experience, and represented by an emblem.

### I. Confirmed by Experience

1. God's faithfulness relateth to some promise wherein he hath engaged himself to his people: (Heb 11:11), 'She judged him faithful who had promised.' It is his mercy to make promises, but it is his faithfulness and truth to fulfil them. His truth is pawned with the creature till he discharge it. "Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old" (Mic 7:20).

2. His truth dependeth upon his unchangeable nature, but it is confirmed to us by experience. "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: 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" (Heb 6: 17,18). If a promise can be made out to be of God, we have no more reason to doubt of it than of the nature and being of God. Yet, it is confirmed by experience: (Psa 18:30), 'The word of the Lord is a tried word.' We are led by sensible things, and what hath been done doth assure us of what shall be done, or may be expected from God.

3. That therefore God hath been ever tender of his truth, that the event may answer the promise, and we might know that God that hath been faithful, and kept touch with the world hitherto, will not fail at last. The heathens ascribed a double perfection to their gods. So the true God is known by his mercy and his fidelity; he never failed to perform his part of the covenant with any: (Psa 138:2), 'I will praise thy name, for thy loving-kindness and thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.' As he hath made us admirable and great promises of giving his Son, and with him all things, so he will certainly perform all to the utmost importance of them. The matter of his word is mercy and loving-kindness, and in the performance thereof there is great truth and fidelity; as he hath made great and excellent promises, so he performeth them most punctually. So that in fulfilling his word, God will be known above all that is named, or famed, or believed, or apprehended, and spoken of them. Here is his great glory and excellency.

4. That the experience of all generations doth confirm God's faithfulness in his promises; for it is said in the text, 'His faithfulness is unto all generations.' In the Hebrew it is, 'From generation to generation.'

This point may be amplified by two considerations:- First, That some promises have been received by one generation, and fulfilled in another. Secondly, That the same common promises have been fulfilled to the faithful in all ages.

First, That some promises have been received by one generation, and fulfilled in another, when the matter so required; as, for instance, Israel's going out of Egypt: (Gen 15:13,14), 'And he said unto Abraham, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years: and also that nation whom they shall serve will I judge: and afterwards they shall come out with great substance.' Compare now (Exo 12:41), 'and it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the self-same day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.' Thirty years were added, because of their fathers dwelling in Canaan; but God kept touch to a day. So for the promise of the Messiah and calling the Gentiles; that God fulfilled in due time, and sent a Saviour into

the world: (Gal 4:4), ' In the fulness of time God sent his son.' When the sceptre was gone from Judah, (Gen 49:10), when the crown was possessed by Herod, a tributary and foreigner, during the Roman monarchy, which at length Christ should utterly destroy (Dan 2:35). Nebuchadnezzar had a vision of an image of four different metals, the head of gold, arms and breasts silver, belly and thighs brass, and the feet part iron and clay. While he beheld the image, and surveyed it from head to foot, he saw a stone hewn out of the mountain without hands, which stone smote the image, not upon the head, breast, or belly, but upon the feet of iron and clay, upon which it vanished away, and the stone became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. This vision Daniel expounded of four Gentile kingdoms, which should succeed one another with great extent of dominion. The first of the Babylonians, which then was; the second of the Medes and Persians; the third of the Grecians; the fourth of the Romans, which subdued all the others, and because possessed of the riches and glory of the former; during this last kingdom was the stone hewn out of the mountain, and smote the iron feet. This stone was the kingdom of the God of heaven, which Christ set up. But not to trouble you with mysteries and nice debates, the apostle telleth us, (Rom 15:8-10), 'That Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers: and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name. And again, it is said, Rejoice, ye Gentiles.' The event in all these cases afterwards did speak for itself; so in all that is yet to come, we should depend upon the veracity of God; as the calling of the Jews, the destruction of antichrist, a more ample effusion of gifts on the church, together with a dilation of its borders; as the patriarchs 'all died in faith:' (Heb 11:13), 'Having not received the promises, but having seen them afar off, were persuaded of them, and embraced them.'

Secondly, That the same common promises have been fulfilled to the faithful in all ages; there is but one and the same way to eternal life in necessary things, and the dispensations of God to every age are still the same; and so in every generation the promises of God are still fulfilled as if they were directed to that time only. God's faithfulness hath been tried many ways and at many times, but every age furnisheth examples of the truth of his promises. From the beginning of the world to the end, God is ever fulfilling the scripture in his providential government, which is double-external or internal.

[1.] External, in the deliverance of his people, the answers of prayer, and manifold blessings vouchsafed to believers and their seed (Psa 22:4,5). 'Our fathers trusted in thee; they trusted, and thou didst deliver them: they cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.' The godly in former times trusted God, and trusted constantly in their troubles, and in their trusting they cried, and did never seek God in vain; which should support us in waiting upon God, and to depend on his mercy and fidelity; for they that place their full faith in God, and seek his help by constant and importunate addresses, shall never be put to shame.

[2.] Internal, in conversion to God, the comforts of his Spirit, establishment of the soul in the hopes of the gospel, as to the pardon of sins and eternal life. Certainly God, that hath blessed the word throughout many successions of ages, to the converting and comforting of many souls, showeth that we may depend upon the covenant for pardon and eternal life. How many have found comfort by the promises! Now, as the apostle speaketh of Abraham, ' It was not written for himself alone, but us also,' (Rom 4:23,24); so these comforts were not dispensed for their sake alone, but for our benefit, that we might be comforted of God; having the same God, the same Redeemer, the same covenant and promises, and the same Spirit to apply all unto us. If they looked to God and were comforted, why should not we? His faithfulness is to all generations; he is alike to believers, as they be alike to him: (Rom 3:22), 'There is no difference.'

5. That the experience of God's faithfulness in former ages is of use to those that follow and succeed, to assure them of God's faithfulness; for God's wonderful and gracious works were never intended merely for the benefit of that age in which they were done, but for the benefit also of those that should hear of them by any creditable means whatsoever. It is a scorn and vile contempt put upon those wonderful works, which God made to be had in remembrance, if they should be buried in oblivion, or not observed and improved by those who live in after ages; yea, it is contrary to the scriptures: (Psa 145:4), 'One generation shall praise thy works to another, and

shall declare thy mighty acts;' (Joel 1:3), 'Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation! (Josh 4:6-8), 'That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, What mean you by these stones? then shall you answer them, that the waters of Jordan were cut off from before the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God.' So (Psa 78:3-7), 'That which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. we will not hide them from their children, showing to the generations to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children; that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.' From all which I observe:-

[1.] That we should tell generations to come what we have found of God in our time, and more especially parents should tell their children; they are bound to transmit this knowledge to their children, and they to improve it, either by word or deed. By word, by remembering the passages of providences, and publishing his mercies to posterity: (Psa 89:1), 'I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever: with my mouth I will make known thy faithfulness to all generations.' Or by deed, putting them in possession of a pure religion, confirmed to us by so many providences and instances of God's goodness and truth.

2.] That this report of God's gracious works, and owning his covenant, is a special means of edification. Why else should God enjoin it, but that the ages following should receive benefit thereby? Surely it is an advantage to them to hear how God hath owned us in ordinances and providences.

[3.] And more particularly I observe, that this tradition is a great means and help to faith; for it is said, (Psa 78:7), 'That they may set their hope in God.' [

6. That to be satisfied in point of God's faithfulness is of great importance to believers. Partly because their fidelity to God is much encouraged by his fidelity to us. They that do not trust God cannot be long true to him: (Heb 3:12), 'Take heed lest there be found in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God;' and (James 1:8), 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways,' one that doth not stick fast to God, and is ever unresolved, being divided between hopes and fears concerning his acceptance with God. A wavering Christian is divided between God and some unlawful course for his safety, divided between God's ways and his own, and cannot quietly depend upon his promises, but is tossed to and fro, doth not entirely trust himself in God's hands, but doth wholly lean upon his own carnal confidence. And partly because God is invisible, and dealth with us by proxy, by messengers, who bring the word to us. We see not God in person: (Heb 13:7), 'Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken to you the word of God, whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversations;' their manner of living, their perseverance till death in this faith and hope. And partly because the promises are future, and the main of them is to be accomplished in another world. Now, nothing will support us but the faithfulness of God: (Prov 11:18), 'The wicked worketh a deceitful work, but to him that soweth righteousness there shall be a sure reward.' Men think to be happy by their sin, but find themselves deceived at last; but none can be deceived that trust in the living and true God. Partly because many of the promises contradict sense; as when the soul is filled with anguish because of the guilt of sin: (1 John 1:9), 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' And the power of sin: (1 Thess 5:24), 'Faithful is he who calleth you, who also will do it.' Supported in great distress: (1 Cor 10:13), 'But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able.' That we may be able to stand in the judgment: (1 Cor 1:9), 'God is faithful by whom ye are called into the fellowship of his son Jesus Christ.' Here is a Christian's great security and support, God's faithfulness, testified by Christians now and in all ages, confessing they have found by their experience the word of God to be true; for they have transmitted religion to us by their constant consent, and left it to us under seal of God's faithfulness; and therefore we should persevere in our duty to God.

## II. As Represented by an Emblem

We should consider it, for it is a help to frequent meditation, as being always before our eyes; and they are without excuse who see not God in this thing; every time we set foot on the ground we may remember the stability of God's promises. And it is also a confirmation of faith, thus:-

1. The stability of the earth is the effect of God's word, this is the true pillar upon which the earth standeth; for 'he upholdeth all things by the word of his power:'(Heb1:3; Psa 33:9), 'For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.' Now his word of power helpeth us to depend upon his word of promise. God, that doth what he pleaseth, never faileth in what he promiseth. We see plainly that whatever standeth by God's will and word, cannot be brought to nought. Whence is it? how came this world to have a being? It is the work and product of that God whose word and promise we have in scripture. Certainly the power of this God cannot fail, it is as easy for him to do as to say.

2. Nothing appeareth whereon the globe of the earth and water should lean and rest: (Job 26:7), 'He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing.' Now, that this vast and ponderous body should lean upon the fluid air as upon a firm foundation is matter of wonder. The question is put in the book of Job chapter 38:6. 'Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who hath laid the corner-stone thereof?' Yet firm it is, though it hang as a ball in the air. The globe of the earth is encompassed with the regions of the air and the celestial spheres, and hath no visible support to sustain so heavy a body hanging in the midst of so vast an expansion; yet God hath settled and established it so firm as if it rested on the most solid basis and foundation; fitted so strange a place for it that, being a heavy body, one should think it would fall every moment; yet which, whensoever we would imagine it, it must, contrary to the nature of such a body, fall upwards, and so can have no possible ruin but by falling into heaven. Now since his word beareth up such a weight, all the church's weight, and our own burden leaneth on the promise of God; he can, by the power of his word, do the greatest things without visible means: (Luke 7:7), ' But say in a word, and my servant shall be healed.' Therefore his people may trust his providence; he is able to support them in any distresses, when no way of help and relief appeareth.

3. The firmness and stability offereth itself to our thoughts. The earth abideth in the same seat and condition wherein God left it, as long as the present course and order of nature is to continue: (Psa 104:5), ' He hath laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be moved for ever.' God's truth is as immovable as the earth: (Psa 117:2), ' The truth of the Lord endureth for ever.' Surely, if the foundation of the earth abideth sure, the foundation of our salvation laid by Jesus Christ is much more sure: ' Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one tittle of the word and law of God, till all be fulfilled,' (Matt 5:18). If the law given by Moses be so sure, much more the promises of salvation by Christ: (2 Cor 1:20), 'For all the promises of God in Christ are yea and in him Amen.'

4. The stability in the midst of changes: (Eccl 1:4), 'One generation passeth away, and another cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.' When man passeth away, the earth stayeth behind him, as a habitation for other comers, and abideth where it was, when the inhabitants go to and fro, and can enjoy it no more. All things in the world are subject to many revolutions, but God's truth is one and the same. The vicissitudes in the world do not derogate from his fidelity in the promises; he changeth all things, and is not changed. Though there be a new face of things in the world, yet we have a sure rule to walk by, and sure promises to build upon. And therefore, in all conditions, we should be the same to God, and there is no doubt but he will be the same to us.

5. In upholding the frame of the world, all those attributes are seen which are a firm stay to a believer's heart, such as wisdom, power, and goodness. Wisdom: (Prov 3:19), ' The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth, by understanding hath he established the heavens.' Look on it, it is the work of a wise agent. So for power: This great fabric is supported by his almighty power. His goodness is seen in that he hath made the earth to be firm and dry land, that it may be a fit habitation for men; this is a standing miracle of goodness. Luther saith we are always kept, as the Israelites were, in the midst of the Red Sea. The Psalmist telleth us, (Psa 24:2), 'He hath

founded the earth upon the seas, and established the world upon the floods.' That part of the world whereon we dwell would suddenly be overwhelmed and covered with waters were it not for the goodness of God, for this the order of nature showeth in the beginning of the creation, (Gen 1:7), that next under the air were the waters covering the whole surface of the earth. But God made such cavities in the earth as should receive the waters into them, and such banks as should bound and bridle the vast ocean, that it might not break forth, (Gen 1:9); and so now by his providence the water is beneath the earth, and the earth standeth firm upon that fluid body as upon the most solid foundation; which, as it is a work of wise disposal and contrivance, so an effect of the goodness of God for the preservation of mankind. And though once, for the sins of the world, these waters were appointed to break out and overwhelm the earth, yet God hath firmly promised that they shall never be so again; wherein his truth is also verified' and applied to the covenant of grace: (Isa 54:9), ' For this is as the waters of Noah to me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee.' The covenant of grace is as sure as the covenant made after the deluge; so that we cannot look upon this earth but as an emblem of those attributes which confirm our faith in waiting upon God till his promises be fulfilled to us.

### III. Application

Let us be then more firmly persuaded of God's faithfulness that we may depend upon it both for his preserving the church and ourselves in the way of our duty, till we enjoy our final reward.

1. For the preservation of Christ's kingdom, God's faithfulness chiefly appeareth in the government of his church or spiritual kingdom, and this is a kingdom that cannot be moved when all things else are shaken: (Heb 12:28), 'Having received a kingdom that cannot be shaken.' Christ cannot be a head without members, a king without subjects. And we are told, (Matt 16:18), 'That the gates of hell cannot prevail against it.' Many disorders happen, but let us depend upon the faithful God. The world was well guided before we came into it, and other generations have had experience of God's faithfulness, though we complain that we see not our signs, nor any tokens for good.

2. For the preservation of our bodies to the heavenly kingdom. We have many discouragements within and without, but while we persevere in our duty, God will not fail us; his word is as sure as the earth: (2 Thes 3:3), 'The Lord is faithful, who shall establish and keep you from evil.' God hath promised not only to give us our final reward, but to secure and defend his people by the way, that they be not overcome by the evils they meet with in their passage.

## GOD WILL FULFILL HIS WORD

Charles Simeon

*"God is not a man, that he should lie"*—Numbers 23:19

There is scarcely any thing that more strongly manifests the depravity of our nature, than that propensity to lying which we perceive in children, as soon as they begin to speak. Even when men are grown to the full exercise of their reason, they too often deviate from truth, sometimes through forgetfulness, sometimes from a change of sentiment or inclination, and sometimes from an inability to perform their word. Hence it is characteristic of man to lie: and we are all so sensible of this, that in matters of great importance we require of men an oath to confirm their word, and enter into written covenants with them, which we take care to have properly attested.

Now we are apt to "think that God is even such an one as ourselves:" and that he also may be prevailed upon to "alter the word that is gone out of his lips." Balak evidently entertained this idea of him; and laboured by many repeated sacrifices to divert him from his purpose. But Balaam was inspired to declare the vanity of such an hope, and to assert in a most humiliating comparison the unchangeableness of Jehovah.

To unfold the full meaning of his words, we observe:

### I. Some men think that God will lie.

God has told us with strong and repeated statements, that "we must be born again": but this is totally disbelieved by:

#### 1. The profane

They persuade themselves, that such strictness in religion as is implied in the new birth, is not necessary; and that they shall go to heaven in their own way.

#### 2. The self-righteous

These consider regeneration as a dream of weak enthusiasts; and are satisfied with "the form of godliness without" ever experiencing "the power of it".

#### 3. The hypocritical professors of religion

These, having changed their creed together with their outward conduct, fancy themselves Christians, notwithstanding their faith neither "overcomes the world," nor "works by love," nor "purifies their hearts".

That all these persons think God will lie, is evident beyond a doubt: for if they really believed that "old things must pass away, and all things become new," before they can enter into the kingdom of heaven, they would feel concerned to know whether any such change had taken place in them; nor would they ever be satisfied till they had a scriptural evidence that they were indeed "new creatures in Christ Jesus." But as this is in no respect the case with them, it is manifest that they "do not believe the record of God," and consequently, however harsh the expression may seem, "they make God a liar".

While some do not hesitate to entertain these dishonourable thoughts of God,

### II. Others fear he may lie.

This is common with persons:

#### 1. Under conviction of sin

When men are deeply convinced of sin, they find it exceeding difficult to rest simply on the promises of the Gospel. God promises to cast out none who come to him by Christ Jesus; to wash them from sins of deepest dye; and to bestow on them all the blessings of salvation freely "without money and without price." Now this appears too good to be true: they cannot conceive how God should "justify the ungodly," and therefore they seek to become godly first, in order that they may be justified: and if they cannot bring some price in their hands, they keep back, and give themselves over to desponding fears.

#### 2. Under temptation or desertion

God has declared that "he will not suffer his people to be tempted above what they are able to bear." But when they come into temptation, they are apt to say, as David, "I shall one day perish by the hands of Saul" (1 Sam 27:1). They see no way for their escape; and therefore they fear that the very next wave will overwhelm them utterly.

If God at these seasons hide his face from them, they conclude "there is no hope;" they think "his mercy clean gone for ever, and his loving-kindness come utterly to an end for evermore," notwithstanding God has so frequently and so expressly declared, that he "will never leave them nor forsake them" (Heb 13:5).

Now these persons do not, like the ungodly, deliberately think that God will lie; but they have many misgiving fears lest he should: and that they do so is obvious; for, if they did not, they would take God at his word, and "stay themselves on him when they are in darkness, and have no light" (Isa 50:10).

Thus generally is the veracity of him who is truth itself, either questioned or denied:

III. But God neither will nor can lie.

It is humiliating beyond expression that ministers should be forced to vindicate the veracity of God. But as he himself has seen fit to do so in the sacred oracles, and as the unbelief of men is so deep-rooted in them, we submit to the necessity, and proceed to shew that:

1. He will not lie

First, let us hear the testimonies of those who have tried him. Had ever any one more opportunities of proving his fidelity than Moses, Joshua, and Samuel? Yet they all attest in the most solemn manner that he neither had deceived them in any thing, nor ever would (Deut 32:4; Josh 23:14; 1 Sam 15:29).

Second, let us attend to God's own assertions and appeals (Isa 5:4; 49:19). Would he ever venture to speak thus strongly on his own behalf, if his creatures could make good their accusations against him. He threatened to punish the angels if they should prove disobedient: he denounced a curse on Adam if he should eat of the forbidden tree: he threatened to destroy the whole world with a deluge; and to overwhelm Sodom and Gomorrha with fire and brimstone; and to scatter his once chosen people over the face of the whole earth. See now whether he has forborne to execute any of these threatenings. He also promised to send his only dear Son to die for sinners; and to make him great among the Gentiles, while his own nation should almost universally reject him. Have either of these promises been forgotten? Or, if such promises, and such threatenings have received their accomplishment, is there any reason to doubt respecting any other that are yet unfulfilled? Are not his past actions so many types and pledges of what he will hereafter perform? (2 Peter 2:4-9; Jude 7).

2. He cannot lie

Truth is as essential to the divine nature as goodness, wisdom, power, or any other attribute; so that he can as easily cease to be good, or wise, or powerful, as he can suffer "one jot or tittle of his word to fail." If for one moment he could divest himself of truth, he would cease to be deserving of all confidence or affection. Let it only be said of any man, "He is great, and wise, and generous, but no dependence can be placed on his word," would he not on the whole be deemed a contemptible character? How then would Jehovah be degraded, if any such infirmity could be laid to his charge?

It should seem that St. Paul was peculiarly solicitous to guard us against entertaining the smallest possible doubt of the divine veracity; for he abounds in expressions declarative of this perfection. "God," says he, "cannot lie" (Titus 1:2) and again, "he cannot deny himself" (2 Tim 2:13) and again in still stronger terms, "It is

impossible for God to lie" (Heb 8:18). Nor let it be thought that this detracts from God's power: for to be able to lie, would be a weakness rather than a perfection: and as it is man's disgrace that he is prone to violate his word, so it is God's honour that he neither will nor can lie.

Application:

1. How vain are the expectations of unconverted men!

Men, whatever may be their state, persuade themselves that they shall be happy when they die. But how delusive must be that hope, which is built upon the expectation that God will prove himself a liar! Who are we, that God should, (if we may so speak) undeify himself for us? And what security should we have if he were even to admit us into heaven in direct opposition to his own word? Might he not change his word again, and cast us into hell at last? Surely heaven would be no heaven, if it were held on so precarious a tenure. Let us then lay aside all such delusive hopes. Let us learn to tremble at God's word; and seek to attain that entire change both of heart and life, to which the promises of salvation are annexed.

2. How groundless are the fears of the converted!

There is a holy fear or jealousy that is highly desirable for every one, however eminent, however established. But there is a tormenting slavish fear that arises from unbelief, and which greatly retards our progress in the divine life. Now we ask, Does this fear arise from an apprehension of our own unfaithfulness, or of God's? If it be God's faithfulness that we doubt, let us know that "his gifts and callings are without repentance," (Rom 11:29) and that "where he hath begun a good work, he will perfect it unto the day of Christ" (Phil 1:6). If, on the other hand, we suspect our own faithfulness, let us recollect on whom our faithfulness depends: if it depend wholly on ourselves, who amongst us will be saved? Thanks be to God, he who has been the author of our faith, has engaged to be the finisher of it; (Heb 12:2) and has promised, not only that he will not depart from us, but that he will put his fear in our hearts, so that we shall not depart from him (Jer 32:39,40). Let us then "set to our seal that God is true." (John 3:33) Let us commit ourselves to him, knowing in whom we have believed, and assured that, while we stand on the foundation of his word, we are immovably secure (2 Tim 2:19).

