

## The Faithfulness of God

# The Attributes of God

## #12

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Faithfulness and loyalty have been lost in our culture. There was a time when, in the business world, a man's word was his bond. No more. In wedding vows people used to say "I do" and mean it. Today, at best, they mean, "I do maybe" or at worst, "I don't." Fifty percent of married people break their vow and opt for divorce. "Till death do us part" has been replaced with "Till I tire of you do us part." It is doubtful that anyone here has not been affected by some form of infidelity. Perhaps you have not broken your word or cheated on your spouse, but chances are a friend or family member has done so. We have all had our faith in humanity shaken at one time or another. Until September 11 most of us trusted our nation to protect us. We naively believed that because we are the greatest nation in the world, we were somehow invincible. And let's be honest. How faithful have we been to God? Have we obeyed Him perfectly? Have we loved Him with all our heart and mind and soul? Have we ever been guilty of continuing in sin simply because we knew that we were forgiven? That is the height of unfaithfulness! In light of all the unfaithfulness in and around us, it is a breath of fresh air to behold our God who is altogether faithful.

God's faithfulness comes from His being. First, God is sovereign. He controls His world from greatest to smallest. There is nothing that he cannot do (that is consistent with His person and purpose). Therefore, He has no need to alter His promises since He is perfectly

able to control the world and all its variables. We, of course, are much different from God. Not only are we not sovereign, we are ultimately impotent. We have no control over our circumstances or the events of our lives. We make promises we cannot keep. One of my earliest remembrances of my earthly father was his resolute refusal to promise me anything. "Daddy," I would say, "Will you promise that we can go to the circus?" "Son," he would answer, "I will try to take you, but I will not promise to do so. Something might happen to prevent me from doing so and I don't want to make a promise I might not be able to keep." That always frustrated me as a little boy, but when I became a man I realized the wisdom of it.

God is also truth. We live in a world of lies and we, ourselves, are guilty of lying. Not so, God. Not only does God not lie, it is impossible for Him to do so (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18). In Numbers 23:19 Moses stated the matter plainly: "*God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?*" As well, 1 Samuel 15:29 says, "*The glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind.*" How consoling to know that God is not only the Supreme Being, but also the Supreme Truth Teller. How horrible it would be if our sovereign God lied to us and deceived us. He is the God of truth (Psalm 31:5)

and His Word is trustworthy. In John 17:17 Jesus said, *“Thy word is truth.”* Therefore, we know that God’s promises are true.

Perhaps you have known someone who was very truthful, yet over time changed so that he was no longer trustworthy. God is not like that, for He is immutable. God does not change, His ways do not change, and His plan remains unaltered. God has no plan “B.” What He has ordained will come to pass. Earth and heaven, according to the psalmist, *“will perish, but Thou dost endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing Thou wilt change them, and they will be changed. But Thou art the same, and Thy years will not come to an end”* (Psalm 102:26–27). Because God does not change, His truth and promises are absolutely trustworthy. Isaiah 40:6–8 says, *“All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.”*

Since we can completely trust the Word of God and the God who gives His Word, let us turn now to God’s certain promises which He will be faithful to keep. When I was a brand-new Christian, a dear, godly woman told me that there were 7,000 promises in God’s Word, and that I should claim each and every one of them. I must confess that in my 30 years as a Christian I have not unearthed all 7,000 of God’s promises, but every one I

have claimed He has kept perfectly. Unlike my earthly father, my heavenly one makes many promises and keeps them all. As Psalm 36:5 states, *“Thy faithfulness reaches to the skies.”* Psalm 119:89 declares, *“Thy word is settled in heaven. Thy faithfulness continues throughout all generations.”*

Before we look at some of God’s wonderful promises, it will be helpful to realize what God has not promised. God nowhere guarantees Christians that they will be successful. The name-it-claim-it, health-wealth gospel is false to its core. You can work and pray for success until you are blue in the face, but you cannot strong-arm God into giving you good health, lots of stuff, and success in your endeavors. I once heard a minister say that God is obligated to give you food and shelter until you die. That is simply not true. He may, in fact, take you to heaven by privation or starvation. Read church history and you will find that has happened many times. Let me state the matter plainly: God does not guarantee us material success, and the lack thereof in no way means that we are unfavored by God. Some are actually better off with less rather than more. Proverbs 30:7–9 says, *“Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.”*

What are some of God’s promises? If

we may use Augustine’s categories, consider God’s promises to the cities of man and God. Man’s city represents humanity unrelated to Jesus Christ. The Lord has promised that until He brings human history to an end, the world will continue as it has been. In Genesis 8:22 the Lord says, *“While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.”* The Lord also promises to one day judge and destroy the world. When He does so, all who have not fled to Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins will be condemned forever (Revelation 19–21).

Those who live in the City of God receive many promises. Perhaps the most important promise God makes is that He will establish His spiritual kingdom. As we look on at a spiritually disinterested world and a culture that has severely degenerated in the past 50 years, we may wonder whether God is doing anything at all. Indeed, looking beyond our own age to all of history yields little encouragement. One would think that if God were building His kingdom, there would be more to show for it. Surely we would have come into a “golden age” by now. We would expect the church to be victorious. Yet, it appears to have little effect on our culture. Is God not really interested in effecting His kingdom? Indeed, He is! The entire Old Testament is a history of God’s progressive revelation of His commitment to establish His spiritual kingdom. Abraham was told that His descendants would be as the sand of the seashore and the stars of the skies. The

New Testament tells us that those who believe in Jesus Christ are the spiritual seed of Abraham. God has been building His City for thousands of years! When Christ was incarnate, He promised: *“I will establish my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”* Not even Satan himself can stop the forward progress of Christ’s church.

For the past 2000 years, Jesus has been establishing His new covenant church. Countless millions have been redeemed. Wherever the gospel has been proclaimed, mankind has been the better for it. The love of God has spread to all men; the redeemed have been light to a darkened world; the many who have believed have come out of darkness into the light. Do not become daunted if you do not see the culture adhere to Christ and Christian principles. This does not mean that Christ has failed to establish His church. On the contrary, we should realize that because darkness hates the light, there will always be a contrast between the City of Man and the City of God until Christ returns to consummate history. In due time, Christ will return as the Judge and will condemn all evil doers. Until then, He is redeeming some *“from every tribe, tongue, kindred and nation”* (Revelation 5). Take comfort from 2 Peter 3:9: *“The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”* You see, no matter how grim things may look, Christ is at work bringing all the elect of God to

salvation. Not until the last of God's elect are redeemed will Christ return. In the meantime, do not be discouraged by the wholesale apostasy of the City of Man. It is out of that city that God calls His own and builds the City of God (Colossians 1:13–14).

God is faithful, not only in redeeming His people, but in preserving them in their redemption, as testified to by Paul when he says we are *“awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord”* (1 Corinthians 1:8–9). Jesus promises believers eternal security: *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one”* (John 10:27–30).

Because God loves His own, He is faithful to discipline them. The author to the Hebrews says God *“disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness”* (Hebrews 12:10–11). We have all seen the results of absentee parents who fail to discipline their children. Children cannot rear themselves in the physical realm; they

need loving, caring parents who will teach them how to live correctly. So it is in the spiritual realm. We cannot grow ourselves spiritually. We need guidance and correction. Oh, it is true that discipline can be painful, but God's discipline is never harsh; rather, it is tailored to our spiritual need.

God is also faithful to care for you. 1 Peter 5:6–7 is one of the first promises I learned as a new Christian. *“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.”* Think of it! The sovereign God of the universe actually cares for you! Are you discouraged? He cares. Are you tempted by sin? He cares. Perhaps you are mistreated by others. Listen; your heavenly Father cares. He cares about everything concerning you. There is no anxiety in your life that your Father does not know and care about. He knows that you are worried about your children—and He cares more for them than you do. He knows you're worried about a loved one. He knows that you fear losing your job. He knows you fear financial ruin. He knows you worry about your health. He knows you suffer from loneliness and He knows that terrorism has you unsettled. Cast all those worries on Him. He cares for you!

God has promised never to abandon you. On May 4 my wife and I celebrated her birthday in Salado, Texas. It was a high-water day for me, because for her birthday I got a puppy! This is a great dog, but whenever I leave him,

he has panic attacks. And when I return he goes ballistic, loving and scolding me all at the same time. This dog hates to be left alone. The word “forsaken” is just not in his vocabulary! He must assume that every time I leave, I'm not coming back. Well, God never leaves us, not for a moment! Quoting from Deuteronomy 31:6, the author of Hebrews (13:5–6) writes, *“I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you, so that we confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?’”* Beloved, when you are down and out, turn to the Lord. He is there and He will not leave you. There is no need for a panic attack. In the midst of your sin struggles, run to Jesus. He was tempted in all the things that tempt us (Hebrews 2:18; 4:15). Jesus understands our struggles, and He will comfort us. Remember that your sins were judged at the cross.

Satan wants to convince you that God is unwilling to love you when you sin, but the Bible teaches the very opposite: *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.”* Beloved child of God, you have been reconciled to God, not while you were attractive to Him, but

when you were repugnant! If God loved you when you were a godless sinner without Christ, won't He love you now that you are a member of His family and are in union with Christ? Take your sin to God every day. Don't hide it from Him. God freely forgives you in Christ. Flee to Him for mercy. God abandoned His Son on the cross so that He would never have to abandon you. On the cross Jesus cried out, *“My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?”* so that we would never need to experience the abandonment of God.

God has promised every Christian that He will cause every event of life to work for their good. Romans 8:28–30 says, *“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”* What is Paul saying? Simply that God uses every event of your life to save your soul. Well, I lost my job. How does God use that to save me? If you've not yet come to Christ, it might be the very event that shakes your foundation so that you cry out to God for salvation. If you are already a Christian, losing your job may cause you to trust God more and deepen your relationship with Him. Remember Joseph. He lost not only His job, but his whole family. His brothers sold him into slavery and he suffered

many indignities. Yet years later, when united with his brothers, Joseph said, “*You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.*” Joseph may not have realized it at the time his brothers acted in an evil manner toward him, but later he knew that God meant their evil for good. Not only was it for Joseph’s benefit, but so that he could also be a blessing to his family in their time of need.

God has also promised never to cease working in your life. Philippians 1:6 says, “*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*” Over a decade ago, Charles Swindoll wrote a book entitled, *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*. Can you identify with that title? I can! Sometimes it seems that I am making no progress in the Christian life. Sins that haunted me 30 years ago are still with me. I watch others fall into grievous sin, and I fear that I will do the same. One of my greatest fears is that I will one day sully the name of Jesus Christ and disqualify myself from Christian service. The last line of my life has not been written yet; perhaps my sin will one day get the better of me. But even if it does, I know that my God will not cease working in my life. He will convict me of my sin; He will give me faith and repentance; He will restore me to sweet fellowship; and yes, He will continue to conform me to the image of Jesus Christ! God assures His children that He will never cease the work of sanctification. Like a sculptor who gets up every day to cut and chisel away on a project, God ever

works to shape us like Jesus. It is His will that we take on the character of His Son, and God will not rest until the task is completed.

Our faithful God has promised us eternal life. What does eternal life mean to you? Do you think of it in terms of life after death? It is that, for sure, but eternal life also has to do with the quality of life we live while yet on earth. Jesus said, “*And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent*” (John 17:3). Think of it! God has promised that you will actually know Him. He did not say that you will know *about* Him or *of* Him, but that you would actually know Him. In other words, eternal life is knowing God personally and intimately. Like Enoch, you may walk with God, and like Abraham and Moses, God will be your friend. Is there anything better than this? Do you remember the years you went through life without knowing God? O Christian, He is no longer your judge and executioner, for your enmity with God has been turned to amity. God is your friend. He gives you eternal life, here and now.

But God also gives you eternal life when you pass from this life to the next. One of the great promises is that when we die, we will be “*at home with the Lord*” (2 Corinthians 5:8). Our lives are fleeting; James 4:14 says we are “*like a vapor that appears a little while and then vanishes away!*” Oh, what shall become of us for eternity? The God who has been faithful to us in life will be faithful in death. The very

moment a believer passes from this life he is in the presence of Jesus Christ in glory! And so, Paul wrote: “*I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have entrusted to Him until that day*” (1 Timothy 1:12). Are you persuaded? Are you certain that when you breathe your last you will go to be with the Lord? If not, flee to Him now. Ask Him to forgive your sin as you trust in Jesus, who died for sinners. Then you will know what it is to be

forgiven, and you will be persuaded that God will be faithful to take you to heaven forever.

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Faith Presbyterian is a particular church of the Presbyterian Church in America.

#### STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

*As the body of believers of Faith Presbyterian Church, we have as our purpose to glorify and enjoy God, as we grow together in Christ, by equipping God’s people for works of service, so that the Lord will be exalted, God’s people will be edified, the lost will be evangelized, and those in need receive works of mercy.*

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