

## Chapter 15

### The Faithfulness of God

It is a good thing to give thanks unto Thee and to sing praises unto Thy name, O Most High, to show forth Thy loving-kindness in the morning and Thy faithfulness every night. As Thy Son while on earth was loyal to Thee, His Heavenly Father, so now in heaven He is faithful to us, His earthly brethren; and in this knowledge we press on with every confident hope for all the years and centuries yet to come. Amen.

As emphasized earlier, God's attributes are not isolated traits of His character but facets of His unitary being. They are not things-in-themselves; they are, rather, thoughts by which we think of God aspects of a perfect whole, names given to whatever we know to be true of the Godhead.

To have a correct understanding of the attributes it is necessary that we see them all as one. We can think of them separately but they cannot be separated. ¶¶¶ All attributes assigned to God cannot differ in reality, by reason of the perfect simplicity of God, although we in divers ways use of God divers words, ¶¶¶ says Nicholas of Cusa. ¶¶¶ Whence, although we attribute to God sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch, sense, reason and intellect, and so forth, according to the divers significations of each word, yet in Him sight is not other than hearing, or tasting, or smelling, or touching, or feeling, or understanding. And so all theology is said to be stablished in a circle, because any one of His attributes is affirmed of another. ¶¶¶

In studying any attribute, the essential oneness of all the attributes soon becomes apparent. We see, for instance, that if God is self-existent He must be also self-sufficient; and if He has power He, being infinite, must have all power. If He possesses knowledge, His infinitude assures us that He possesses all knowledge. Similarly, His immutability presuppose His faithfulness. If He is unchanging, it follows that He could not be unfaithful, since that would require Him to change.

Any failure within the divine character would argue imperfection and, since God is perfect, it could not occur. Thus the attributes explain each other and prove that they are but glimpses the mind enjoys of the absolutely perfect Godhead.

All of God's acts are consistent with all of His attributes. No attribute contradicts the other, but all harmonize and blend into each other in the infinite abyss of the Godhead. All that God does agrees with all that God is and being and doing are one in Him.

The familiar picture of God as often torn between His justice and His mercy is altogether false to the facts. To think of God as inclining first toward one and then toward another of His attributes is to imagine a God who is unsure of Himself, frustrated and emotionally unstable, which of course is to say that the one of whom we are thinking is not the true God at all but a weak, mental reflection of Him badly out of focus.

God being who He is, cannot cease to be what He is, and being what He is, He cannot act out of character with Himself. He is at once faithful and immutable, so all His words and acts must be and remain faithful. Men become unfaithful out of desire, fear, weakness, loss of interest, or because of some strong influence from without. Obviously none of these forces can affect God in any way. He is His own reason for all He is and does. He cannot be compelled from without, but ever speaks and acts from within Himself by His own sovereign will as it pleases Him.

I think it might be demonstrated that almost every heresy that has afflicted the church through the years has arisen from believing about God things that are not true, or from overemphasizing certain true things so as to obscure other things equally true. To magnify any attribute to the exclusion of another is to head straight for one of the dismal swamps of theology; and yet we are all constantly tempted to do just that.

For instance, the Bible teaches that God is love, some have interpreted this in such a way as virtually to deny that He is just, which the Bible also teaches. Other press the Biblical doctrine of God's goodness so far that it is made to contradict his holiness. Or they make His compassion cancel

out His truth. Still others understand the sovereignty of God in a way that destroys or at least greatly diminishes His goodness and love.

We can hold a correct view of truth only by daring to believe everything God has said about Himself. It is a grave responsibility that a man takes upon himself when he seeks to edit out of God's self-revelation such features as he in his ignorance deems objectionable. Blindness in part must surely fall upon any of us presumptuous enough to attempt such a thing. And it is wholly uncalled for. We need not fear to let the truth stand as it is written. There is no conflict among the divine attributes. God's being is unitary. He cannot divide Himself and act at a given time from one of His attributes while the rest remain inactive. All that God is must accord with all that God does. Justice must be present in mercy, and love in judgment. And so with all the divine attributes.

The faithfulness of God is a datum of sound theology but to the believer it becomes far more than that: it passes through the processes of the understanding and goes on to become nourishing food for the soul. For the Scriptures not only teach truth, they show also its uses for mankind.

The inspired writers were men of like passion with us, dwelling in the midst of life. What they learned about God became to them a sword, a shield, a hammer; it became their life motivation, their good hope, and their confident expectation. From the objective facts of theology their hearts made how many thousand joyous deductions and personal applications! The Book of Psalms rings with glad thanksgiving for the faithfulness of God. The New Testament takes up the theme and celebrates the loyalty of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession; and in the Apocalypse Christ is seen astride a white horse riding toward His triumph, and the names He bears are Faithful and True.

Christian song, too, celebrates the attributes of God, and among them the divine faithfulness. In our hymnody, at its best, the attributes become the wellspring from which flow rivers of joyous melody. Some old hymnbooks may yet be

found in which the hymns have no names; a line in italics above each one indicates theme, and the worshipping heart cannot but rejoice in what it finds: *God's glorious perfections celebrated. Wisdom, Majesty and goodness. Omniscience. Omnipotence and immutability. Glory, mercy and grace.* These are few samples taken from a hymnbook published 1849, but everyone familiar with Christian hymnody knows that the stream of sacred song takes its rise far back in the early years of the Church's existence. From the beginning belief in the perfection of God brought sweet assurance to believing men and taught the ages to sing.

Upon God's faithfulness rests our whole hope of future blessedness. Only as He is faithful will His covenants stand and His promises be honoured. Only as we have complete assurance that He is faithful may we live in peace and look forward with assurance to the life to come.

Every heart can make its own application of this and draw from it such conclusions as the truth suggests and its own needs bring into focus. The tempted, the anxious, the fearful, the discouraged may all find new hope and good cheer in the knowledge that our Heavenly Father is faithful. He will ever be true to His pledged word. The hard-pressed sons of the covenant may be sure that He will never remove His loving-kindness from them nor suffer His faithfulness to fail.

Happy the man whose hopes rely  
On Israel's God; He made the sky,  
And earth and seas, with all their train;  
His truth forever stands secure;  
He saves the oppressed, He feeds the poor,  
And none shall find His promises vain.

Isaac Watts