

Sunday Evening Online

God is Faithful

Selected Scriptures

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Well, good evening, and welcome to Sunday Evening Online, just an informal time of study together just reflecting on God's word and thinking through some issues, and so, we welcome you, looking forward to our time together this evening. I really want to focus tonight, in our thoughts, on God's faithfulness – you know, faithfulness is a crucial issue to God; it's crucial in terms of what He expects of us. In fact, in Matthew 23, Jesus was talking to the scribes and Pharisees, and He said to them, you have "neglected the weightier matters of the law," and one of the items He lists is faithfulness – our faithfulness to God, our faithfulness to each other – and so, it matters to Him. Unfortunately, we are, by nature, unfaithful – to our word, to our promises, whether you're talking governments and the treaties between them, whether you're talking business and the relationship between business and employee; often there's dishonesty, distrust, lack of faithfulness and loyalty; whether you're talking about marriage, sadly, in some cases. A lack of faithfulness really taints every human relationship – but the good news is our God stands in absolute contradiction to that. He is, by nature, faithful – scripture constantly affirms that to be true.

I want to start – turn with me to Numbers 23, and there's a prophecy here that reminds us of the nature of God; it's a very familiar text. Numbers 23:19 – he says, "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?" You notice the contrast between who man is by nature and who God is by nature. Why aren't we faithful to our word? You see it in that text – it's because human beings lie, human beings repent, that is, they change their minds, and human beings are not able to do what they've said they're going to do; they lack the power to do what they've promised. The prophet here is saying that God is not like that in any way – He doesn't lie, He doesn't change His mind, He doesn't lack the power to do what He's committed to do – and so, this is the nature of God. Deuteronomy 7:9 says, "Know, therefore, that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God." Deuteronomy 32:4 says He is "a God of faithfulness." I love the way Psalm 36:5 puts it, "Your faithfulness," God, "reaches to the skies." Go outside, look up

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at the atmosphere in which we live, look at the ceiling of that, the blue sky above us, and that's the depth of the faithfulness of God, that's the measurement of the faithfulness of God; it absolutely overwhelms and surrounds us. In fact, Psalm 119:90 says, "Your faithfulness continues throughout all generations." Of course, the most famous statement of all – we sing it in one of our favorite hymns – Lamentations 3:23, "Great is Your faithfulness." 1 Corinthians 1:9 says, "God is faithful."

But when we talk about God's faithfulness, what exactly does it mean that God is faithful? Well, let me, first of all, ask this question – how is God's faithfulness related to His attributes; and specifically, the attribute of truth? When we talk about faithfulness, we often treat that as a separate attribute of God – but theologians, when they talk about the attributes of God, often treat God's faithfulness as related to, as a kind of subset, of God's attribute of truth or veracity. So, let's start there – when we talk about God being true, what do we mean? Well, primarily, we mean four things – and I'm not going to spend a lot of time here because this is just to get us into the main point I want us to look at tonight – but, first of all, we mean, when we say God is true, that He is metaphysically genuine. God is metaphysically genuine – in other words, God is true in the sense of He's real, He's genuine. We speak of true or real gold as opposed to false or fool's gold – God is true in the sense that He is real, He is genuine – He is the only God who really is. Jeremiah 10:10 says, "The Lord is the true God, He is the living God" – He's true in the sense that He is all that purports to be God. Scripture calls the gods of the nations, on the other hand, idols and lies – you hold in your hand a lie, the prophet says, when he talks about the gods that the nations worship. And so, God is metaphysically genuine; that's what we mean when we say He is true.

Secondly, we also mean that God is logically rational – there's no inherent logical contradiction in His own understanding of reality. God knows all things as they really, truly are – His knowledge is true.

Thirdly, we mean that God is morally reliable; that is, He is reliable, He's faithful to speak what is true. What He says, His words describe the things and relationships that He speaks as they really, actually are – He can't lie, He can't misrepresent. Now, that doesn't mean God tells us

everything that He knows about anything – obviously, He can't; we are mere creatures, He is the Creator. He is the infinite God, omniscient in all things, so He can't tell us everything He knows about anything – what it means, though, is that whatever God does tell us, whatever He says, matches the way things really are; He's morally reliable in what He communicates.

And then, finally, when we say God is true, we mean that God is relationally loyal; that is, He is faithful to His people. Now, when we speak about God's faithfulness, when we use that term, we're talking about the last two of those – we're saying that God is morally reliable to always speak what is true, and especially we're talking about when it comes to His promises, when He tells us what He's going to do; and that He is relationally loyal to all those with whom He has entered into a relationship.

So, that's really just setup for what I want you to think about with me for just a moment, and that is, why does it matter? How is God's faithfulness, this amazing quality in God that we've just been talking about, how is it practically expressed? When we look at our lives, when we look at what happens day in and day out in the practical outflow of our lives, why does God's faithfulness matter? Well, let me just highlight several reasons that it matters – first of all, and this is sort of on the larger scope of things, God's faithfulness sustains all of His creation. It's God's faithfulness that causes the sun to rise in the morning and set in the evening, that causes the seasons to come and go, that the earth continues to spin and it continues to move in its orbit through space – all of those things are a reflection of God's faithfulness. In fact, look at Psalm 119, and specifically verse 90 – let's go back to verse 89 in setting it up here; he says, "Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven." Of course, this great psalm is about the word of God, so he says Your word that you've revealed, the word that you hold in your hand right now, he said that word is "settled in heaven," it stands firm, literally, in heaven. "Your faithfulness continues throughout all generations" – here is kind of a hinge phrase; he's talking about the faithfulness of God, and he says Your faithfulness is what causes Your word to stand, settled in heaven, verse 89. But he goes on in verse 90 to say Your faithfulness also is what "established the earth" and causes it to stand, and they, that is, the things You created, "stand this day according to Your ordinances, for all things are Your servants" – and so, it's God's faithfulness that sustains all of the creation. I am often reminded of the amazing statement that comes after

the flood in Genesis 8:22, where we have this little poem that recites, really, the faithfulness of God. "While the earth remains," Moses writes, "seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." Listen – it's the faithfulness of God that means we don't have to be concerned that this world is going to be destroyed prematurely, that we're going to destroy it. No, God said, until I'm done, everything is going to continue in its normal cycles – and so, it's His faithfulness that secures that.

Secondly, I would just encourage you to think about this – it's God's faithfulness that guarantees all of His promises. I really love this – look at Deuteronomy 7, in the great chapter where He talks about how He set His love on Israel and chose them for Himself, simply because of His love. Verse 7, "The Lord did not set His love on you" – this is Deuteronomy 7:7 – "the Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples," but He loved you, "because He loved you, and He kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers." He loved you because He loved them, and "the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery." Verse 9, "Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps His covenant and His steadfast love to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments." Moses says, listen – you can depend on everything God has told you He's going to do in His relationship with you because He is faithful. And, believer, the same thing is true with us – the reason you and I can depend on the promises that have been made to us, we can depend on the relationship that God has entered into with us, is because of His faithfulness, because He is morally reliable, what He says can be counted on, and He is relationally loyal, He guarantees His promises. Hebrews 10:23 says "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope;" that is, our hope in the salvation promised in the gospel and promised in Christ, "without wavering, for He who promised is faithful." Listen – you can hold on to the promises that have been held out to you in the gospel, the promises where we're told "the one who believes in Him will never perish," where Jesus says that "no one will ever snatch those who are My own out of My hand," and promise after promise – you can hold on to those promises because God is faithful, because He is morally reliable in everything He says, and because He is relationally loyal, and nothing will ever change that quality in God.

A third practical expression of this wonderful quality in God is, it's God's faithfulness that protects us from sin. 1 Corinthians 10:13 is one of the most familiar verses in the Bible – turn there with me, 1 Corinthians 10. In context, Paul is dealing with the abuse of Christian liberty and how even the children of Israel in the wilderness were running their liberty out to the edge and running over the edge and falling because they weren't using that liberty in a responsible way; rather, abusing it – and in that context, he tells them, he tells us what can happen in the first part of chapter 10, what happened to them. Verse 12, "Let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall" – don't get cocky in your battle with sin, don't get cocky in your use of Christian liberty. But then he gives us this assurance, verse 13, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man, and God is faithful" – there it is. Whatever you're facing, it's common – there's no temptation that you've experienced that isn't common to mankind; you're not the odd man out. But God is faithful, and here's how His faithfulness manifests itself – He "will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it." Listen, Christian, you don't have to sin, and the reason you don't have to sin is because of the faithfulness of God – He is faithful; He will not allow you, He says, to be tempted beyond what you are able – we don't have to sin; He provides the way of escape. What is the way of escape? Well, there are two of them hinted at here - one of them is you'll be able to endure it; that is, you will go through that temptation feeling the weight of it and come out the other side without giving in – so, one of the ways of escape is simply not to sin, to stay in that commitment to endure, to come out the other side of the temptation without having given into it. The other is in verse 14 – "Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry." Sometimes the way out is to run, and of course, on a number of occasions, Paul tells Timothy, flee – flee youthful lust, flee – there are certain things you run from. And, so, the way out sometimes is to endure it, come out the other side because there's nowhere to run – other times, get away, run. But, regardless, the point is, God is faithful – in temptation, He will protect you from sin; you don't have to sin. And when we do sin, it's not God's fault – He's made the provision, in His faithfulness.

A fourth way that God's faithfulness expresses itself is it protects us from Satan. It protects us from Satan – we don't often think about this, but this is a constant reality. There is a war going on around us, a spiritual war between the forces of darkness and Satan, and God and His forces –

and there's no doubt about who's going to win; "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world." As you've heard me say many times, I love that example of Luther, where he talks about, God has Satan on a leash; Satan is God's devil, and He will only let him go as far as He wants him to go and allows him to go for His own purposes. So, the end result's not in question; there's not like a *Star Wars* battle between the forces of good and evil, and there's some question about who's going to win. No, there is, in fact – the battle's been won at the cross, and all that remains is the mopping up and the ultimate destruction of Satan – but he is still a real foe to us, and that battle rages around us. He is involved in the temptations, he and his demons are involved in the temptations we face, they've created the world's system that trips us up – so, how do we protect ourselves? And the answer is, we really can't protect ourselves; we rely on God's protection. Look at 2 Thessalonians 3:3 – he's been talking, in the first couple of verses of this chapter, about being "rescued from perverse and evil men, for not all have faith," and he says, but in spite of that, in spite of the fact that we are surrounded by evil, "the Lord is faithful," and here's how His faithfulness manifests itself, "and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one." We don't have to worry, ultimately, about Satan and his demons – "He will protect and strengthen you from the evil one." I love the way it's illustrated in the life of Christ and His interaction with Peter – in Luke 22:31, Jesus says to Peter, and you know the setting; Peter is going to deny the Lord, and in that context, Jesus says, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat;" he wants to destroy you. But Jesus says, "But I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail, and you, when once you have turned again," once you've been restored, once you've repented, that's going to happen, I'm going to see to that, then "strengthen your brothers." Jesus is no less involved in protecting and caring for us – in fact, He prayed this in John 17:15, "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them," protect them, Father, "from the evil one." And, of course, He goes on later in that prayer to say I'm not just praying that for the eleven true disciples, but rather for those who will believe through their word for Us. So, it's the faithfulness of God that assures that we are strengthened and protected from Satan and his demons – you don't have to fear, you don't have to worry. Some Christians walk around in some sort of worry – they come out of a charismatic background, where they have this impending sense of doom that somehow, Satan and his demons are going to intrude into their lives in ways that are overwhelming – He will strengthen you, and He will protect you from the evil one – and so, we can rest in the faithfulness of God.

There's a fifth expression of the faithfulness of God that I love – His faithfulness ensures our forgiveness when we sin. One of the most familiar passages in the New Testament is 1 John 1:9, but I'm afraid a lot of people read it and just skip over one of the most helpful, encouraging words in the entire verse. 1 John 1:9 – of course, the context is saying that if you're a new person, if you've been re-created, if you've been regenerated, then your life is a life characterized by walking in the light; that is, in moral purity and in the truth of God's word – your life is characterized that way, as opposed to the way it used to be; it was characterized by evil, by sin and by walking in error. It doesn't mean Christians don't sin – he goes on to say, of course; in fact, if you say you don't sin, you're a liar – but it means that the preponderance of our life, we walk in the light; our lives, day in and day out, are characterized not by darkness, but by light, and when sin intrudes, it intrudes into the light in which we walk. But notice verse 9 – "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." We've talked about this before; this isn't talking about justification – when we came to Jesus Christ, at the moment you were regenerated, that you repented and believed, you were justified; that is, you were declared right with God. The gavel at the bench of God's justice came down, and God declared you perfectly, eternally, forever, fully righteous; you have the righteousness of Jesus Christ. In the courtroom of God's justice, every sin has been forgiven, forever, and you have been declared right with God through the righteousness of Jesus Christ; you've been declared eternally righteous so that God sees you as if you had lived Jesus' perfect life; that's justification, that's the joy that we have in justification. But, as believers, after we've been justified, we sin – so, what about that sin, what's going on? Well, understand that that doesn't mean that that sin wasn't justified, that we weren't justified with that sin in view, we were – when we were saved; when Christ died, all of our sins were future; when we were saved, all of our sins, past, present and future, were forgiven, and we now wear the righteousness of Jesus Christ. But, as believers, when we sin, we don't go back into the courtroom of God's justice; rather, we have to now deal with our Father – our sin is against the Father. So, we've left the courtroom once and for all at the moment of salvation, but now, when we sin, we're sinning against a good and gracious Father, and we have to deal with that sin at that level. And so, we confess our sins, and He says, if we are confessing our sins, if you are *homologeō* – if you're saying the same thing, is the Greek word, *homologeō*, is to say, to say the same – if we say the

same thing God is saying about our sins; in other words, if we judge our sins, if we take full responsibility, if we say it is what it is before God, and we seek His forgiveness, notice, "He is faithful to forgive us our sins." In other words, He's faithful to His promise – He said He would, and He never says anything He doesn't mean, He's always reliable in what He says, there is a direct correlation between what He says and what He does. And so, He's faithful to forgive our sins – and, of course, he adds, and I love this, "and righteous" – God can righteously forgive our sins because those sins were fully paid for, the justice due those sins was fully exhausted on Jesus Christ on the cross. So, when you confess your sins, come back to this verse, remind yourself that the reason you're going to experience the forgiveness of a Father toward your sin is because He is faithful to the promises He's made, and He is righteous because those sins have already been fully and ultimately paid for by Jesus Christ – so, take solace in the faithfulness of God in terms of the forgiveness of your sin.

A sixth way that God's faithfulness comforts us and encourages us is, God's faithfulness provides comfort in our worst trials. Comfort in our worst trials – Lamentations, turn back there with me, is, of course, a book of laments, as Jeremiah laments the destruction of his city, the Babylonian captivity, the death of his friends, all of those things that were a part of that horrific scene that unfolded. And, in the middle of that, he talks about just how bad things are – in fact, you read chapter 3, Lamentations 3, and it's one of the darkest chapters, the first half of the chapter, that you will ever read. You know – "I am a man," verse 1, "who has seen affliction because of the rod of His wrath. He has driven me, made me walk in darkness and not in light. He has turned His hand against me repeatedly all day," and on and on it goes – bitterness, hardship, dark places, "a heavy chain," verse 7, "He shuts out my prayer," verse 8, "He has made me a laughingstock," verse 14, "to all the people," "He has filled me with bitterness, made me drink wormwood," verse 15; verse 16, "He has broken my teeth with gravel." Maybe you're in the middle of a desperate trial, that you can relate to some of those expressions – maybe you feel, to some degree, like that – where do you find hope in the midst of that? Well, verse 19 says, Lord, "Remember my affliction and my wandering, the wormwood and bitterness. Surely my soul remembers and is bowed down within me" – that's where we are when we reflect on our circumstances in the middle of life's worst trials. But verse 21 changes – "This I recall to mind," I'm about to tell you what I'm going to think about, and in light of that, "Therefore, I have hope,

the Lord's steadfast love," the expressions of his steadfast love, "indeed never cease, His compassions never fail, they are new every morning – great is Your faithfulness." God, You are going to stay relationally loyal to me, even in the midst of my trouble. "The Lord is my portion, says my soul, therefore I have hope in Him. The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him. It is good that he waits silently for the salvation of the Lord." You can find comfort in your worst trial in the faithfulness of God, in the fact that He will not abandon you – He absolutely will not. He cannot, because it is contrary to His nature, it would – He would un-God Himself to stop being relationally loyal to those on whom He set His love. I love the way A.W. Pink says it in his book on *The Attributes of God* – let me just read this; this is a little longer quote, but I want to encourage you with it. He says, "There are seasons in the lives of all when it's not easy, not even for Christians, to believe that God is faithful – our faith is sorely tried, our eyes dim with tears, and we can no longer trace the outworking 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 God's still, small voice. Cherished plans have been thwarted, friends on whom we have 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." And Pink writes this: "Ah, faltering soul, seek grace to heed Isaiah 50:10, 'Who is among you that fears the Lord, that obeys the voice of His servant, that walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.' And what do you rely on? His faithfulness."

Number seven – and I just mention this one – God's faithfulness gives us hope in our suffering and persecution. 1 Peter 4:19 says, "Therefore, those who suffer" – and in context, it's talking about suffer for righteousness, suffer persecution for our faith – do so "according to the will of God," and they simply need to "entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right." God's faithfulness gives us hope in the midst of our unfair persecution.

One last one – and I love this one, and this is really what prompted me to even think about this tonight, sharing this with you; my own mind and heart went to these passages this week, and it's this – God's faithfulness guarantees our ultimate salvation. Look at 1 Corinthians 1 and specifically verse 7. 1 Corinthians 1:7 ends by saying that you who have been saved are

"awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ" – we talked about that this morning. Now, notice verse 8 – "our Lord Jesus Christ will also confirm you to the end." The word means to establish you – He will establish you to the end, He'll make you firm, He'll make you stand to the end; you will be preserved without blame at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. How in the world can I, a sinner like me, be presented blameless, without blame, before the Lord Jesus Christ, when He comes? Here's the reason – "Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass." I hope you will think and meditate on these amazing truths about the faithfulness of our God – you are ultimately going to be saved; He will present you faultless before His presence with exceeding joy. It's going to happen, Christian, because He is faithful. Let's pray together.

Father, we are overwhelmed by the truths that we've reflected on tonight, as we think about how unfaithful we are. Lord, we are so fickle, we are so unfaithful to You – and yet we thank You that, even in our unfaithfulness, You remain faithful, because You cannot deny Yourself; we thank You that You will remain faithful, that what You've said, what You've promised us, You'll never go back on, because You are morally reliable, You are true in that sense. And, Father, You're also true in the sense that You are relationally loyal – You are faithful; once You have set Your love upon us, once You have entered into a relationship with us, once You have called us to Yourself through the gospel to Your Son, nothing can change that commitment. Lord, we thank You – we thank You that, ultimately, even as we sing that wonderful song together, it's You who will hold us fast – thank You for Your faithfulness. May we, even in these days, find our joy, our comfort, our peace in the knowledge that Your faithfulness extends to the heavens, that it is good in all generations.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Good night – have a great week.