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Chapter 23

OF THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

Faithfulness is an attribute that belongs to God; from whence he is denominated the “faithful God” (Deut. 7:9). It is essential to him, and without which he would not be God; to be unfaithful, would be to act contrary to his nature, to deny himself, (2 Tim. 2:13) an unfaithful God would be no God at all; it is a most glorious perfection of his nature; it is “great”, like himself; yea, it is infinite; “Great is thy faithfulness”, (Lam. 3:23) it relies to all persons and things God has any concern with; it is all around him; he is, as it were, clothed and covered with it; and there is none in any creature like unto it (Ps. 89:8). There is faithfulness in the holy angels, and in good men, but not like what is in God; and therefore he puts no trust in them, (Job 4:18) his faithfulness is invariably the same; it has never failed in anyone instance, nor never will; it is established in the heavens, and will continue to all generations, (Ps. 89:2, 24, 33, 119:90; Josh. 23:14) otherwise there would be no firm foundation for trust and confidence in him; but he is the “faithful Creator”, and covenant God and Father of his people; to whom they may safely commit themselves, and depend upon him for all mercies promised, both temporal and spiritual, (1 Peter 4:19; 1 Thess. 5:23, 24) for the faithfulness of God chiefly lies in the performance of his word, which is certain, with respect to all that is spoken by him; for “hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” Verily he will (Num. 23:19; Luke 1:45). And it appears,

First, In the performance of what he has said with respect to the world in general; as, that it shall never more be destroyed by a flood, as it once was; and for a token and confirmation of it, God has set the rainbow in the cloud; and now four thousand years are gone since the covenant was made; and God has been faithful to it, though the earth has been sometimes threatened with destruction by violent storms, and sudden inundations; see (Gen. 9:11-16; Isa. 54:9). Also that the ordinances of heaven, the sun, moon, and stars, shall not depart, but always continue in their being, use, and influence; and now they have kept their course, or station, and have done their office, exactly and punctually, for almost six thousand years; see (Jer. 31:35, 36, 33:25). Likewise that the revolutions of the time, and seasons of the year, should keep their constant course; that, “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) and so it has always been, and still is, in one part of the world or another, according to the different climates. Remarkable was the faithfulness of God to the Jewish nation, in that their land required rain only at two seasons of the year, and God promised it to them, and which they always had; though sometimes so ungrateful as not to fear him who gave them rain, “both the former and the latter, in his season”, and “reserved” for them “the appointed weeks of the harvest”, (Jer. 5:24; see Deut. 11:14, 15) and whereas God has given reason to expect that his creatures should be preserved in their being, and provided for by him, with the necessaries of life; he has not left himself without a witness to his faithfulness, in all ages and nations, giving rain from heaven and fruitful seasons; and so filling the hearts of his creatures with food and gladness; whose eyes all of them wait upon him, and he gives them their meat in due season, (Acts 14:17; Ps. 36:5, 6, 145:15, 16). And from all this it may be strongly concluded, that whatsoever God has said concerning the world, which is yet to be fulfilled, shall be most certainly done; as the judgment of it, the end and consummation of all things in it, the conflagration of it, and the making new heavens and a new earth, wherein will dwell righteousness (2 Peter 3:7-13).

Secondly, The faithfulness of God appears in the fulfilment of what he has said with respect to Christ, and the salvation of men by him; both of what he has said of him, and of what he has said to him: and, indeed, the faithfulness of God is displayed in Christ as in a mirror.

1. In the performance of what he has said of him; as that he should be born of a woman, be of the seed of Abraham, spring from the tribe of Judah, arise out of the family of David, be born of a virgin at Bethlehem, and converse much in Galilee, (Gen. 3:15, 22:18, 49:10; 2 Sam. 7:12, 13; Mic. 5:2; Isa. 7:14 9:1, 2) and suffer, and die, and work out the salvation of his

people, (Ps. 22:1-31; Isa. 53:1-12, 25:9 35:4, 49:6) all which has been fully accomplished (Matthew 1:1, 18-23, 2:5, 6, 8, 11, 22, 23, 4:13-16; Luke 1:68-72; 1 Cor. 15:3).

2. In the performance of what he said to Christ, or promised him; as that he would help him, and strengthen him, as man and mediator, in the great work of redemption and salvation; and which help and strength Christ expected, and believed he should have, and had it, (Ps. 89:21; Isa. 50:7, 9, 49:8) and that though he should die, and be laid in the grave and buried; yet he would raise him from the dead, and that on the third day; and which was accordingly done, (Ps. 16:10; Hosea 6:2; 1 Cor. 15:4) and that when he had done his work, being delivered unto death for the sins of his people, and raised again for their justification, he should be glorified at his right hand, in his human nature; and accordingly, Christ having done his work, pleaded this promise, and it was fulfilled, (Ps. 110:1; John 17:4, 5; Phil. 2:9, 10) and that he should see his seed have a numerous offspring, which should continue to the end of the world, (Isa. 53:10; Ps. 89:4, 29, 36) and which has been accomplished in the numerous conversions both among Jews and Gentiles, in the first ages of Christianity; and which have continued, more or less, ever since; and will still more manifestly appear when the nation of the Jews shall be born at once, and the fullness of the Gentiles be brought in.

3. The faithfulness of God is displayed in the person, office, and works of Christ. This, as all other divine perfections, is common to each person in the Godhead, and shines resplendently in the Son of God, “the brightness of his Father’s glory”, who has every perfection the Father has; so that he that has seen the Son has seen the Father, the same perfections being in the one as in the other, and this of faithfulness among the rest; which is to be seen in Christ as in a mirror, or glass; and an estimate may in some measure be taken, and judgment made of the faithfulness of God, by what appears in his Son; who has been “faithful to him that appointed him” to his office as Mediator. Moses was faithful in the house of God, as a servant; but Christ as a Son over his own house, (Heb. 3:2-6) and whose faithfulness may be observed,

(1). In the performance of his engagements: he engaged to be the Surety of his people; to stand in their place and stead; to do and suffer for them what should be required, and to take care of all their affairs and concerns for time and eternity; and accordingly, he is become the Surety of the better testament, (Heb. 7:22) he engaged to be the Saviour and Redeemer of them; he is often spoken of as such in the Old Testament; that is, as one who had engaged to work out their redemption and salvation; and which he has now obtained, and become the author of, (Heb. 5:9, 9:12) he engaged to come into

the world, in order to do this work, saying, “Lo, I come”; and he is come, and has done it; and that he came into the world, and has done this for sinners, the chief of sinners, is a “faithful saying”; in which the faithfulness of God in his promises, and of Christ in his engagements, is abundantly displayed, (1 Tim. 1:15) he engaged to come and fulfil the law, both its precepts and its penalty, and to become a sacrifice for sin; ceremonial sacrifices being insufficient, (Ps. 40:6-8) and he is accordingly become the fulfilling “end of the law for righteousness to all that believe”; and has offered himself, soul and body, without spot to God; “a Sacrifice of a sweet smelling savour”; and whereby sin has been fully expiated and put away, (Rom. 10:4; Heb. 9:14, 26, 10:5-10) he engaged to pay off the debts of his people, and by being their Surety, become responsible for them, and to clear off all their scores; which he has done to the uttermost farthing, and blotted out the handwriting of ordinances against them. In short, he engaged to feed the flock of God, to take the whole care and oversight of it; and he does feed his flock like a shepherd, and has shown himself to be the good and faithful one, by laying down his life for the sheep, (Zech. 11:4, 7; Isa. 40:11; John 10:14).

(2). The faithfulness of Christ is seen in his discharge of the trust reposed in him, which is very large and great; the Father hath “given all things into his hand”, (John 3:35) all the persons of his elect to be kept, preserved, and saved by him; and so they are and shall be, even everyone of them, whom Christ will present to his Father, and say, “Behold, I, and the children which God hath given me”; not one is lost (Heb. 2:13). Christ is entrusted with a fullness of grace, to supply the wants of his people; it has been his Father’s pleasure, that it should dwell in him for their use; he has deposited it with him, to communicate it to them, as they need it; and he has been faithful to do it, in all ages and generations; he has been to all his churches, and to all his saints, in every period of time, “A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon”, (Song 4:15) saints both of the Old and New Testament, have “all received of his fullness, and grace for grace” (John 1:16). Eternal life and happiness is in his hands, and he has a power to give it to as many as the Father has given him; and he is faithful in the use of that power, and does give it to all his sheep, so that none of them shall ever perish, (1 John 5:11; John 17:2, 10:28) yea, the glory of all the divine perfections, as concerned in the salvation of men, was entrusted with Christ; and he has been faithful “in things pertaining to God”, as well as in making “reconciliation for the sins of the people”; and in doing the one he has taken care of the other. The glory of God is great in the salvation of men, even of his justice and holiness; as well as of his wisdom, power, faithfulness, grace, and mercy (Heb. 2:17; Ps. 20:5, 85:10).

(3). Christ has appeared to be faithful in the exercise of his offices, as Prophet, Priest, and King: in the exercise of his prophetic office; for which he was abundantly qualified, by lying in the bosom of his Father, and so privy to his whole mind and will, which he has faithfully declared; all that he heard of the Father, all the words and doctrines he gave him, as man, he made known to his disciples; in doing which, he sought not his own glory, but the glory of him that sent him; and therefore must be true and faithful, and no unrighteousness or unfaithfulness in him, (John 1:18, 7:16-18, 15:15, 17:8) and therefore is justly entitled to be called the Amen, and faithful Witness (Rev. 3:14). In the exercise of his priestly office; in which he is faithful to him that appointed him; and rightly bears the character of a faithful high priest, in that he has offered up himself to make atonement for the sins of his people; and as the Advocate for them, even Jesus Christ the righteous, faithful, and true; and takes perfect care, in all things, of the house of God, over which he is a priest (Heb. 2:17, 3:1,2, 10:21, 9:14; 1 John 2:1). And in the exercise of his kingly office; all whose administrations in it are just and true; righteousness being the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins; and with great propriety is he called “faithful and true, since in righteousness he doth judge and make war” (Rev. 15:3, 19:11; Isa. 11:5).

(4). The faithfulness of Christ is manifest in the fulfilment of his promises, which he made to his disciples; as, that he would not leave them comfortless, but come and see them; as he did, after his resurrection, and comforted them with his presence, and filled them with joy at the sight of him, (John 14:18, 20:20) that they should receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and therefore were bid to wait at Jerusalem for it, and where it was bestowed upon them, on the day of Pentecost, in a very large and extraordinary manner, (Acts 1:4, 2:4, 33) that he would be with them in the administration of his word and ordinances; and accordingly did go forth and work with them, confirming the word by signs following, (Matthew 28:19, 20; Mark 16:20) yea, he has promised his presence with his ministers and churches to the end of the world, and that even “where two or three are gathered together in his name, he will be in the midst of them”, (Matthew 18:20 28:20) and he makes his word good, which the experience of his ministers and people in all ages confirms: he has promised also to come again, and take his disciples and faithful followers to himself, that where he is they may be also; and which was not only verified in his immediate disciples, but in his saints in all ages, whom, when they have served their generation according to the will of God, he comes and takes them to himself, by death; and “to them that look for him, would appear a second time, without sin, unto salvation” (John 14:2, 3; Heb. 9:28).

(5). The faithfulness of Christ may be observed in his concern with the covenant of grace, and the promises of it; the covenant was made with him as the Head and Representative of his people, and stands fast with him; all the blessings of it are lodged with him, and faithfully dispensed by him; the promises were made to him, who only actually existed when they were made, and to whom only they could be given; he was the Amen, and faithful Witness of them, of their being made; and they are Yea and Amen in him; by whose blood the blessings and promises of it are ratified and confirmed; and therefore called, “the blood of the everlasting covenant”: and it is in and through him that believers come to have an interest in the promises, a right unto them, and to be partakers of them, (Ps. 89:3, 24; Rev. 3:14; 2 Cor. 1:20; Heb. 13:20; Eph 3:6). And now by the faithfulness of Christ thus manifestly displayed, may be learnt somewhat more of the attribute of faithfulness, as it is in God. Which leads on to consider,

Thirdly, The faithfulness of God in the performance of what he has said in the covenant, and the promises of it, with respect to his special people. God is denominated “faithful”, from his keeping covenant and mercy with them, (Deut. 7:9) every covenant God has made with man, he has been faithful in: he made a covenant with Adam, as the head and representative of his posterity, promising a continuance of happiness to him and his, provided he remained in his state of innocence; and threatening with death, in case of disobedience. Adam was unfaithful, and broke the covenant; “they, like Adam, have transgressed the covenant” (Hosea 6:7). But God was faithful to it, and deprived him of his happiness, and pronounced the sentence of death on him and his. God made a covenant with Noah, and all the creatures, promising that he would no more destroy the world by a flood; and he has faithfully kept it, as before observed. He made a covenant with Abraham, that he would make him the father of many nations, and that kings should spring from him, and that he would give to his posterity the land of Canaan: the former part of which was verified in the Ishmaelites, Israelites, Edomites, Midianites, and others, with their kings, which were of him: and the latter part, by putting the people of Israel in possession of Canaan, by Joshua; which they held long by the tenure of their obedience, according to his promise; but when they broke the covenant, he destroyed them from it, as he threatened, (Gen. 17:5, 6; Josh. 21:43, 23:16). He made a covenant at Sinai, with all the people of Israel; and, according to his engagements, continued to them their blessings, natural, civil, and religious; but they were not steadfast in his covenant, and he dispossessed them of them. But the grand and principal covenant, is the covenant of grace; which God has made in Christ with all his elect, and is ordered in all things, and sure; and which he will

never break, and they cannot; and which will never be removed, but ever be inviolably kept; and there are promises of various sorts, which God has graciously made to his people, and which are faithfully performed by him.

1. Some of a temporal nature; for “godliness” and godly men have “the promise of the life that now is”, of things belonging to it, as well as “of that which is to come”, (1 Tim. 4:8) these their heavenly Father knows they have need of, and therefore provides them for them, and promises them unto them. He has said, “that they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing”, (Ps. 34:10) they shall have that which is good, as every creature of God is good, good food and good raiment; though it may be but mean, yet it is good, and better than the best of men deserve; and they want not any, that God, in his infinite wisdom, sees is good for them; for though they and others may think it would be better for them if they had a greater affluence of the things of this life; but God thinks otherwise, and knows it would be to their hurt, as sometimes riches are: he has bid his people “trust in the Lord, and do good”, and has promised, they “shall be fed”, (Ps. 37:3) not all of them with dainties and delicious food, but with food convenient for them; he has assured them, their “bread shall be given them”, and their: “waters shall be sure”, (Isa. 33:16) and this is sufficient to support and confirm his faithfulness: nor is the poverty of some of God’s people any objection to it, since he has nowhere promised them the riches of this world, and has given them no reason to expect them; but he has promised them better riches, durable riches, and righteousness, the riches of grace and glory, and these he gives to them; see a testimony from David’s experience of the faithfulness of God, with respect to temporal things (Ps. 37:25). God has not promised his people security from outward afflictions; but rather has suggested to them that they may look for them; since his people are described as a poor and afflicted people; and it is their common case; many are the afflictions of the righteous; it is what they are appointed to, and what are appointed for them; but then God has promised that they shall work for their good; either for their temporal good, as Jacob’s afflictions worked for his; or for their spiritual good, the exercise and increase of grace and holiness; and always for their eternal good, (2 Cor. 4:17) and also that he will be with them in them, support them under them, and deliver out of them in due time: all which is faithfully performed by him, (1 Cor. 10:13).

2. Others are of a spiritual nature; and the principal of these is, and which is the sum of the covenant, “They shall be my people, and I will be their God”, (Jer. 32:38) and which appears in their election, redemption, and the effectual calling; which is saying, that he has a special love and affection for them, and will continue it, as he does: nor are his chastisements of them, his hiding

his face from them for a time, his displeasure at them, and being angry with them, any objection to the perpetuity of his love; since these are not contrary to it, but rather the fruits of it, and for their good: it signifies, that they shall have his gracious presence with them, and may expect it, and which they have; nor do their doubts, and fears, and complaints disprove it, (Isa. 41:10, 49:14-16) which are generally owing to their ignorance and unbelief; God is with them, and they know it; however, he is never far from them, nor long; he does not depart from them, nor withdraw his gracious presence from them totally and finally: it assures them of his protection, that he will be all around them, guard them, and secure them, preserve and keep them by his power, through faith unto salvation, as he does; for though they may fall into sin, yet they rise again by his grace; and though they fall into temptation, and by it, yet they are delivered out of it; they are kept from a final and total falling away; they are not of them that draw back unto perdition: in a word, this promise is expressive of their enjoyment of God here, and for evermore; and he is their shield, and exceeding great reward; their portion in life, at death, and for ever; their all in all. There are many particular spiritual promises made to the people of God; and which are made good by him; as, that he will sprinkle clean water upon them, and cleanse them from all their sins; which is to be understood of justifying grace, through the blood of Christ; that he will forgive their iniquities, and remember their sins no more; and he is just in doing it, upon the account of the blood of his Son, and faithful to his own promise, (1 John 1:9) that he will give them new hearts and new spirits, which he does in regeneration; and take away the heart of stone, and give an heart of flesh; as he does, when he removes the hardness of the heart, and gives evangelical repentance unto life; that he will put his laws in them, and write them in their minds; not only give knowledge of them, but both a disposition and grace to observe them; working in them both to will and to do of his good pleasure: that he will put his Spirit into them, and give them spiritual strength to keep his statutes, and perform every duty; that he will carry on his good work of grace in them, and perform it, until the day of Christ; of which they may be confident, since he has promised it; that he will give them more grace, a sufficiency of it, and supply all their need out of the fullness in Christ; and that his fear shall be continually in their hearts; and they shall not depart from him, but persevere in faith and holiness to the end. All which promises, and more, are faithfully and truly performed in all his people (see Jer. 31:33,34, 32:38-40; Ezek. 36:25-27).

3c. There are other promises which respect the life to come; the eternal happiness of the saints in another world: the apostle speaks of the promise of this, “as the promise”, by way of eminency, as if it was the only promise,

or, however, the principal one, in which all others issue and end; “This is the promise that he has promised us, even eternal life”, (1 John 2:25) and this is an ancient one, made before the world began, and by God, that “cannot lie”, (Titus 1:2) who is faithful and true, and will most certainly perform it; wherefore, “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him”, (James 1:12).

4. Fourthly, The faithfulness of God appears in fulfilling his threatenings, as well as his promises. God threatened Adam, that in the day he eat of the forbidden fruit, he should surely die; and he immediately became mortal, death began at once to work in him; his soul was seized directly with a spiritual or moral death, guilt, and terror of conscience, a sense of divine wrath, and deprivation of the divine presence, and he became liable to eternal death; nor had he any reason to expect any other, until he heard that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head; and the sentence of death passed on him, and all his posterity in him, as soon as he had sinned, according to the divine threatening (Rom. 5:12). God threatened the inhabitants of the old world with a flood to destroy them, for their impiety and wickedness; and though his patience and forbearance were for a long time exercised, yet he was faithful to his word, and brought it upon the world of the ungodly, and destroyed them all. God threatened the people of Israel with captivity, and other judgments, if they walked not in his ways, and broke his statutes; of which see (Lev. 26:1-46; Deut. 28:1-68) all which grievous threatenings, and sore judgments, have been exactly fulfilled in that people, and remain to this day; who are a standing proof of God’s faithfulness in this respect. And as God has threatened men with the burning of the world, and the works of it, and the wicked in it; and damnation to all unbelieving and impenitent sinners, they may be assured of it, and expect it; for as it is most true, and may be depended upon, that “he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved”; so it is equally as true, and as surely to be depended on, that “he that believeth not, shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). Nor is it any objection to the faithfulness of God in fulfilling his threatenings, that Nineveh was spared, when it was threatened, that in forty days it should be overthrown; since there was a condition implied, a secret proviso made, “except they repented”; and which their hope of mercy, and the mercy shown them upon their repentance, fully confirm; and so the veracity and faithfulness of God is sufficiently secured; and, indeed, in many promises and threatenings, respecting temporal things, a condition is either openly expressed, or secretly understood; according to which God in providence proceeds, (Jer. 18:7-10).