

Faithfulness

by Allan Chapple

How do you know when you've finally become a senior citizen? Apparently, one tell-tale sign is nostalgia for the (largely imaginary!) "good old days." Perhaps this puts me in that category—but weren't we all better off when "a man's word was his bond", and a handshake was enough to clinch a deal or form a partnership? Whether or not our world was ever like that, it's not hard to see how much better it would be if it was. Life would be so much more straightforward and so much less stressful—no need to worry about being ripped off; no need to protect my back; no need for wall-to-wall lawyers.

Reliability, trustworthiness, dependability—what a precious commodity! A world where you can take people at their word is so much better than living in anxiety, fear, and suspicion. And here's where what the Bible tells us about the faithfulness of God comes into its own: our faith rests on the rock of his faithfulness. Would you like to look with me at Psalm 89:1-14?

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Did you notice that God's faithfulness is referred to five times? And did you also notice the three things that are linked with it? The first is God's love (verses 1, 2, and 14). Here's a crucial reason why this matters: love that is coupled with faithfulness is a love that can be relied on, a love that is stable and constant. And as we learn from Romans 5:1-8 and 8:28-39, for example, people who are loved with a dependable love are secure and at peace. No, not half-asleep or in a trance! A faithful love—one that doesn't change—isn't boring or sedating; it is bracing and energising. While it is very draining and nerve-wracking


to be around someone moody and unpredictable, someone whose love isn't steady and reliable, being loved by a faithful God gives us confidence and makes us courageous (as those two passages in Romans show).

The second thing linked with God's faithfulness is his promises (verses 3-4)—a link also made in verses 33-34 (as well as in Hebrews 10:23 and 11:11, for example). Why does this matter? Because it means that we can take God at his word. God's faithfulness makes his promise an unbreakable commitment, a cast-iron guarantee: his word is his bond! He means what he says—and what he says, he will do. Not surprisingly, the Bible often celebrates this: for example, when the Israelites had taken possession of the land of Canaan (Joshua 21:43-45; 23:14), and when Solomon dedicated the Temple (1 Kings 8:15, 20, 24-26, 56).

What makes promises important? They reveal purposes. When I make a promise, you know what I am going to do. Or do you? One problem with my promises is that I may not mean what I say. Our world is littered with false promises—some of them meant to hide the promise-giver's real intentions from me. There are no ifs and buts about God's promises, however! They are completely trustworthy, and they let us know what God intends to do. What a huge difference that makes. Life is no longer a matter of groping our way through a fog that never lifts. Instead, God's promises light up the path ahead of us. What's more, knowing his promises keeps us from living at cross-purposes with God. This is why trusting his promises is one of the primary ingredients of authentic faith.

There is another problem with my promises. Even when they are sincere, I may fail to keep them—not because I won't, but because I can't. Here's where the third connection the passage makes is so important. God's faithfulness is linked with his power (verses 8-9, 13).

A God who is all-powerful never has the problem we often do, of being caught in circumstances "beyond our control". This faithful God is the "LORD God Almighty" (verse 8), who created the world (verses 11-12) and rules over it (verses 9-10). His sovereign power underwrites his faithfulness, guaranteeing that all of his promises will be kept and all of his purposes will be fulfilled. He means what he says—and there is absolutely nothing that can prevent him from doing what he promises.

A faithful God—that's not just a nice idea, and not even just a true doctrine; it's the necessary foundation for a faith-filled life. 



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