

THE RIGHTEOUS MAN'S REFUGE—THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

John Flavel (1630-1669)

*Opening that glorious attribute of Divine faithfulness as a third chamber
of security to the people of God, in times of distress and danger.*

HAVING viewed the saint's refuge in the power and wisdom of God, we next proceed to a third chamber of safety for the saints refuge: **The faithfulness of God.**

In this attribute is our safety and rest, amidst the confusions of the world, and daily disappointments we are vexed withal, through the vanity and falseness of the creature; as to creatures, the very best of them are but vanity, yea, vanity of vanity, the vainest vanity (Ecc 1:2), "Every man in his best estate is altogether vanity" (Psa 39:5). Yea, those that we expect most from, give us most trouble (Mic 7:5). Nearest relations bring up the rear of sorrows. "My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook" (Job 6:15). Especially their deceit appears most, when we have most need of their help. How great a mercy is it then to have a refuge in the faithfulness of God as David had; "I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul" (Psa 142:4). And likewise the church, "I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me" (Mic 7:7) A time may come, when you shall not know where to trust in all this world. Let me therefore open to you this chamber of rest in the faithfulness of God against such a day, and this I shall do in a twofold consideration of it.

I. Absolutely in its own nature.

II. Relatively in the promises and providences of God.

I. Absolutely, and so the faithfulness of God is His sincerity, firmness, and constancy in performing His Word to His people in all times and cases.

So Moses describes Him to Israel. "Know therefore, that the Lord thy God he is God, the **faithful God**" (Deu 7:9). And Joshua appeals to their experience for the vindication of it. "Ye know in all your hearts, and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass, and not one thing hath failed thereof" (Jos 23:14). And it is also fully asserted (Jer 31:35-37) and greatly admired even in the darkest day. **Great is thy faithfulness** (Lam 3:23). And it is well for us that His faithfulness is great, for great is that weight that leans upon it, even all our hopes for both

worlds, for this world, and for that to come. “In hope of eternal life, which **God, that cannot lie**, promised before the world began” (Ti 1:2).

Now God is faithful, and that will appear by these following evidences of it.

1. By His exact fulfilling of His promises of the longest date. So, four hundred and thirty years were run out before the promise of Israel's deliverance out of Egypt was accomplished (Act 7:6); yet when the time of the promise was come (Act 7:17), God was punctual to a day. Seventy years in Babylon, and at the expiration of that time they returned (2Ch 36:21). Men may forget, but God cannot (Isa 49:15-16).

2. By making way for His promises through the greatest difficulties, and seeming impossibilities. So to Abraham when old, “Is there any thing too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time will I return unto thee, according to the time of life; and Sarah shall have a son” (Gen 18:13, 14). And likewise to the Israelites, “Can these dry bones live?” (Eze 37:3). **Difficulties are for men, not God** (Gen 18:14). What “art thou, O great mountain?” (Zec 4:7). “If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the Lord of hosts” (Zec 8:6).

3. By fulfilling promises to His people, when their hopes and expectations have been given up. So, “Our bones are dry, our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts” (Eze 37:11). And, “Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me” (Isa 49:14). There may be much unbelief in good men, their faith may be sorely staggered, yet God is faithful; men may question His promises, yet God cannot deny Himself (2Ti 2:13).

4. By God's appealing to His people, and referring the matter to their own judgment. “O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me. For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord” (Mic 6:3-5). If I have failed in any way of my promise, shew it: Did not Balak and Balaam court me, and try all ways to win me over to them by multitudes of sacrifices? yet I did not desert you. So, “O generation, see ye the word of the Lord: Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness? Wherefore say my people, We are lords; we will come no more unto thee?” (Jer 2:31). Also “Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God: Which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is: which keepeth truth for ever” (Psa 146:5-6).

5. The faithfulness of God is abundantly cleared by the constant testimonies given unto it in all ages by them that have tried it; they have all witnessed for God, and attested His unspotted faithfulness to the generations that were to come. So did Joshua (chap 23:14), “All is come to pass,” and so did Daniel (chap 9:4), “O

Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him,” with which David’s testimony concurs, “God, which made the heaven and earth, the sea, and all that therein is, which keepeth truth for ever” (Psa 146:6). Thus his people have been witnesses in all generations, unto the **faithfulness of God** in His promises; the consideration whereof leaves no doubt or objection behind it.

And if we enquire into the grounds and reasons why God is, and ever must be most faithful in performing his promises, we shall find it is built upon stable and unshaken pillars:

1. The holiness of His nature.
2. The all sufficiency of His power.
3. The honour of His name.
4. The unchangeableness of His nature.

1. *The faithfulness of God is built upon the perfect holiness of His nature*, by reason whereof it is impossible for God to lie (Ti 1:2; Heb 6:18). The deceitfulness of a man flows from the corruption of the human nature, but “God is not a man that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” (Num 23:19). If there be no defect in His being, there can be none in His working; if His nature be **pure holiness**, all His ways must be **perfect faithfulness**.

2. *It is built upon the all-sufficiency of His power*; whatsoever He hath promised to His people, He is able to perform it; men sometimes falsify their promises through the defects of ability to perform them; but God never out-promised Himself; if He will work, none can let (Isa 43:13). He can do whatsoever He pleaseth to do (Psa 135:6). The holiness of His nature engageth, and the Almightyness of **His power enables Him to be faithful**.

3. *The glory and honour of His name may assure us of His faithfulness*, in making good the promises, and all that good which is in the promises, to a tittle;¹ for wherever you find a promise of God, you also find the name and honour of God given as a security for the performance of it; and so His name hath ever been pleaded with Him by His people, as a mighty argument to work for them, “What wilt thou do for thy great name” (Jos 7:9); Lord Thine honour is a thousand times more than our lives, it is no such great matter what becomes of us; but ah, Lord, it is of infinite concernment that the glory of Thy name be secured, and Thy faithfulness kept pure and unspotted in the world. So again, “And Moses besought the Lord his God, and said, Lord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people which thou hast brought out of the land of Egypt, with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, for mischief did he bring them out to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face

¹ **tittle** – the smallest mark used in making Hebrew letters (Luk 16:17).

of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people” (Exo 32:11-12). It will be sad enough for the hands of the Egyptians to fall upon Thy people, but infinitely worse for the tongues of the Egyptians to fall upon Thy name.

4. *The unchangeableness of His nature gives us the fullest assurance of His faithfulness* in the promises. “I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Mal 3:6). God’s unchangeableness is His people’s indemnity and best security in the midst of dangers; as there is not yea and nay with God, neither should it be so with our faith; that which gives steadiness to the promises should give steadiness also to our expectations for the performance of them: and so much, briefly, of the faithfulness of God, absolutely considered in the nature and grounds of it.

II. The faithfulness of God in His promises

Next let us view the **faithfulness of God**, as it relates to the many great and precious promises made unto His people for their security, both in their

1. Temporal Concernments
2. Spiritual Concernments

We find the faithfulness of God pledged for the security of His people, their spiritual and eternal concernments against all their dangers and fears, threatening them on that account, and that more especially in these three respects.

1. It is given them as their great and best security for the pardon of their sins. “If we confess our sins, **he is faithful** and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1Jo 1:9). Our greatest danger comes from sin; guilt is a fountain of tears, a pardoned soul only can look other troubles in the face boldly: as guilt begets fear, so pardon produces courage, and God’s faithfulness in the covenant is, as it were, that pardon-office from whence we fetch our discharges and acquittances. “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake” (Isa 43:25). The promises of remission are made for Christ’s sake, and when made, they must be fulfilled for His own, that is, His faithfulness sake.

2. It is engaged for the perseverance of the saints, and their continuance in the ways of God in the most hazardous and difficult times; this was the encouragement given them. “Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ; **God is faithful** by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1Co 1:8-9). Ah Lord! might those Corinthians say, the powers of the world are against us, suffering and death are before us, a treacherous and fearful heart within us. Ay, but yet fear not, Christ shall confirm you whosoever opposes you; though the world and your own hearts be deceitful, yet comfort yourselves with this, **your God is faithful**.

3. The faithfulness of God is given by promise for His people’s security in, and encouragement against all their sufferings and afflictions in this world. “That we

may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men, for all men have not faith; but the Lord is **faithful**, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil” (2Th 3:2-3). He prays they may be delivered from absurd, treacherous, and unfaithful men, who would crush and betray them to ruin; but this is proposed as their relief, that when the treachery of men shall bring them into troubles, the faithfulness of God shall support them under, and deliver them out of those troubles; they shall have spiritual supports from God under their deepest sufferings from men (1Pe 4:19).

God’s faithfulness is engaged for His people’s indemnity and security amidst the temporal and outward evils whereunto they are liable in this world; and that, either to preserve them from troubles (Psa 91:1-4) or to open a seasonable door of deliverance out of trouble (1Co 10:13). In both, or either of which, the hearts of Christians may be at rest in this troublesome world; for what need those troubles fright us, which either shall never touch us, or if they do, shall never hurt, much less ruin us?

III. The faithfulness of God in His providences

Having taken a short view of God’s faithfulness in the promises, it will be a lovely sight to take one view of it more, as it is actuated, and exerted in His providences over His people. Believe it, Christians, the faithfulness of God runs through all His works of providence, whenever He goes forth to work in the world. “*Faithfulness is the girdle of his reins*” (Isa 11:5). It is an allusion to workmen who, going forth in the morning to their labour, gird their loins or reins with a girdle; now there is no work wrought by God in this world, but His faithfulness is as the girdle of His loins: The consideration whereof should make the most despondent believer gird up the loins of his mind, that is, encourage and strengthen his drooping and discouraged heart. Those works of God which are wrought in faithfulness, and in pursuit of His eternal purposes and gracious promises, should rather delight than affright us in beholding them. It plucks out the sting of David’s affliction, when he considered it was in very faithfulness that God had afflicted him (Psa 119:89-90). But more particularly, let us behold with delight the faithfulness of God, making good six sorts of promises to His people, in the days of their affliction and trouble:

1. The promises of preservation.
2. The promises of support.
3. The promises of direction.
4. The promises of provision.
5. The promises of deliverance.
6. The promises of ordering and directing the event to their advantage.

1. *There are promises in the Word for your preservation from ruin*, and what you read in those promises, you daily see the same fulfilled in your own experiences. You have a promise in Psalm 57:3, “He shall send from heaven, and save me from the

reproach of him that would swallow me up. Selah. God shall send forth his mercy and truth.” Say now, have you not found it so? When hell hath sent forth its temptations to defile you, the world its persecutions to destroy you, your own heart its unbelieving fears to distract and sink you, hath not your God sent forth all His mercy and His truth to save you? Hath not His truth been your “shield and buckler” (Psa 91:4)? May you not say with the church, it is of His mercy you are not consumed, His mercies are new every morning, and great is His faithfulness (Lam 3:23).

2. As you have seen it actually fulfilling the promises for your preservation, so you may see it making good all the promises in His Word for your support in troubles. That is a sweet promise. “I will be with him in trouble: I will deliver him” (Psa 91:15). You have also a very supporting promise: “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness” (Isa 41:10). Oh! how evidently hath the faithfulness of God shone forth in the performance of His Word to you in this respect? You are His witnesses, you would have sunk in the deep waters of trouble if it had not been so. So speaks David, “My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever” (Psa 73:26). Have you not found it so with you as it is in 2 Corinthians 12:10, “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.” God’s strength hath been made perfect in your weakness, by this you have been carried through all your troubles: hitherto hath He helped you.

3. As you have seen it faithfully fulfilling the promises for your preservation and support; so you have seen it in the direction of your ways. So runs that promise. “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way that thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye” (Psa 32:8). Certain it is “that the way of man is not in himself” (Jer 10:23). O how faithfully hath your God guided you, and stood by you in all the difficult cases of your life! Is not that promise faithfully fulfilled to a tittle, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb 13:5)? Surely you can set your seal to that in John 17:17, “Thy word is truth.” Had you been left to your own counsels you had certainly perished; as it is said of them in Psalms 81:12, “I gave them up unto their own hearts lusts: and they walked in their own counsels.”

4. As there are promises in the Word for your preservation, support, and direction; so in the fourth place, there are promises for your provision, as in Psalms 34:9—the Lord hath promised that they that fear Him shall not want. When they are driven to extremity, He will provide, “When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, when their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them” (Isa 41:17). And is not this faithfully performed? “He hath given meat unto them that fear him: he will ever be mindful of his covenant” (Psa 111:5). In all the exigencies of your lives, you have found Him

faithful to this day; you are His witnesses that His providences never failed you, His care hath been renewed every morning for you; how great is His faithfulness!

5. *You also find in the Word some reviving promises for your deliverances.* You have a very sweet promise in Psalm 91:14, "Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him." And again, Psalm 50:15, "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee." You have done so, and He hath made a way to escape. Our lives are so many monuments of mercy; we have lived among lions, yet preserved (Psa 57:4). The burning bush was an emblem of the church miraculously preserved.

6. *There are promises in the world for the ordering and directing all the occurrences of providence to your great advantage;* so it is promised, "That all things shall work together for good to them that love God" (Rom 8:28). Fear not, Christians, however you find it now; whilst you are tossing to and fro upon the unstable waves of this world; you shall find, to be sure, when you come to heaven, that all the troubles of your lives were guided as steadily by this promise as ever any ship at sea was directed to its port, by the compass or north star.

And now what remains but that I press you as before,

1. To enter into this chamber of divine faithfulness.
2. To shut the door after you.
3. And then to live comfortably on it in evil days.

1. Enter into this chamber of God's faithfulness by faith, and hide yourselves there. Every man is a lie, but God is true, eternally and unchangeably faithful. Oh! exercise your faith upon it, be at rest in it.

Now there are two great and weighty arguments to press you to enter into this chamber of divine faithfulness.

The first is based upon the nature of God, "who cannot lie" (Ti 1:2). "He is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" (Num 23:19). Remember upon what everlasting, steady grounds the faithfulness of God is built. These are immutable things (Heb 6:18). This Abraham built upon, "being fully persuaded, that what he had promised, he was able also to perform" (Rom 4:21). He accounted Him faithful that promised. What [else] would you expect or require in the person that you are to trust?

You would expect a clear promise; and lo! you have a thousand all the Scripture over, fitted to all the cases of your souls and bodies. Thus you may plead with God, as David, "Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope" (Psa 119:49). So Jacob pleaded, "Thou saidst I will surely do thee good" (Gen 32:12). These are God's bonds and obligations.

You would expect sufficient power to make good what He promiseth. This is in God as a fair foundation of faith, "Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord

Jehovah is everlasting strength” (Isa 26:4). Because of thy strength we will wait upon thee: creatures cannot, but God can do what He will.

You would expect infinite goodness and mercy inclining Him to help and save you. Why, so it is here, “Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption” (Psa 130:7). So Moses, “I beseech thee, shew me thy glory” (Exo 33:18). The request was, a view of God’s glory: The answer is, “My goodness shall pass before thee”; which hints to us, that though all God’s attributes be glorious, yet that which He most glories in is His goodness.

You would expect that none of His promises were ever blotted or stained by His unfaithfulness at any time; and so it is here, “Not one thing hath failed” (Jos 23:14): all are come to pass, all ages have sealed this conclusion, “Thy word is truth” (Joh 17:17); Thy Word is truth!

The second is grounded in the encouragement of all former experiences, both of others and of your own, as an argument to press you **to enter into this chamber of safety, the faithfulness of God.**

You have the experiences of others. Saints have reckoned the experiences of others that lived a thousand years before them, as excellent arguments to quicken their faith. “He had power over the angel, and prevailed...he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us” (Hos 12:4). Remember there was a Joseph with us in prison, a Jeremiah in the dungeon, a Daniel in the den, a Peter in chains, an Hezekiah upon the brink of the grave; and they all found the help of God most faithfully protecting them, and saving them in all their troubles. Suitable to this is that in Psalms 22:4-5, “Our fathers trusted in thee; they trusted, and thou deliveredst them; they cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.”

Your own experiences may encourage your faith: So David’s did, “The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine” (1Sa 17:37). So did Paul’s experience encourage his faith, in 2 Corinthians 1:10, “Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.” Thus enter into the faithfulness of God by faith.

Let me beg you to be sure to shut the doors after you, against all unbelieving doubts, jealousies, and suspicions of the faithfulness of God. The best men may find temptations of that nature; so did good Asaph, though an eminent saint. “Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for ever more?” (Psa 77:7-8). These jealousies are apt to creep in upon the minds of men, especially when God delays to answer our prayers as soon as we expect the return of them. We are all in haste for a speedy answer, forgetting that seasons of prayer are our seed-times; and when we have sown that precious seed, we must wait for the harvest as the husbandman

doth. Even a precious Heman may find a faint qualm of unbelief and despondency seizing him by the long suspension of God's answers (Psa 88:9-11).

It will be hard to shut the door upon unbelief, when all things in the eye of our sense and reason seem to work against the promise; it will require an Abraham's faith at such a time to glorify God by believing in hope against hope (Rom 4:18). If ever thou hopest to enjoy the sweet repose and rest of a Christian in evil times, thou must resolve, whatever thine eyes do see, or thy senses report, to hold fast this as a most sure conclusion; God is faithful and His Word is sure; and that although "clouds and darkness be round about him, yet righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne" (Psa 97:2).

Oh! that you would once learn firmly to depend on God's faithfulness, and fetch your daily reliefs and supports thence, whensoever you are oppressed and assaulted!

1. By spiritual troubles. When you walk in darkness and have no light, then you are to live by acts of trust and complete dependence upon the most faithful one (Isa 50:10).

2. By temporal distresses; so did the people of God of old (Heb 11:17-19). He lived by faith on this attribute, when all visible comforts and supplies were out of sight.

But especially, let me warn and caution you against five principal enemies to your repose upon the faithfulness of God!

1. Distracting cares, which divide the mind, and eat out the peace and comfort of the heart, and which is worst of all, they reflect very dishonourably upon God who hath pledged his faithfulness and truth for our security; against which, I pray you bar the door by those two Scriptures: "Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God" (Phi 4:6), and that in 1 Peter 5:7, "Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you."

2. Bar the door against unchristian despondency, another enemy to the sweet repose of your souls in this comfortable and quiet chamber of divine faithfulness: you will find this unbecoming and uncomfortable distemper of mind insinuating and creeping in upon you, except you believe and reason it out, as David did, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him" (Psa 42:11).

3. Bar the door of your heart against carnal policies and sinful shifts, which war against your own faith, and God's faithfulness as much as any other enemy whatsoever. This was the fault of good David in a day of trouble. "And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul; there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines" (1Sa 27:1). Alas poor David! Nothing better than this? Time was when thou couldst

think on a better way, when thou couldst say, at what time I am afraid I will trust in Thee. How dost thou forget thyself in this strait! doth thy old refuge in God fail thee now? can the Philistines secure thee better than the promises? wilt thou fly from thy best friend to thy worst enemies? but what need we wonder at David, who find the same distemper almost unavoidable to ourselves in like cases.

4. Shut the door against discontents at, and murmurings against the dispositions of providence, whatever you feel or fear: I persuade you not to a stoical apathy, and senselessness of the evils of the times; that would preclude the exercise of patience. If the martyrs had all had the dead palsy before they came to the fire, their faith and patience had not triumphed so gloriously as they did; but on the contrary, beware of grudgings against the ways and will of God, than which, nothing militates more against your faith, and the peace and quietness of your hearts.

5. To conclude, shut the door against all suspicions and jealousies of the firmness and stability of the promises, when you find all sensible comforts shaking and trembling under your feet; have a care of such dangerous questions as that, "Doth his promise fail?" (Psa 77:8). These are the things which undermine the foundation both of your faith and comfort.

In a word, having sheltered your souls in this chamber of rest, and thus shut the doors behind you, all that you have to do is to take your rest in God, and enjoy the pleasure of a soul resigned into the hands of a faithful Creator, by opposing the faithfulness of God to all the fickleness and unfaithfulness you will daily find in men (Mic 7:6-7), yea, to the weakness and fading of your own natural strength and ability. "My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever" (Psa 73:26).

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