

The Faithful God

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When we're tempted to worry about the uncertainties that are inherent in a changing world, it is reassuring to remember that the whole cosmos in which we live was created by a God who is eternal. He is "the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End . . . who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8). The comforting thing about God's eternal nature is not merely that He exists eternally, but that His character is eternal: God is changelessly faithful.

What it means that God is faithful. Unlike the false gods of paganism, who were thought to be fickle and whose capricious anger was deemed unpredictable, the God who really made us and revealed Himself to us can be counted on to be the same always. "I am the Lord, I do not change" (Mal. 3:6), He has said. With God "there is no variation or shadow of turning" (Jas. 1:17). We don't have to worry that an alteration in God's "mood" will result in a change in His character or His principles.

But more than that, God's eternal faithfulness also makes Him different from Satan, the liar (Jn. 8:44). God's word is unfailingly and infallibly true. God's truthful character is immutable — He "cannot lie" (Tit. 1:2; cf. Hb. 6:17,18). Long ago Isaiah prayed, "O Lord . . . Your counsels of old are faithfulness and truth" (Isa. 25:1). And when we say God's word is always "true," we don't just mean it is accurate. We mean also that, because it's true, it can be depended on. God is never treacherous. He never cheats. Every word He has ever spoken has been "a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance" (1 Tim. 1:15). God's eternal truthfulness means that He is eternally trustworthy.

When He has spoken to mankind, God has often made promises. It is in regard to these promises that we see further what it means for God to be faithful. Faith has always meant taking God at His word when He promised something — and such faith has always proved to be well-founded. God has never failed to keep a promise. On the basis of that evidence, discerning people have long been willing to do as Sarah did, who "judged Him faithful who had promised" (Hb. 11:11). A final thing involved in God's eternal faithfulness is that the fulfilling of His purposes is no less certain than the keeping of His promises. The glorious conclusion to which God intends to bring His creation is unstoppable because His character is unchangeable. The Psalmist's statement is true of everything God has ever purposed: "The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations" (Psa. 33:11). Through Isaiah, God declared, "I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure' . . . Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it" (Isa. 46:9-11). God has given us reason to be assured that though the world around us passes through change after troublesome change, He is still the eternal Sovereign whose purpose for His creation will not fail to be accomplished.

How understanding God's faithfulness helps us. Learning the eternally changeless character of God is a wonderfully practical exercise. At the very least, it drives worry and fear out of our lives. Since God has always shown Himself to be faithfully concerned about His children, how can we doubt that we will be taken care of? The Christian (who has not only the usual cares of daily living, but also may face various kinds of suffering because he is a Christian) can endure whatever trials and tribulations may confront him. Knowing that God remains on His throne and that He is working toward a victorious consummation of all things imparts strength to the suffering saint — strength because the saint knows that the eternal Judge will ultimately vindicate justice and right. Peter wrote, "Let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator" (1 Pt. 4:19).

Moreover, a comprehension of God's eternal nature helps the Christian deal with sin. Knowing that God is not mocked (Gal. 6:7,8), that He will not fail to do as He has said about punishing sin surely ought to give the us a more serious attitude about sin. On the positive side, knowing the steadfastness of God's help is the very thing needed for us to resist temptation. As Paul put it, "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

Finally, an understanding of the unchangeableness and faithfulness of God is the thing that assures us of our salvation and motivates us to remain faithful to Him. The Hebrew writer appealed to his readers: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful" (Hb. 10:23). In the long run, the person who will be "faithful until death" (Rev. 2:10 NKJV) is the one who is confident that God will always be faithful to us. Giving credence to God's eternal truthfulness, we take on a confidence in God's trustworthiness that imparts a constancy to our allegiance to Him. "Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day; earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away; change and decay in all around I see; O Thou who changest not, abide with me!"