



Living Scripture with the Corinthians.
Week 23: Considering 2 Corinthians
Faithfulness of His Promises

FAITHFULNESS

God's faithfulness, Deuteronomy 7:7–9; 1 Corinthians 1:9.

Faithful reading of the law, Joshua 8:35.

Trustworthy promises, 1 Kings 8:56.

Reward to the faithful, 2 Samuel 22:26–27.

Faithful to God's house, Nehemiah 10:39.

Undivided heart, Psalm 86:11.

Proclaiming divine faithfulness, Psalm 89:1.

Trustworthy messenger, Proverbs 25:13.

Faithfulness new each morning, Lamentations 3:23.

Faithful in all circumstances, Daniel 3:17–18 (CEV).

Rewarded faithfulness, Matthew 10:32–33.

Faithful when Christ returns, Mark 13:35–37; 1 Timothy 6:11–16.

Courage, faithfulness, Acts 23:1–5.

“Our first duty,” 1 Corinthians 4:2 (CEV).

“You never disappoint,” 2 Corinthians 1:7 (CEV).

Faithful without pastoral supervision, Philippians 2:12–13.

Faithful unto death, Philippians 2:25–30; Revelation 2:13.

Partial faithfulness insufficient, Revelation 2:1–6, 13–15.

Holding on to the faith, Revelation 2:25.

Beheaded for faithfulness, Revelation 20:4.¹

Chapter 3—The Father's Plan

We often encounter a view of God—indeed, plaguing our own hearts—in which God is essentially against us; that he's only a hair's breadth away from crushing us, with the least provocation. To put it differently, we function as though we deeply believe that God's disposition is first and foremost anti-us and that we must do something to bend his heart towards us, to make him pro-us. This mode of thought, and the actions that flow from it, are completely contrary to the Christian faith. In fact, this is where Christianity separates itself from every other religion. The God of Christianity is for you and me; he is “pro-me.” His “pro-me-ity” is the way he is; it's not something which he can or has to be cajoled into being.

What is the Christian life? The Christian life is constantly receiving, constantly hearing again that God is for me in Jesus Christ—this is the gospel. Jesus Christ is the “yes” of God's “promeity.” And this means that the Christian life constantly involves the simple reflexive response of, “Amen, that's the way that it is!” This response richly pleases God, for it gives all glory to his grace and keeps none for self. In sum, *the Christian life is continually receiving and responding to the gospel.*

The gospel places our salvation, welfare, blessing, dignity, identity, destiny, and the fruitfulness that God has promised us as his sons and daughters in a new creation, wholly outside of us. It occurs entirely *in God*, and it occurs in God *for me*. This “promeity” isn't based on what we each have done, are doing, or will do. God was, in fact, pro-me even when we were anti-him, when we hated him and in sin and rebellion

¹ Anderson, K. (1996). [Where to Find It in the Bible](#). Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers.



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preferred to be his enemy (Rom 5:6–10; Eph 2:1–10). It's this "promeity" of God—anchored in Jesus, outside of me—that is the principle of the Reformation. It's what Martin Luther discovered afresh. He came to understand that God's righteousness was also in God's being for him, and for his part, he was to live by faith in this very fact. When the reality of this divine "promeity" broke through into Luther's life it utterly changed him. He wrote:

I greatly longed to understand Paul's epistle to the Romans, nothing stood in the way but that one expression "the righteousness of God," because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and acts righteously in punishing the unrighteous ... Night and day I pondered until ... I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, he justifies us by faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through the open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before "the righteousness of God" had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway into heaven.

The sweetness that Luther experienced in his own heart for God was wholly anchored in God's loving-faithfulness extended to him, a love promised in the fulfillment of the new covenant (see Jer 31:31–34). In this new covenant, the Father fulfilled every promise he ever purposed. In this chapter, we want to explore the depths of his plan and purpose set before the foundation of the world (1 Pet 1:20), that we might come to take hold of the truth of his "promeity."

All Promises Are "Yes!" in Jesus

In Matthew 1:1, "Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" appears like a header introducing the subsequent genealogy. The genealogy is divided into three lots of fourteen generations (cf. Matt 1:17), with Abraham and David serving as the first two major marker points (the third being the deportation to Babylon). The point of this "header verse" is to proclaim that all the promises given to Abraham, and subsequently to David as the offspring of Abraham, now fall, by line of inheritance and virtue of his incarnation, on Jesus Christ.

The great promise of Genesis 3:15 is passed to Abraham and reiterated to David; David's kingship in Israel would represent God's kingship over the nations. "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession" (Psa 2:8); in 2 Samuel, when David wants to build a house for the Lord, God instead says, "No, David, 'the Lord will make you a house' " (7:11). David had in mind a physical temple. God, however, had in mind a house of a very different sense: a dynasty. "You will have earthly sons come from you," God says in effect, "but one will have an everlasting dominion, whose kingdom will never be shaken. The promises you receive in your enthronement will actually be inherited by your son—the farthest and future Son." And David can't believe his ears. He receives this gift of mercy and grace and wonders, "Is this your 'normal way' God? Is this your revelation for the nations, that you would come to me with a blessing that would touch the world? Is this the way you normally are?" And God's resounding answer, fulfilled in David's greater Son, is "Yes!" (see Matt 12:42; Mark 12:35–37).

And so the promise to Abraham is transmitted through Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph all the way down to David: that rest would come, that offspring would come, and that the nations would be blessed. By the time we get to David it's crystal clear that the promised blessing is going to flow out from his throne. All the promises that God has made from Genesis 3:15—"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel"—through the covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and everything ever promised through the



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prophets concerning restoration and renewal, is going to be fulfilled in the anticipated offspring of Eve and of Abraham, the royal son of David, enthroned forever—the Messiah.

The history of God’s Old Testament people showed that these promises were never fulfilled in any of their earthly rulers. The prophets looked and longed for the time of their fulfillment (1 Pet 1:10–11), and through them God made great promises to his people. He kept reiterating the covenant promises to the prophets and through them to Israel and to the nations. Even the prophets’ pronouncements about God’s necessary judgments stand in the context of his overarching commitment to his covenant.

Messianic expectation was high at the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Many looked and longed for the Messiah’s appearing (e.g., Luke 2:25–30), but nearly everyone misunderstood what he would be like. No one expected him to accomplish his work through the suffering of the cross. Jesus’ disciples didn’t understand this until after his resurrection. “Are you the Christ?” Israel wondered, but Jesus didn’t fit. Yet the New Testament answer is, “Yes, indeed, Jesus is the Messiah ... but not in the way you expected him to be.” It’s as though Jesus says, “I am the Christ, yet I’m not going to be Christ in the way you want. For you want a Christ who establishes an earthly kingdom by power, a kingdom of political and military might. No, that’s not who I am. Rather, I’m the sort of Christ who comes—as I always have—for the nations, not to exclude them. I’m the sort of Christ who comes with the heart of my Father, pro-sinners. I come for the ones whom you’d slaughter, for those you’d bring to your own judgment and crush beneath your chariots. This isn’t the sort of Christ I am, because this isn’t the sort of Father who has sent me.”

Throughout Matthew’s Gospel two themes continually emerge: (1) that Jesus is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament promises—note the recurring purpose statement, this was written so that it might be fulfilled (e.g., Matt 21:4; cf. John 19:24); and (2) that the great Davidic king would rule over the nations with justice and mercy, blessing them through the compassion and loving-kindness of God. Hence Jesus, being Abraham’s offspring and of David’s line, comes *through* Israel but not solely *for* Israel.

Throughout Matthew’s Gospel we witness the nations coming in: wise men coming from the east (Matt 2:1); a Roman centurion blessing the Lord and receiving his blessing (8:5–13); the disciples being told to expect persecution that will result in their witnessing to the Gentiles (10:17–18); the healing of a Canaanite woman’s daughter (15:22). As Jesus walked the roads of Israel, he was enacting the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise. Though the Davidic king of Israel, he was already bringing God’s blessing to the nations, extending his reign over them through his mercy. This reaches its climax at his death, where Jesus is portrayed as the completely unexpected king—robed in scarlet, a crown not of gold but of thorns upon his head, and a reed, a mock scepter, in his hand (27:28–29). How close to the truth they were. His reed scepter under a crown of thorns is a pretty good symbol of what his reign is really like—humble. And yet it was used as an instrument to mock: “He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him” (27:42b).

But—precisely because he was the King of Israel come to bless the nations—coming down from the cross was the very thing he would never do. For his blessing of the nations was wholly bound up with what was happening on the cross; his blood shed was the inauguration of the new covenant (26:28; 1 Cor 11:25). In this covenant, the promises declared through the patriarchs and prophets—that there would come a time when a new covenant would be formed in which the forgiveness of sins would be complete and every heart cleansed (Joel 2:28–32)—finds its fulfillment. In this covenant, “no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer 31:34). In this covenant, everything God ever promised his Old Testament people would be fulfilled.

Matthew 1:1 shows that the early church, encapsulated by the gospel, saw Jesus as the Messiah, that all of God’s promises were fulfilled in him. His incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension are the



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unexpected means by which they have been fulfilled. His reappearing at the end of this age will open his fulfillment of the great promises to sight—but now we live by faith. Regarding this fulfillment Paul writes:

For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory (2 Cor 1:20).

Paul is pointing out two intimately connected points. The first is that Jesus Christ is the embodiment and fulfillment of all the promises of God. A promise of a resting place for his people, a promise of redemption and deliverance from oppressors, a promise of his very own personal presence, a promise of new creation, of every nation belonging to God. Every promise that God has ever made has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ—he's God's "Yes!" to every promise. The second thing, flowing from the first, is that when we hear God's "yes" to us, a response of ratifying agreement, *Amen!* ("It is so!"), resounds within our hearts.²

THE CHURCH RECEIVES ALL GOD'S PROMISES IN CHRIST

It is not an overstatement to say that the church is central to God's redemptive plan and our Lord's entire work. For example, our Lord Jesus as the Messiah reminds us how central the church is to his messianic mission with these famous words: "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). By this time in his ministry, Jesus has already begun to gather his messianic community by calling the twelve disciples and constituting them as the new Israel (Matt. 4:18–22; 10:1–4) in relation to him, the true Israel (Hos. 11:1; Matt. 2:15). Also, the future tense of "I will build" (*oikodomēsō*) looks ahead to the time after Jesus's cross and resurrection when the promised Spirit is poured out at Pentecost, thus signaling the arrival of the new covenant age. In fact, as Christ's redemptive mission unfolds in the book of Acts, Jesus's messianic people (*ekklēsia*) begins with the Twelve and other believing Jews (Acts 1–2), reunites Israel with the conversion of the Samaritans (Acts 8), and then incorporates into it believing Gentiles, which together constitute the church (Acts 10; cf. Eph. 2:11–21). In Christ, the church as his people has entered God's kingdom through the new covenant, and she now faithfully lives, worships, and proclaims the gospel to the ends of the earth as she awaits Christ's return. Central to Jesus's work, then, is the fulfillment of his Father's will by redeeming, establishing, and building his church.

If the church is central to Christ's work, then it follows that she is also central to the entirety of our triune God's redemptive plan. For example, Paul can say that due to Jesus's triumphant work, the Father has "put everything under [Christ's] feet and appointed [Christ] as head over everything *for the church*" (Eph. 1:22). Christ's lordship over the universe is for the benefit of his people, which certainly places the church at the center of God's redemptive purposes. This truth is also borne out in Ephesians 3:1–10, where Paul identifies the "mystery" of God—that is, God's eternal plan, which was hidden in ages past but is now revealed and made known in Christ—with the church. As Paul proclaims the "incalculable riches of the Messiah" (3:8), it results in the birth and growth of the church. The "mystery" is not an abstraction. In Christ and his church it takes on concrete shape before our eyes, as a new multiethnic humanity is formed and grows, consisting of believing Jews and Gentiles, who display "God's multifaceted wisdom" (3:10). The church is the public display of God's power, grace, and wisdom and thus is central to God's entire redemptive plan.

² Bush, D., & Due, N. S. (2014). [*Embracing God as Father: Christian Identity in the Family of God*](#). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.



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Given the centrality of the church to God's plan and Christ's triumphant work as our new covenant head, there is an inseparable relationship between Christ and his people, signified by our union with Christ. All that Christ has achieved is for the benefit of the church, and as an entire church without distinction, she has received *all* God's promises *in him*. Since the new covenant is the fulfillment of the previous covenants, the church, as God's *new covenant* kingdom people, is the community that continues forever, while all the kingdoms of this world fade away and ultimately come under divine judgment (Revelation 18–22).

Two crucial entailments follow from the unbreakable Christ-church relation, which explains why the church receives *all* God's promises *in Christ*. First, the church is part of the *one* people of God (elect) across time, yet it is covenantally *new* and constituted *now* as a transformed, regenerate community and not a mixed people in the present time (against covenant theology). Second, the church is God's *new creation* eschatological community that remains *forever*, consisting of believing Jews and Gentiles, who, in Christ, equally and fully receive *all* God's promises. The church is *not* a parenthesis in God's plan or merely a *present* illustration of what Israel as a nation and the Gentile nations will be like in the millennium and consummation as recipients of "distinct" blessings (against dispensationalism). Three points will summarize the New Testament data that support these two entailments and distinguish progressive covenantalism from both dispensational and covenant theology *on these specific points* due to a different way of "putting together" the Bible's progression of the covenants.³

³ Gentry, P. J., & Wellum, S. J. (2018). [*Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*](#) (Second Edition, pp. 746–748). Wheaton, IL: Crossway.