

Book Reviews

Talbert, Layton. *The Trustworthiness of God's Words: Why the Reliability of Every Word from God Matters*. Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2022. 240 pp. + 40 pp. (back matter).

Christians recognize that God is jealous for his glory, but they sometimes forget that God is also jealous for his integrity. In *The Trustworthiness of God's Words*, Layton Talbert reminds us that God's glory is at stake if we do not trust what God has said, since the person of God is inseparable from his words. Talbert does not try to guilt us into trusting God; rather, he meticulously shows from Scripture itself that God is true to his word, and that great blessings and comfort come to those who trust him.

In Part 1, Talbert lays a theological foundation that provides a bedrock for a believer's unequivocal trust in God's words. Trust, he argues, is more than belief. Building from Reformation thought, Talbert suggests that biblical faith moves past mere knowledge (*notitia*) to assent (*assensus*) and a kind of confidence (*fīducia*) that results in action (19–20). “Believing and trusting are twins,” Talbert suggests—“Believing (*ʿāman*) is predominantly an act of thinking and deals with processing information (facts or claims). Trusting (*baʿātah*) is the choice to act on that knowledge. . . . But trusting also denotes an emotional experience,” an “inner peace” (23–24). He demonstrates from Scripture that to distrust God's words is to question God himself. He explains that trustworthiness is essential to the character of God—God always tells the truth (77–78), he always knows the truth (78–79), he always has the power to do what he promises (79–80), and he has clearly communicated those promises in his Word (81–83). Thus, Talbert suggests that “God's trustworthiness is at the root of our confidence in all his other attributes” (36), and this is why repeatedly in Scripture God “has expressed a compelling interest in demonstrating the integrity of what he says” (37). If God were not trustworthy, he would cease to be God. Since his words are integral to who he is as God—he is “inseparable from his words” (58)—Christians should “lean all their confidence on the trustworthiness of God's words in every circumstance, just like Jesus did” (86).

Part 2 builds on this foundation with practical applications for how Christians can and should trust God's words. Talbert argues that we must trust God's words in Scripture about past history (chapter 7), his own character (chapter 8), and even “unbelievable” promises (chapter 9). He explores how the events recorded in Genesis are particularly under attack, but then he astutely notes that this questioning of God's words was at the root of the first sin: “God's testimony regarding the progression of the Fall reveals that the reason they sinned is because they were persuaded that God's words were not reliable” (123). From that point on in human history, God's people have struggled with trusting God's words; but using examples of Jacob (130), Naomi (131), Job (133), David (134), Habakkuk (135), Lamentations (138), and Martha and Mary (141), Talbert admonishes believers that “because all God's words are trustworthy, we can always rely on God to be exactly what he says he is, even when it doesn't look to us like he is” (130). This kind of trust in God's words, as Talbert demonstrates in chapters 10 and 11, “inevitably manifests itself in how we live life” (174).

In Part 3, Talbert steps back to cap the practical discussion with firm support from the overarching narrative of Scripture. “The Bible is God’s record of reality,” Talbert notes, “to help us see and interpret our experience through his eyes, because he is the only one who sees everything, and sees it as it really is” (207). This is why we must immerse ourselves in Scripture, allowing the larger story of God’s Word to fortify our hearts to trust his words in our everyday lives. Chapters 13 and 14 trace that biblical storyline in more detail through the Old and New Testaments. Ultimately, as Talbert argues in his final chapter, a Christian’s response to the steadfast faithfulness at the core of who God is should be an equally fitting steadfast trust in him.

At times the reader may begin to feel like the trees are lost for the forest in some of Talbert’s broader discussions of Scripture’s metanarrative and worldview, especially in Part 3, yet he skillfully connects the broader story to the particular issue of God’s trustworthiness in just the right places. The value of Talbert’s approach is that he does not treat distrusting God as a mild ailment with a simple remedy; rather, he painstakingly shows how serious a vice it is and offers the only real solution—a complete worldview reorientation based on God’s view of reality as expressed in his Word. Helpful definitions throughout and “Review and Reflect” questions at the end of each chapter make this book ideal for use in a small group or other teaching settings. Deeply biblical and thoroughly pastoral, this book is a must-read for every Christian.

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