

“He Has Given Us”

“He has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature.”

—II Peter 1:4, New International Version

THE PROMISES OF GOD

play a very prominent role in our Christian life. They are so powerful that in our text the apostle indicates that by yielding to their blessed effects we will attain the divine nature. Even at this present hour, we are being prepared and made ready for exaltation, if faithful unto death, to the highest plane of existence in God’s universe. In Hebrews 4:1, the Apostle Paul urges us to be on guard so that we do not “come short” of any of the promises which the Lord has made on our behalf. Practically all of God’s promises have conditions attached to them, and failure to comply with these is what Paul describes as “coming short.” It is our faithful compliance with the conditions attached to God’s promises which will qualify us to be partakers of the divine nature and to have an abundant entrance “into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”—II Pet. 1:11

God’s promises are of value to us only in proportion to our faith in them, and as we demonstrate that faith by obeying his precepts. God is pleased

when his people actually believe what he has promised. Concerning Abraham, we read that he “staggered not at the promise of God; . . . but was strong in faith.” Being persuaded by his belief that God was able to perform that which he had promised, and by demonstration of his conviction through obedience, Abraham’s faith was “imputed to him for righteousness.”—Rom. 4:20-22

We too, are justified, or made righteous, in the sight of God by our faith in his promises, particularly those which give assurance that we have been “redeemed . . . with the precious blood of Christ,” from our sinful condition inherited from Father Adam. (I Pet. 1:18,19) Thus Paul says, “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rom. 5:1) This must be a living, working faith, which does not waver at the promises of God, but compels us to take a course in life consistent with our professions of faith.

Many and varied are the promises which assure us of our acceptance with God, through Christ. An abiding faith in these promises is essential if we are to be made partakers of the divine nature. We know that by birth we are sinners, as we read in Psalm 51:5, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.” (*New American Standard Bible*) Every day we are in close contact with our imperfections. In addition, there are those around us who know about them and may not hesitate to keep us reminded of them. Our great adversary, the Devil, also knows our weaknesses and uses them to discourage us. (I Pet. 5:8; Eph. 6:11-13) Indeed, he hopes that we will give up running “toward the mark for the prize of the high calling.”

(Phil. 3:14) If, however, our confidence in the promises remains firm, we will not fear, for God has said, “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.”—Isa. 54:17

The phrase, “their righteousness is of me,” is a blessed assurance! If we can grasp the full meaning of this promise, we will realize that even with our imperfections we stand justified before God, and that there is no condemnation from him. A proper recognition of this fact should keep us humble, ever remembering that our own “righteous acts are like filthy rags.” (Isa. 64:6, *NIV*) We must also realize that the pure, white “robe of righteousness” which God sees as we stand before him is not our own, but Christ’s righteousness. (Isa. 61:10) This is confirmed by Paul in his letter to Titus, where he writes: “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of the regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.”—Tit. 3:5,6

This does not mean that we can be careless about our imperfections. We must be continually on guard so that the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit through the Word of the Lord is allowed to accomplish the needed work within us. There must be a sincere desire for righteousness on our part, in spite of our inability to measure up fully to the standard of perfection held before us. However, if we are sincere in our efforts, we should not be discouraged, for the promise is: “Blessed is he whose transgression is

forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.”—Ps. 32:1,2

Even the grace of God which grants us forgiveness and provides our standing of righteousness before him is not unconditional. We must believe, and this is not merely a mental realization of the truth pertaining to the death and resurrection of Jesus, but a wholehearted acceptance of him as our Savior, which manifests itself in a full surrender and consecration to do God’s will. (Rom. 6:11-19) We then, must actually walk in Christ’s footsteps, guided by the instructions of the Scriptures. John wrote: “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, . . . the blood of Jesus Christ . . . cleanseth us from all sin.”—I John 1:7

“HE IS FAITHFUL”

It has been said that much of the distress of today’s troubled and deteriorating world is caused by broken promises. Human promises are not always intentionally broken, but circumstances arise which make it impossible to fulfill them. Man is not the master of his own destiny. He cannot foresee the future, nor can he judge even his present ability accurately. As a result, he often finds it impossible to do what he has promised. This is not true with God.

Paul writes concerning God that “he is faithful that promised.” (Heb. 10:23) We can depend upon the integrity of God. “I change not,” he says, and with him there “is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” (Mal. 3:6; James 1:17) There is no need for God to change his mind. He can foresee

every circumstance which may arise, and is fully able to meet it. God is faithful to his promises, and always implements them in keeping with the richness of his grace and in harmony with his eternal purposes.

Have we ever been disappointed in our family, friends, neighbors, associates, or coworkers in the work place? Many of us, perhaps, have had experiences along this line. At times we may even become disappointed in some of our brethren in Christ—our spiritual family. These experiences might tend to be discouraging, but God permits them for a purpose. He wants us to lean more fully upon him rather than trusting in the will of the flesh. It is on these occasions, especially, that we should turn to God, and do so with full assurance that “he is faithful that promised.”

“THROUGH FAITH AND PATIENCE”

Paul speaks of those “who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” (Heb. 6:12) Thus, in order to claim the promises for our very own we must demonstrate an active faith in them, and patiently endure whatever trials the Lord may see we need in order that our worthiness of the promises might be manifested. The fulfillment of many of God’s promises belongs in the present life, while others apply to our future inheritance beyond the veil. When the apostle speaks of those who “inherit the promises” he apparently has in mind both our present and our future inheritance.

We may properly ask: have the promises themselves really become ours, or do we just read them in an impersonal manner as though they do not

actually apply to us? Our answer is important, because it is not until we are able to see in the promises of God a personal assurance of his blessing, that they become truly effective in molding our lives into his likeness. Only by claiming and making them our own can these promises prepare us to become partakers of the divine nature.

CLEANSE OURSELVES AND FOLLOW JESUS

Paul admonishes us that if we have “these promises” we should “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit,” and to then perfect “holiness in the fear of God.” (II Cor. 7:1) This is a similar thought to that expressed by the Apostle John when he wrote, “every man that hath this hope”—the hope based upon the promises of God—“purifieth himself.” (I John 3:3) We might reverse this thought and say that the evidence of the possession of the promises, and of having truly inherited them, will be a purification of character. The conditions attached to the promises, enumerated by Peter in the verses following our opening text, guarantee that this will be the case. —II Pet. 1:5-11

One of the fundamental needs of every consecrated believer is to be guided in the right way. We all have anxious thoughts from time to time as to what the will of the Lord is for us under certain circumstances. To choose the right way is often difficult to determine. We want to believe, to do, and to be exactly what the Lord would wish, and to keep ourselves in a “cleansed” condition of character. However, while we should be sincere in always searching out the right way, let us remember the additional promise that the Lord will shed light

upon our pathway, and that we need not walk in darkness. Jesus said, “He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”—John 8:12

We note the important condition attached to this promise—“He that followeth me.” This is a crucial test, for we must be prepared to follow Jesus. The pathway he took was a difficult one. It was a way of sacrifice and suffering which ended in a cruel death on the cross. He has invited us to “take up [our] cross daily,” and follow him. (Luke 9:23) A consecration which is pleasing to God involves the acceptance of this invitation, and to carry it out is a lifetime task. However, there is no other condition upon which we may expect to be given the “light of life” to guide our steps in ways pleasing to our Heavenly Father.

There are few circumstances in the Christian life in which the example of Jesus will not indicate the course we should take. However, to follow in his steps will not always be the easy way. Our fleshly mind will reason that we should choose a way that is less unpleasant, and more conducive to our well-being along earthly lines. There may be times when such a choice would be pleasing to the Lord, but if he indicates his will to be otherwise, there should be no hesitancy in choosing the more difficult way. In doing this we will be following in the Master’s footsteps, and will be assured that we are walking in the light. Then we can claim the precious promise: “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.”—Ps. 32:8

THE FATHER LOVES

At times, the pathway in which the Lord guides us will seem hazardous. We may find it lined with enemies seeking to injure us. We do not need to fear, regardless of how weak we may appear to be in the face of those who oppose us. Peter wrote: "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" (I Pet. 3:13) The "good" which we endeavor to follow is the will of God—namely, that we take up our cross and walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

Jesus did nothing but good, and no harm came to him spiritually. By this we mean that while it is true that he was persecuted, his name was cast out as evil, he was falsely accused, given a mock trial, sentenced to death, and crucified, no harm ever came to him as a New Creature. (Isa. 53:3-5,10-12; Heb. 12:2) These experiences were permitted by his Father for his good, to test his worthiness, and to train him for the high office he was to occupy in God's arrangement for the blessing of all the families of the earth. The same will be true with us if we, like him, follow "that which is good." Our pathway will not be an easy, effortless one. Enemies will try to oppose our progress. We will experience weariness and pain, but as New Creatures in Christ Jesus we will not be harmed. (II Cor. 5:17) Of this we can be certain, for the Lord has promised it. As the Apostle Paul wrote: "The Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil."—II Thess. 3:3

To realize that those experiences in life which perplex and hurt are not evidences that the Lord has deserted us, but is permitting them for our good, helps us to bear up under trial. (Rom. 8:28;

I Cor. 10:13) Even so, however, we feel our weakness. Our courage will waver at times, and we need to be on guard that we do not become “wearied and faint” in our minds. (Heb. 12:3) Indeed, if we were left to fight our battles alone, we would be certain to fail. The Father’s love will not permit this, for once again he has promised: “Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD.”—Ps. 31:24

Surely then, we need the courage which the promises of God give to us. Peter writes that we should “think it not strange” when fiery trials are upon us. (I Pet. 4:12) It is at such times that we need to recall the reassuring promises of God: “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire [of trials], thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.”—Isa. 43:2

HOLD STEADFAST TO THE END

No one enjoys trouble. The thought of a carefree life without problems, doubts, and trials is alluring to the flesh. Yet, even those in the world never fully attain to such a life. We know that being a Christian, and sacrificing time and strength and means as we lay down our life in the service of the Lord, results in additional trials. Therefore, at times when the burden seems particularly heavy, we might be inclined to wonder whether or not it is worthwhile. It is then that the Lord reminds us of the glorious inheritance which will be ours if we continue faithful. We will be “made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto

the end.” (Heb. 3:14) To be a “partaker of Christ” means to live and reign with him—to share his glory, and be a partaker with him of the divine nature. Jesus said, “Whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it.” “Because I live, ye shall live also.”—Mark 8:35; John 14:19

In the writings of the apostles, we are given many precious promises, all of which are provided to help us maintain our steadfastness “unto the end.” A sampling of these is found in the following texts: “Being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” “It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him.” “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.” “It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”—Tit. 3:7; II Tim. 2:11; Col. 3:4; I John 3:2

OUR FUTURE WORK

Being coworkers with the Lord now is a great honor. We have a peace and joy of mind and heart which the world can neither give nor take away. There is, however, a still greater work awaiting us if we continue faithful, even unto death. That future work will also be in association with Christ, reigning with him as kings and priests to bless all the families of the earth. (Rev. 20:6; Acts 3:25) We are favored now to have heard the call of God to follow in the Master’s footsteps, and have received the assurance that if we present our bodies a living sacrifice the Lord will accept us and give us grace

sufficient for our every time of need. (Heb. 4:16) God's promises to us, however, go far beyond the present: "In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will . . . give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves . . . , and their pastures shall be in all high places."—Isa. 49:8,9

Let us never have any doubts about the keeping power of God, for he has promised never to leave us, nor forsake us. (Heb. 13:5) His is an abiding love and care for us, even as it was for Jesus, who said, "The Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God." (John 16:27) One reason the Father loves us is that he purposes to use us together with Jesus in his kingdom. It is for this glorious future reign that the Father is preparing us, if we continue faithful to him.

It is in keeping with this that the glorified Jesus promised: "He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations." "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."—Rev. 2:26; 3:21

"THAT THROUGH THEM"

It is "through" these many promises of God that we are made partakers of the divine nature. It is through their encouragement, their authority, their inspirational power in our lives, and our own

faithfulness to all the conditions attached to them, that we will attain this hope. As we press on in our walk with the Lord, we continually need the strength of which these promises assure us. There is no possible circumstance in our Christian experience in which God has not promised to be with us, and to supply our need. "The LORD . . . forsaketh not his saints."—Ps. 37:28

Although we have the many promises of God provided to us, it is essential to remember the conditions pertaining thereto. This is true even when we seek the throne of grace to claim the promises. It is only if we "abide" in Christ, and if his words "abide" in us, that we have the privilege of asking for what we need as New Creatures, in order that we may be directed and nourished as we journey on in the narrow way of sacrifice. (John 14:13; 15:7) For those striving to comply with these conditions, how blessed are the words: "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, . . . Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised.)"—Heb. 10:19-23

ADD TO YOUR FAITH

Our faith rests upon the promises of God, and if our faith is to be strong and to increase, we will need always to be on the alert to meet the conditions of the promises. This will result in what Peter describes as adding to our faith the qualities of

moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. If these things are in us, and increasing, Peter explains, we will not be “useless nor unfruitful” in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus. If we do these things, we will “never stumble,” and an “entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied” to us.—II Pet. 1:5-11, *New American Standard Bible*

Verse 5 of the above passage states that we must use “all diligence” in the adding of these various character qualities to our faith. It will not suffice to be halfhearted or part-time runners for the prize. We will not be able to divide our interests between the things of God and the things of the world, nor between the interests of the New Creature and the interests of the flesh. Paul wrote, “This one thing I do.” (Phil. 3:13) This is the only approach to the Christian life which will result in victory. It is the only attitude of heart in which to be if the Lord is to make good his promises to us. We cannot afford to be unduly concerned about even our temporal needs. The Lord knows about these, and promised: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”—Matt. 6:33

What a blessed prospect is assured to us by the Heavenly Father’s wonderful promises. Truly the Lord has given us “good doctrine,” so that we “for-sake . . . not” his law. (Prov. 4:2) Let us yield ourselves to its transforming influence, so that we are made ready for that blessed entrance into the kingdom, where “we shall be like him,” and “see him as he is.”—I John 3:2 ■