

If Ye Do These Things

“Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.”

—II Peter 1:10

PETER’S WORDS, CONTAINED in our theme text, are just one of many reminders given to us in the Scriptures that the promises of God to his people have conditions attached to them, and that if we are to experience their fulfillment we must, as individuals, comply faithfully with those conditions. Jesus’ promise in Revelation 2:10 is another good example of this: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” Indeed, to receive the fulfillment of this ultimate promise—that being the crown of life—requires the meeting of the condition of faithfulness “unto death.”

In God’s dealings with his typical people, Israel, he promised them rich blessings if they obeyed his commandments. These promises, therefore, were not unconditional. If the people did not obey, then God would hold back the good things he promised and the people would not receive them. While various experiences were permitted to come upon natural

Israel which demonstrated the importance of the conditions attached to their blessing, the same holds true in principle concerning spiritual Israel. “Exceeding great and precious” are the promises which the Lord has made to us—promises which, if we are faithful to the conditions attached to them, will lead to the divine nature, and to “glory and honour and immortality.”—II Pet. 1:4; Rom. 2:7

In Peter’s reference to the precious promises of God, he emphasizes the necessity of adding to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge self-control, and to self-control patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. He explains that “if these things” be in us and abound, then we will not be unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. However, if we lack these, Peter continues, we will be spiritually blind, and eventually forget that we were once purged from our sins. Rather than this, Peter exhorts, we should “give diligence” to make our calling and election sure. He assures that “if ye do these things,” then an abundant entrance shall be ministered unto us into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.—II Pet. 1:4-11

THE HEBREW BRETHREN

There are certain statements in Paul’s letter to the Hebrews which indicate that as a group they were not living up to their privileges as well as they might. Hence, to some extent they were “coming short” of the promises of God as they applied to them, and to all the followers of the Master. He speaks of them as being “dull of hearing,” explaining,

“When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”—Heb. 5:11-14

Many are the promises of God which assure his people of an abundant supply of spiritual food for their nourishment as New Creatures, food which will enable them to grow and become mature in Christ Jesus. This food must be faithfully used and assimilated if we are to develop from the immature, childhood stage of Christian experience into the mature, adult stage—“by reason of use,” Paul states. This is one of the conditions attached to the promises of God which builds us up in the most holy faith.

When we do not properly assimilate the promises of God, and through faith obey the conditions attached to them, our “first love”—enthusiasm for the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren—will be lost. This seems to be what had happened with the Hebrews to whom Paul addressed his epistle. He said to them, “Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.”—chap. 10:32,33

Seemingly these Hebrew brethren had been very faithful and zealous in the beginning of their walk in the narrow way. They then took joyfully the

spoiling of their goods. Apparently, however, their attitude had somewhat changed, else Paul would not have invited them to call to remembrance those former days. It is not a temporary faithfulness that will gain the crown of life. One of the conditions attached to the promises is continued faithfulness, not for a week, or a month, or a year, but until the end of the narrow way is reached in death.

It is this that Paul encouraged in the Hebrew brethren. He wrote, "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." (chap. 6:10-12) The promises of God hold before us a very rich future inheritance, but if we are to "inherit" what the called of God are promised, we must exercise faith and patience unto the end. Thus, the apostle wrote, "Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise."—chap. 10:36

"Ye have need of patience." Here is another of the conditions attached to the promises of God. Jesus illustrated this point in his parable of the sower, in which, as he explained, the "seed" is the Word of God. (Luke 8:5-15) In his Word are contained the promises of God and the conditions which are attached to these promises. In the parable, some of the seed falls by the wayside. This does not take root at all. Some of the seed falls upon stony ground, where there is not enough soil to

keep the new plants alive. Some falls among the thorns, which choke out the growing plants. Some falls on good ground where the new plants flourish and bring forth fruit.

The stony-ground believers, Jesus explained, are those which wither under the heat of trials and persecution. If these could enjoy the promises of God and inherit their fulfillment, but also at the same time enjoy the plaudits of men and be assured freedom from trials and opposition as they walk in the narrow way, they would rejoice. This is not the pathway which the Lord has designed for his faithful people. In order to demonstrate their faithfulness to him and their worthiness of the place in the kingdom which he has promised, they must endure opposition and persecution—and they must endure patiently.

The seed that fell among thorns, Jesus explained, “are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.” When we first accept the invitation and make a consecration to do the Heavenly Father’s will, it may not seem so difficult to give up the good things of life, and devote all our strength, time, and means to serving the Lord. If, however, we do not patiently endure the difficulties and hardships resulting from this prescribed way of life, but allow the deceitfulness of riches and the cares of this life to interfere with our walk in the narrow way, then we will not be pleasing to the Lord. Are we permitting these things to choke out the important interests of the New Creature, hindering its growth in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord?

Our aim should be to qualify as the “good ground” hearers of the Word, concerning whom Jesus said, these are “they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the Word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.” How important it is that we “keep” the Word, that we treasure up in our hearts the precious promises of God, patiently enduring all the tests which the Lord, in his love and wisdom, permits to come upon us. Only thus may we expect, after having done the will of God in making a consecration to do his will, to inherit the fulfillment of the promises.

Bringing forth the fruits of righteousness is the great objective of our receiving the Word. After speaking of those who become so unfaithful that it is impossible to renew them unto repentance, Paul continues, “For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by [for, *Marginal Translation*] whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.” (Heb. 6:4-8) This grave warning follows Paul’s admonition to the Hebrew brethren to lay hold more firmly upon the Truth, to learn its great first principles, and adhere to them without wavering.

ABRAHAM AN EXAMPLE

Paul cites Abraham as an example of patient endurance in connection with the promises of God. We quote: “When God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after

he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.”—Heb. 6:13-20

Usually we think of Abraham as an example of faith, and correctly so. In this passage, Paul reminds us additionally of his great patience in waiting for the fulfillment of God’s promise. It was, in fact, his faith which enabled him to patiently endure during all those years of waiting, from the time God first spoke to him in Ur of the Chaldees, until, when he had demonstrated his faithfulness by his willingness to offer up his son Isaac in sacrifice, God confirmed the promise by his oath. Yet, this was not the fulfillment of the promise which Abraham received after patiently enduring, but its confirmation by God’s oath. It was not then the due time for Abraham’s seed to bless all the families of the earth, but God did assure Abraham that the promise would be fulfilled—he confirmed it by his oath.

Our glorious hope has its roots in the Abrahamic Covenant, not as part of the human race which is to be blessed, but as the promised seed which will,

together with Jesus, do the blessing. Because of this, God's confirmation of the promise is a "strong consolation" for us. It is a blessed assurance that if, like Abraham, we patiently endure, we will inherit the fulfillment of the promises. To us, the promises of reward are spiritual. The hope engendered by them entereth into that which is beyond the veil, where our forerunner, even Christ, has already entered.

We still "have need of patience," having need of it in all the trying experiences of life. When Paul used this expression he was applying it particularly to the fact that our long wait for the fulfillment of God's promises of glory, honor, and immortality is a severe test of our patience. It was this test of time which Abraham patiently endured. The waiting test has been upon all the Lord's people, from Pentecost even to the present. In this end of the age particularly, the Lord's people have been sorely tested by their long wait for the kingdom, and their exaltation to joint-heirship with Christ in his kingdom. That test is still upon us. Shall we patiently endure, or shall we become weary of waiting and fall by the wayside?

When Paul wrote, "Ye have need of patience," he added, "For yet a little while, and he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry." (Heb. 10:36,37) The brethren in the Early Church knew that they would not inherit joint-heirship with Christ in his kingdom until he returned at his Second Advent. Paul encourages them in the thought that it would be only a "little while" until he did return, and admonished them to patiently endure throughout that short time of waiting. We understand that "little while" turned out to be nearly nineteen hundred

years, but so far as the Hebrew brethren were concerned, it lasted only until they finished their course in death. Similarly, in this harvest period of the age, the test of time is no longer than the lifetime of any of the Lord's consecrated people. If we are faithful unto death, we will receive the crown of life, regardless of God's timetable in the outworking of his plans and purposes as a whole.

We believe the fulfillment of many scriptural signs indicate that we are now living in the days of our Lord's Second Presence. The "little while" of waiting for him to return is in the past. Still, we have need of patience. For each of us, there is still a "little while, now he has come," which is testing our patience. Are we enduring that test, or are we inclined to become lax in our zeal, and just drift along in a half-hearted way? How are we meeting the test of patience in waiting for the kingdom? It is important that we patiently endure if we are to receive the promised reward. This is one of the conditions attached to the exceeding great and precious promises whereby we are made partakers of the divine nature.

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

Many times promises are made by those who are not reliable, or who lack the ability to fulfill them. This is not true with respect to the promises of God's Word. God, our beloved Heavenly Father, is the source of all the promises contained in his Word. In the two opening verses of the Book of Hebrews, we read, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days

spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.”—Heb. 1:1,2

When God speaks through his prophets, through his Son, or through the apostles of the New Testament, it is his voice which we hear in all the exceeding great and precious promises of his Word. He is the Author of the promises, and we can depend upon God to fulfill them. Paul wrote, “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised.)” God is faithful. He is both willing and able to fulfill all his good promises.

God will be faithful—of this there is no question. The important consideration is our own faithfulness. Paul attaches another test of our faithfulness to the promises in the statement, “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.” The promises are sure. It remains only for us to hold fast to them, and without wavering. If we waver in uncertainty, we could well lose our grip on the promises, and find ourselves tossed about by every wind of doctrine.

Obedience is another test. Through the promises of God we hear the voice of God speaking to us, but if we are to be blessed in full by that voice, it is necessary to be obedient to all the conditions attached to the promises. Thus the apostle wrote, “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall we not escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth

only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace [hold fast, *Marginal Translation*], whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.”—Heb. 12:25-29

Here we are warned against turning away from the voice of God. Are we ever tempted to do this? When we hear God speaking to us through his Word, outlining the conditions which make the narrow way so narrow, do we wish that we could turn away and not hear some of those conditions, the ones which seem particularly difficult for us? We may not consciously do this, but it is so easy to close our ears to the things which we do not wish to hear, and be tempted along this line. Let us be watchful of this. Let us listen attentively to everything which the Lord says, and by his grace and strength obey his voice, while we continue to serve him “acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”

MORE EARNEST HEED

Continuing to emphasize the need of faithfulness to the conditions attached to the promises, Paul wrote, “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; How shall we escape, if we

neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.”—Heb. 2:1-3

Giving “earnest heed” to, and not neglecting the promises, are the conditions laid down in this admonition as prerequisite to obtaining the “great salvation” which “began to be spoken by the Lord.” It is easy to allow the vitality of the promises of God in our lives to “slip” away from us. The weaknesses of the flesh, the allurements of the world, and the attacks of the Adversary, all contribute to steal away from our hearts and minds that freshness of zeal and obedience which we manifested when first the Lord spoke to us. The revelator speaks of this as the loss of our “first love.” (Rev. 2:4) This is why the apostle urges that we give “more earnest heed to the things which we have heard.” A similar thought is contained in Peter’s admonition that we give “all diligence” to make our “calling and election sure.”—II Pet. 1:10

“We are made partakers of Christ,” Paul wrote, “if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.” (Heb. 3:14) Notice the condition—“if” we hold steadfast unto the end. Are we holding steadfast? This is the condition upon which we are made partakers of Christ, and if faithful, become part of the great Messianic company for the blessing of all the families of the earth. To hold fast implies willingness to suffer and to die with him, to be planted together in the likeness of his death. It is only if we suffer with him that we will be with him in the kingdom. It is only if we are planted together with him in death, that we may hope to live with him in the resurrection.

Here are further “ifs”: “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31,32) “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”—John 14:23

How wonderful to know, as Paul wrote, that “the Lord is faithful, who shall establish you, and keep you from evil.” (II Thess. 3:3) Because the Lord is faithful, not one of his good promises will ever fail on behalf of those who strive as earnestly as possible to meet the conditions attached to his promises. “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.”—Heb. 4:1

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