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Exceeding Great and Precious Promises Or, How God Has Ingeniously Designed His Promises to Sanctify His People

"Whereby are given unto us Exceeding Great and Precious Promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine Nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2Peter 1:4).

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Preface

Who but God could have been so clever as to design His Promises to have the sanctifying effect of transforming the Believer into the image of the Only Begotten Son of God? Every Believer has been predestinated to be like the Son. "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29). Sanctification is the process of becoming more and more like Jesus. "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our LORD and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and for ever. Amen" (2Peter 3:18). Our day-to-day needs have been ordained by God to cause us the necessity of discovering some new aspect of the character of the LORD Jesus that we may lay hold of by means of the Exceeding Great and Precious Promises. "But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

Only Faith Can Receive the Promises

Faith is the only thing that man can do to please God. "But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). Rees Howells, a Welsh coal miner who exemplified intercessory prayer, understood that need to please God and recorded: "Faith Is Substance". "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). God requires man to live by faith. "The just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him" (Hebrews 10:38).

All men have a moral likeness to their Creator. That likeness means the ability to make a moral decision of choosing or rejecting good or evil. "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them" (Genesis 1:27). No, that does not make one a child of God without repentance and faith. "Repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). But, even with this God-given capacity of every man to choose or reject God, man never does what he should without the gracious intervention of God. "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the Truth" (2Timothy 2:25).

Our claiming of the Promises only occurs with the continual help of God. "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). In this fashion, God rightly demands us to exercise faith in our own salvation and sanctification, while giving us His help freely, as a Father to a child, to ensure our likeness to the Only Begotten Son. "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed" (Romans 4:16). Through Jesus "we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand" (Romans 5:2).

The Veracity of God

A promise assumes the veracity and ability of the one who makes the promise to keep it. "For when God made promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no greater, He sware by Himself" (Hebrews 6:13). What is Scripture but the account of a Faithful God dealing with man? "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" (Hebrews 6:16-18).

What "two immutable things" are meant by Hebrews 6:18? God's "Counsel" and "Oath" (6:17) are the "two immutable things" intended. God's Counsel is the "Thus saith the LORD" (Isaiah 7:7) of the prophets. God's Counsel is the right advice. "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the Counsel of the LORD, that shall stand" (Proverbs 19:21). God's Counsel is the leading that comes from the Spirit of Counsel and Might (Isaiah 11:2). God's purpose is to work "all things after the Counsel of His own will" (Ephesians 1:11).

God's "Oath" (Hebrews 6:17) is His confirmation that His counsel will come to pass. "By Myself have I sworn, saith the LORD" (Genesis 22:16). Man's oath is questionable, but God's Oath is certain. "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" (Numbers 23:19).

"In hope of eternal life, which God, that **cannot** lie, promised before the world began" (Titus 1:2). God cannot lie because He has **chosen** not to lie. "The Strength of Israel **will not** lie nor repent" (1Samuel 15:29). God is what He is because He has chosen to be so, not because someone else caused Him to be that way. "I am He: before Me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after Me" (Isaiah 43:10). Thus, He is what He has chosen to be, and deserves the greatest honor and credit for being the Faithful God. "Know therefore that the LORD thy God, He is God, the faithful God, which keepeth Covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His Commandments to a thousand generations" (Deuteronomy 7:9).

The Cooperation of Man

God's Promises are checks drawn on the Bank of Heaven, backed by the unlimited resources of God. "Prove Me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of Heaven, and

pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Malachi 3:10). The Father has made the deposit. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His Only Begotten Son" (John 3:16). His authorizing signature is His Word. "For all the Promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen" (2Corinthians 1:20). The amount of the check is the Kingly sum of "According to Your Faith" (Matthew 9:29).

Your name has been carefully included on the line, "Pay to the Order of". To ensure no difficulty in your cashing of the check, our Loving Heavenly Father has written your name as "Whosoever Will"-- "whosoever will, let him take the Water of Life freely" (Revelation 22:17). All that remains is your cooperation, in endorsing your signature on the back of the check, to tell the Bank that you have accepted the check. This can only be done by faith. "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24).

What hinders us from claiming the Promises of God? The absence of faith. Sometimes we refuse to believe what God has said-- for whatever selfish reason. That is sin. "Afterward He appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen Him after He was risen" (Mark 16:14). Other times, we simply lack the faith to honestly believe because we do not understand the Promise. "If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will He clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:28-32).

After we have claimed the Promises, we may falter because we become impatient. That too, is sin. "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James 1:2-4). Gaining from God the very thing we desired and for which we prayed the Promises, has the added benefit of God perfecting us to be more like the LORD Jesus.

Although faith is the condition of all of God's Promises, our reception of His Promises is usually based upon some specifically stated condition. For instance, we have been promised prosperity and success, but on the condition that we abide in the Word of God. "This Book of the Law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (Joshua 1:8). We have been promised a secure and happy family, but on the condition of fearing (i.e., reverently trusting) God. "Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD" (Psalm 128:3-4). We have been promised escape from the Tribulation Week (as understood from Daniel 9 and Matthew 24), but on the condition of our continual watching and praying that we would be accounted worthy to escape. "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36). The examples are endless.

God Has Always Kept His Promises

Even when the consequences are negative, God has always kept His Word. With all the love that He lavished upon our original parents in their Edenic Paradise, it must have truly pained Him to cause death to fall upon Adam and Eve after they ate the Forbidden Fruit. "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17).

Noah "being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house" (Hebrews 11:7). Jehovah said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth" (Genesis 6:7) because He "looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt" (Genesis 6:12). He promised Noah the delay of 120 years before the Flood would come, which was enough time to build the Ark. "And the LORD said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years" (Genesis 6:3). Noah fulfilled the conditions of God's promised deliverance from the coming Flood, by building the Ark.

The Promised Land is Israel. It received that name from the fact that the LORD promised Abraham "all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession" (Genesis 17:8). Though Abraham was promised to possess all the land on which he dwelled, he was still only "a stranger and a sojourner" (Genesis 23:41) as far as the practical ownership of the land was concerned. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise" (Hebrews 11:8-9).

What motivated Abraham to continue living as a stranger in the land that God had promised him as a possession? "He looked for a City which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10). Abraham looked for an eternal dwelling with his God. "But now they desire a better country, that is, an Heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a City" (Hebrews 11:16). Abraham was looking for what the Apostle John called the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2). In other words, Abraham was patient about receiving the Promised Land from God because He was motivated by the higher desire to dwell with God forever.

Rahab is another excellent example of how God has kept His Promises. "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace" (Hebrews 11:31). She perished not with the inhabitants of Jericho because she believed the promise God had given her through Joshua's two spies. "And the men answered her, Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business. And it shall be, when the LORD hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee" (Joshua 2:14). Rahab had a further condition to fulfill in addition to her silence about the whereabouts of the two spies. She was to bind a line of scarlet thread in the window of her room on the walls of Jericho, where she and her father, mother, brothers, and her father's household would be protected from Jericho's sure destruction. "Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which thou didst let us down by: and thou shalt bring thy

father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father's household, home unto thee. And it shall be, that whosoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood shall be upon his head, and we will be guiltless: and whosoever shall be with thee in the house, his blood shall be on our head, if any hand be upon him. And if thou utter this our business, then we will be quit of thine oath which thou hast made us to swear. And she said, According unto your words, so be it. And she sent them away, and they departed: and she bound the scarlet line in the window" (Joshua 2:18-21).

Because Rahab fulfilled the conditions for her promised preservation, she not only received her life in the bargain, but was one of the direct ancestors of King David and the LORD Jesus Christ. "And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse" (Matthew 1:5). Truly our God is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the Power that worketh in us" (Ephesians 3:20). Thank God for the faith of Rahab!

God is Keeping His Promises

Our certainty about trusting the Promises of God is founded upon the character of God Himself. "For I am the LORD, I change not" (Malachi 3:6). Also, consider the fact that we can only stand on the Promises in the present tense. It is appropriate to say that we have stood on the Promises in the past and will stand upon them in the future, but only today can we say that we are Standing on the Promises of God. "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe [present tense] that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24).

If we cannot have a present victory in our dependance on the Promises of God, the past and the future lose significance. May we be as presently optimistic as Brother Paul when he announced to his fellow lost-at-sea shipmates their certain deliverance. "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me" (Acts 27:25).

If God is presently sustaining us, then we have confidence in God. "But Christ as a Son over His own house; Whose house are we, **if** we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope **firm unto the end**" (Hebrews 3:6). Walking by faith, claiming the Promises, and believing God, all describe confidence in God. "For we are made partakers of Christ, **if** we hold the beginning of our confidence **stedfast unto the end**" (3:14). Pray that God will give us a strong grip on Himself. "Thy God hath commanded thy strength: strengthen, O God, that which Thou hast wrought for us" (Psalm 68:28). What a wonderful prayer that God will most willingly grant! "O God, strengthen my hands" (Nehemiah 6:9).

Can we lose our reward? Most certainly. "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward" (2John 8). Our confidence in God and in His Promises has great reward. "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward" (Hebrews 10:35). When we backslide from the LORD, we lose ground from where we were previously standing. "For Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer" (Hosea 4:16). We need Promises from God to ensure our continual cleaving to His Promises! "I have stuck unto Thy Testimonies: O LORD, put me not to shame" (Psalm 119:31). "He will keep the feet of His saints" (1Samuel 2:9). "Preserve me, O God: for in Thee do I put my trust" (Psalm 16:1).

Confidence in God and His Promises is essential for those who wait for the soon coming of the LORD. "And now, little children, abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (1John 2:28). How can we await an appointed time of departure from this earthly abode without confidence in God? "And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation" (Isaiah 25:9).

The certainty that we will leave in a Pre-Tribulational Rapture before the Tribulation Week begins is founded upon the LORD Jesus' promise and admonition to watch and pray that we would be accounted worthy to escape ALL things that shall come to pass. "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36). The promise of our LORD coming to take us before the Tribulation Week begins is further founded upon our confidence that He is able to subdue us to Himself. How could we be ready otherwise? "For our conversation is in Heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the LORD Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself" (Philippians 3:20-21). What an ecstatic relieving of a great burden will our departure be! "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1Corinthians 2:9).

A present tense confidence in God and His Promises is **necessary** for our prayers to be answered. "And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us: And if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him" (1John 5:14-15). The mighty men of faith and prayer of the past such as George Muller and Hudson Taylor have taught the Church to expect great things from God-- and to attempt great things for God. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it" (Psalm 81:10). They will be waiting in Heaven with the Saviour to welcome us as soldiers of the Promises, who have come home. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2Timothy 4:7).

God Will Surely Keep His Prophecies

What else is a prophecy than God's promise of what He said will happen in the future? "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My Counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure" (Isaiah 46:10). The Immutability of God assures us that He will most assuredly perform all of His promised prophecies. "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8).

God's Promises are to prevent us from taking anxious thought about the future. "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matthew 6:34). But why should we be so unconcerned about the evil that could befall us tomorrow? Because our God is demonstrating His sustaining power through His Promises toward us today. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

How could we be in a state of Spiritual readiness as Wise Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), if we are in an anxious state of fear, doubt, and perplexity concerning our immediate circumstances? "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love" (1John 4:18). By intelligent and thoughtful use of the Promises, cast all of your cares upon the LORD. "Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you" (1Peter 5:7). Your faith in God honors Him, and He will likewise honor you with the fulfillment of His Promises in answer to your prayers. "Them that honour Me [the LORD God of Israel] I will honour" (1Samuel 2:30).

What has the LORD promised about the future? He has promised eternal happiness for His people. "Blessed are they that do His Commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the City" (Revelation 22:14). The wicked are promised eternal suffering. "And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 25:30).

Those who are walking in righteousness are promised to be delivered from the upcoming Tribulation Week, while the backslidden and the wicked will not escape it. "The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead" (Proverbs 11:8). The Foolish Virgins (i.e., the backslidden) who enter into the Tribulation Week are promised to be refined by their experience. "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience" (Romans 5:3).

Israel is promised to return to Jehovah at the Second Coming of the LORD Jesus Christ. "Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children" (Isaiah 66:8). The Apostle Paul's heart desire for Israel will finally be realized. "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (Romans 10:1). All Israel is promised to be finally saved. "And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Romans 11:26).

Conclusion

A promise need not start with an "If" to be a promise. Your faith is the understood condition of all of the Promises of God. "And being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform" (Romans 4:21). Further, anything from God's Word that you can reverently fashion into a promise from God without diminishing the rest of Scripture-- for "the Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35)-- is yours. "Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours" (1Corinthians 3:21). Ours is the God who has promised us Heaven. "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of Heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Malachi 3:10). He only awaits the prayerful cry of His children to meet their every need. "Call unto Me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not" (Jeremiah 33:3).

Since God has designed man from the "dust of the ground" (Genesis 2:7) and not as the Angels, we

have our own unique problems and necessities. "Thou madest him a little lower than the angels" (Hebrews 2:7). Adam and Eve's sin has tainted all except the moral agency of man, which is the "image of God" (Genesis 1:27). That moral agency-- the capacity to choose between right and wrong-- is practically all that separates man from the animals, for they also were formed from the dust of the ground. "And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field" (Genesis 2:19). However, that moral agency is the avenue by which we have the glorious opportunity of being elevated to the Throne of God by His Exceeding Great and Precious Promises. "Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and His Maker, Ask Me of things to come concerning My sons, and concerning the work of My hands command ye Me" (Isaiah 45:11).

Confidence in the Promises of God is another way of saying confidence in God. After all, God is as good as His Word because He is His Word. "His name is called The Word of God" (Revelation 19:13). Our confidence in God binds us to Him by faith. "The just shall live by faith" (Galatians 3:11). Our Creator, who has become our Saviour, is also our Sanctifier. "But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1Corinthians 1:30). Truly, the LORD Jesus Christ is unto us "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2Peter 1:3). Our access to all of His divine attributes is through the "Exceeding Great and Precious Promises" (1:4). The result of the Promises is as complete of a union of God's people with Himself as Divinely possible. "And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be All in all" (1Corinthians 15:28).