

THE SCRIPTURES AND THE PROMISES

A. W. Pink

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The Divine promises make known the good pleasure of God's will unto His people, to bestow upon them the riches of His grace. They are the outward testimonies of His heart, who from all eternity loves them and foreappointed all things for them and concerning them. In the person and work of His Son, God has made an all-sufficient provision for their complete salvation, both for time and eternity. To the intent that they might have a true, clear and spiritual knowledge of the same, it has pleased the Lord to set it before them in the exceeding great and precious promises which are scattered up and down in the Scriptures as so many stars in the glorious firmament of grace; by which they may be assured of the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning them, and take sanctuary in Him accordingly, and through this medium have real communion with Him in His grace and mercy at all times, no matter what their case or circumstances may be.

The Divine promises are so many declarations to bestow some good or remove some ill. As such they are a most blessed making known and manifesting of God's love to His people. There are three steps in connection with God's love: first, His inward purpose to exercise it; the last, the real execution of that purpose; but in between there is the gracious making known of that purpose to the beneficiaries of it. While love is concealed we cannot be comforted therewith. Now God who is "love" not only loves His own, and will not only show His love fully to them in due time, but in the interim He will have us informed of His benevolent designs, that we may sweetly rest in His love, and stretch ourselves comfortably upon His sure promises. There we are able to say, "How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them" (Ps. 139:17).

In II Peter 1:4, the Divine promises are spoken of as "exceeding great and precious." As Spurgeon pointed out, "greatness and preciousness seldom go together, but in this instance they are united in an exceeding degree." When Jehovah is pleased to open His mouth and reveal His heart He does so in a manner worthy of Himself, in words of superlative power and richness. To quote again the beloved London pastor: "They come from a great God, they come to great sinners, they work for us great results, and deal with great matters." While the natural intellect is capable of perceiving much of their greatness, only the renewed heart can taste their ineffable preciousness, and say with David, "How sweet are Thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth" (Psalm 69:103).

1. When we perceive to whom the promises belong

We profit from the Word when we perceive *to whom the promises belong*. They are available only to those who are in Christ. “For all the promises of God in Him (the Lord Jesus) are yea, and in Him Amen” (II Cor. 1:20). There can be no intercourse between the thrice holy God and sinful creatures except through a Mediator who has satisfied Him on their behalf. Therefore must that Mediator receive from God all good for His people, and they must have it at second hand through Him. A sinner might just as well petition a tree as call upon God for mercy while he despises and rejects Christ.

Both the promises and the things promised are made over to the Lord Jesus and conveyed unto the saints from Him. “This is the [chief and grandest] promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life” (I John 2:25), and as the same epistle tells us, “this life is in His Son” (5:11). This being so, what good can they who are not yet in Christ have by the promise? None at all. A man out of Christ is out of the favour of God, yea, he is under His wrath; the Divine threatenings and not the promises are his portion. Solemn, solemn consideration is it that those who are “without Christ” are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). Only “the children of God” are “the children of the promise” (Romans 9:8). Make sure, my reader, that you are one of them.

How terrible, then, is the blindness and how great is the sin of those preachers who indiscriminately apply and Divine promises unto the saved and unsaved alike! They are not only taken “the children’s bread” and casting it to the “dogs,” but they are “handling the word of God deceitfully” (II Cor. 4:2), and beguiling immortal souls. And they who listen to and heed them are little less guilty, for God holds all responsible to search the Scriptures for themselves, and test whatever they read or hear by that unerring standard. If they are too lazy to do so, and prefer blindly to follow their blind guides, then their blood is on their own hands. Truth has to be “bought” (Prov. 23:23), and those who are unwilling to pay the price must go without it.

2. When we labor to make our own the promises of God

We profit from the Word when we *labor to make our own the promises of God*. To do this we must first take the trouble to become really acquainted with them. It is surprising how many promises there are in Scripture which the saints know nothing about, the more so seeing that they are the peculiar treasure of believers, the substance of faith’s heritage lying in them. True, Christian’s are already the recipients of wondrous blessings, yet the capital of their wealth, the bulk of their estate, is only prospective. They have already received an “earnest,” but the better part of what Christ has purchased for them lies yet in the promise of God. How diligent, then, should they be in studying His testamentary will, familiarizing themselves with the good things which the Spirit “hath revealed” (I Cor. 2:10), and seeking to take an inventory of their spiritual treasures.

Not only must I search the Scriptures to find out what has been made over to me by the everlasting covenant, but I need also to meditate upon the promises, to turn them over and over in my mind, and cry unto the Lord for spiritual understanding of them. The bee would not extract any honey from the flowers as long as he only gazed upon them. Nor will the Christian derive any real

comfort and strength from the Divine promises until his faith lays hold of and penetrates to the heart of them. God has given no assurance that the dilatory shall be fed, but He has declared, “the soul of the diligent shall be made fat” (Prov. 13:4). Therefore did Christ say, “Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth until everlasting life” (John 6:27). It is only as the promises are storied up in our minds that the Spirit brings them to remembrance at those fainting seasons when we most need them.

3. When we recognize the blessed scope of God's promises

We profit from the Word when we *recognize the blessed scope of God's promises*. “A sort of affectation prevents some Christians from seeking religion as if its sphere lay among the commonplaces of daily life. It is to them transcendental and dreamy; rather a creation of pious fiction than a matter of fact. They believe in God, after a fashion, for things spiritual, and for the life which is to be; but they totally forget that true godliness hath the promise of the life which now is, as well as that which is to come. To them it would seem almost profanation to pray about the small matters of which daily life is made up. Perhaps they will be startled if I venture to suggest that this should make the question the reality of their faith. If it cannot bring them help in the little troubles of life, will it support them in the greater trials of death?” (C.H. Spurgeon).

“Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (I Tim. 4:8). Reader, do you really believe this, that the promises of God cover every aspect and particular of your daily life? Or have the “Dispensationalists” deluded you into supposing that the Old Testament belongs only to freshly Jews, and that “our promises” respect spiritual and not material blessings? How many a Christian has derived comfort from “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5); well, that is a quotation from Joshua 1:5! So too II Corinthians 7:1, speaks of “having these promises,” yet one of them referred to in 6:18, is taken from the book of Leviticus!

Perhaps someone asks, “But where am I to draw the line? Which of the Old Testament promises rightfully belong to me.” We answer that Psalm 134:11, declares, “The Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly;” if you are really walking “uprightly” you are entitled to appropriate that blessed promise and count upon the Lord giving you whatever “good thing” is truly required by you. “My God shall supply all your need” (Phil. 4:19); if then there is a promise anywhere in His Word which just fits your present case and situation, make it your own as suited to your “need.” Steadfastly resist every attempt of Satan to rob you of any portion of your Father's Word.

4. When we make a proper discrimination between the promises of God

We profit from the Word when *we make a proper discrimination between the promises of God*. Many of the Lord's people are frequently guilty of spiritual theft, by which we mean that they appropriate to themselves something to which they are not entitled, but which belongs to another. "Certain covenant engagements, made with the Lord Jesus Christ, as to His elect and redeemed ones, are altogether without condition so far as we are concerned; but many other wealthy words of the Lord contain stipulations which must be carefully regarded, or we shall not obtain the blessing. One part of my reader's diligent search must be directed toward this most important point. God will keep His promise to thee; only see thou to it that the way in which He conditions His engagement is carefully observed by thee. Only when we fulfil the requirements of a conditional promise can we expect that promise to be fulfilled us." (C.H. Spurgeon).

Many of the Divine promises are addressed to particular characters, or, more correctly speaking, to particular graces. For example, in Psalm 25:9, the Lord declares that He will "guide in judgement;" the meek; but if I am out of communion with Him, if I am following a course of self-will, if my heart is haughty, then I am not justified in taking unto myself the comfort of this verse. Again in John 15:7, the Lord tells us "If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." But if I am not in experimental communion with him, if His commands are not regulating my conduct, then my prayers will remain unanswered. While God's promises proceed from pure grace, yet it ever needs to be remembered that grace reigns "through righteousness" (Romans 5:21) and never sets aside human responsibility. If I ignore the laws of health I must not be surprised that sickness prevents my enjoying many of God's temporal mercies: in like manner, if I neglect His precepts I have myself to blame if I fail to receive the fulfillment of many of His promises.

Let none suppose that by His promises God has obligated Himself to ignore the requirements of His holiness: He never exercises one of His perfections at the expense of another. And let none imagine that God would be magnifying the sacrificial work of Christ were He to bestow its fruits upon impenitent and careless souls. There is a balance of truth to be preserved here; alas, that it is now so frequently lost, and that under the pretense of exalting Divine grace men are really "turning it into lasciviousness." How often one hears quoted, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee" (Psalm 1:15). But that verse begins with "And," and the preceding clause is "pay thy vows unto the most High!" Again, how frequently is "I will guide thee with Mine eye" (Psalm 32:8) seized by people who pay no attention to the context! But that is God's promise to one who has confessed his "transgression" unto the Lord (verse 5). If, then, I have unconfessed sin on my conscience, and have leaned on an arm of flesh or sought help from my fellows, instead of waiting only on God (Psalm 62:5), then I have no right to count upon the Lord's guiding me with His eye—which necessarily presupposes that I am walking in close communion with Him, for I cannot see the eye of another while at a distance from him.

5. When we are enabled to make God's promises our support and stay

We profit from the Word when *we are enabled to make God's promises our support and stay*. This is one reason why God has given them to us; not only to manifest His love by making known His benevolent designs, but also to comfort our hearts and develop our faith. Had God so pleased He could have bestowed His blessings without giving us notice of His purpose. The Lord might have given us all the mercies we need without pledging Himself to do so. But in that case we could not have been believers; faith without a promise would be a foot without ground to stand upon. Our tender Father planned that we should enjoy His gifts twice over: first by faith, and then by fruition. By this means He wisely weans our hearts away from things seen and perishing and draws them onward and upward to those things which are spiritual and eternal.

If there were no promises there would not only be no faith, but no hope either. For what is hope but the expectation of the things which God has declared He will give us? Faith looks to the Word promising, hope looks to the performance thereof. Thus it was with Abraham; "Who against hope believed in hope... and being not weak in faith, he considered not his body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb; he staggered not ... through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God" (Rom 4:18,20). Thus it was with Moses: "Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater than the treasures in Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward" (Heb. 11:26). Thus it was with Paul; "I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me" (Acts 27:25). Is it so with you, dear reader? Are the promises of Him who cannot lie the resting-place of your poor heart?

6. When we patiently await the fulfillment of God's promises

We profit from the Word when *we patiently await the fulfillment of God's promises*. God promised Abraham a son, but waited many years for the performance of it. Simeon had a promise that he should not see death till he had seen the Lord's Christ (Luke 2:26), yet it was not made good till he had one foot in the grave. There is often a long and hard winter between the sowing-time of prayer and the reaping of the answer. The Lord Jesus Himself has not yet received a full answer to the prayer he made in John 17 nineteen hundred years ago. Many of the best of God's promises to His people will not receive their richest accomplishment until they are in glory. He who has all eternity at His disposal needs not to hurry. God often makes us tarry so that patience may have "her perfect work," yet let us not distrust Him. "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come" (Hab. 2:3).

"These all died in faith, not having received the (fulfillment of the) promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them" (Heb. 9:13). Here is comprehended the whole work of faith: knowledge, trust, loving adherence. The "afar off" refers to the things promised; those they "saw" with the mind, discerning the substance behind the shadow, discovering in them the wisdom of and goodness of God. They were "persuaded:" they doubted not, but were assured of their participation in them and knew they would not disappoint them. "Embraced them" expresses their delight and veneration, the heart cleaving to them with love and cordially welcoming and entertaining them. The promises were the comfort and the stay of their souls in all their wanderings, temptations and sufferings.

Various ends are accomplished by God in delaying His execution of the promises. Not only is faith put to the proof, so that its genuineness may the more clearly appear; not only is patience developed, and hope given opportunity for exercise; but submission to the Divine will is fostered. “The weaning process is not accomplished: we are still hankering after the comforts which the Lord intends us for ever to outgrow. Abraham made a great feast when his son Isaac was weaned; and, peradventure, our heavenly Father will do the same with us. Lie down, proud heart. Quit thine idols; forsake thy fond doings; and the promised peace will come unto thee” (C.H. Spurgeon).

7. When we make a right use of the promises

We profit from the Word when *we make a right use of the promises*. First, in our dealings with God Himself. When we approach unto His throne, it should be to plead one of His promises. They are to form not only the foundation for our faith to rest upon, but also the substance of our request. We must ask according to God’s will if we are to be heard, and His will is revealed in those good things which He has declared He will bestow upon us. Thus we are to lay hold His pledged assurances, spread them before Him, and say, “Do as Thou hast said” (II Samuel 7:25). Observe how Jacob pleaded the promise in Genesis 32:12; Moses in Exodus 32:13; David in Ps. 119:58; Solomon in I Kings 8:25; and do thou, my Christian reader, likewise.

Second, in the life we live in the world. In Hebrews 11:13, we not only read of the patriarchs discerning, trusting, and embracing the Divine promises, but we are also informed of the effects which they produced upon them: “and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims in the earth,” which means they made a public avowal of their faith. They acknowledged (and by their conduct demonstrated) that their interest were not in the things of this world; they had a satisfying portion in the promises they had appropriated. Their hearts were set upon things above; for where a man’s heart is, there will his treasure be also.

“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (II Cor. 7:1); that is the effect they should produce in us, and will if faith really lays hold of them. “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” (II Peter 1:4). Now the Gospel and the precious promises, being graciously bestowed and powerfully applied, have an influence on purity of heart and behaviour, and teach men to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly; such are the powerful effects of gospel promises under the Divine influence as to make men inwardly partakers of the Divine nature and outwardly to abstain from and avoid the prevailing corruptions and vices of the times.