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THE
PROMISES OF GOD,

CONSIDERED IN THEIR

NATURE, SOURCE, CERTAINTY, FREENESS, PRE-
CIOUSNESS AND SANCTIFYING POWER.

BY
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AUTHOR OF
"ADAM AND CHRIST," "THE TRUE PENITENT," "A TREATISE ON
REGENERATION," "AN ESSAY ON TEMPTATION," &c., &c.



PC PHILADELPHIA :
PRESBYTERIAN BOARD OF PUBLICATION,
No. 821 CHESTNUT STREET.

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tmp96 031452

HLR 17 840

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THE PROMISES OF GOD.

CHAPTER I.

DEFINITIONS AND DISTINCTIONS.

A DIVINE promise is a gracious discovery of God's kindness and good-will to believing sinners. It is a glorious declaration of his purpose, and a solemn engagement of his faithfulness, to bestow upon them some good or to avert from them some evil.

The promises of God are of several sorts.

They may be distinguished as absolute or conditional. An absolute promise is one whose fulfilment is irrespective of all agency on the part of those to whom it is made. Such was the promise of God to send his Son for the

redemption of our race. Such also is the promise that he will no more destroy the world with a flood.

A conditional promise is one whose fulfilment is dependent on something to be done by the person who is the object of it. Thus, the promise of forgiveness of sin is conditioned upon repentance and faith on the part of the sinner. Thus also the promise of covenant blessings to the children of believers is conditioned upon the faith and fidelity of the parents.

They may be distinguished as temporal or spiritual. A temporal promise is the promise of some earthly good, as that engagement of God in ancient times that he would bring his chosen people into Canaan; and that other engagement to his believing people of all times, that their bread and water shall be sure.

A spiritual promise is the promise of some heavenly good, some benefit that appertains

to our spiritual natures. Such is the promise that God will circumcise our hearts and give us a new and holy nature, and the promise that, after death, we shall be with Christ and behold his glory to eternal ages.

They may be distinguished as extraordinary and common. Extraordinary promises are those made to a particular individual, or a particular family, or a particular nation. Such was the promise made to Abraham, that in him should all the families of the earth be blessed; that made to David, that his seed should sit upon the throne of Israel for ever; that made to the covenant people, that God would be their civil head and leader.

Common promises are those which belong to all believers alike. Most of the promises contained in the divine Word are those of this class—those innumerable engagements of divine love and grace which irradiate every page of the sacred volume, even as the constellations which adorn the brow of night

shed down their mild and benignant light from every portion of the visible heavens. It is these common promises, the inheritance of the whole household of faith, which St. Peter characterizes as exceeding great and precious.

CHAPTER II.

CHRIST THE FOUNTAIN OF THE PROMISES.

THE original and spring of all gospel promises is the Lord Jesus Christ. This precious truth is taught by Peter in the following passage: "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness: *whereby* are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises," 2 Pet. i. 3, 4. The word "whereby," in verse fourth, refers to the divine power and glorious excellence of Jesus Christ; that is, to Jesus Christ himself. Without any unnatural or forced construction, therefore, the passage might be rendered: "By, through, or in Christ Jesus, are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises." Thus con-

strued, it distinctly teaches the doctrine enunciated as the theme of the present chapter.

The same glorious and cheering truth is still more clearly taught by Paul in 2 Cor. i. 20, where he affirms that "all the promises of God in him (that is, in Jesus Christ, as the contest shows) are yea, and in him, Amen." Matthew Henry, in commenting on this passage, speaks of it as "a great and sweet truth" that all the promises of God are made in Christ Jesus, the Amen, the true and faithful Witness, who has purchased and ratified the covenant of promises, and is himself the surety of that covenant.

THAT CHRIST IS THE FOUNTAIN OF THE PROMISES IS THE PROPOSITION NOW TO BE ESTABLISHED, ILLUSTRATED AND APPLIED.

Christ may be said to be the rise and spring of the promises, inasmuch as they were all purchased and procured for us by the shedding of his most precious blood. As there is

no remission of sins without the shedding of blood, even the blood of the Son of God, so there are no divine promises without that same blood-shedding. Many plain scriptures attest this truth. Let me direct the reader's attention to two or three of these scriptures. The first is contained in Eph. ii. 11, 13: "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision by that which is called the circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise: but now, in Christ Jesus, ye who some time were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ." Observe the relation of ideas here: You Gentiles, in time past, were strangers to the divine promises, far removed from any participation in them; but now you are brought nigh and made partakers of these promises by the blood of Christ. Again, in the same

Epistle (Eph. iii. 6), the apostle speaks of the Gentiles as partakers of the promises in Christ; that is, through the purchase of his blood. In 1 Pet. i., 19, believers are said to be "bought by the blood of Christ;" which is equivalent to saying that the promise of redemption in which all others are included is the purchase of his cross.

Remarkable are the words of the apostle in the first of the above-cited scriptures. He speaks therein of the "covenants of promise." The covenant of grace (says Henry) has ever been the same for substance; though, having undergone various additions and improvements in the several ages of the Church, it is called covenants; and it is called the covenants of promise, because it is made up of promises, and particularly because it contains the great promise of the Messiah and of eternal life through him. Now, those who are without Christ, having no interest in the Mediator of the covenant, have no interest in

the promises of the covenant. But in Christ Jesus, sinners who before were far off from his promises are by their new birth made nigh. They are brought into a vital union to Christ; are taken into the bond of the covenant; are made partakers of the promises; and become entitled to all the privileges consequent upon these new and blessed relations. Every believing sinner owes his nearness to God and his interest in the promises of the gospel to the death and sacrifice of Christ.

There is not, then, a single promise in the Bible, great or small (if, indeed, any divine promise can be small), for which the blood of God's incarnate Son has not been paid as the price of it. On every one of these engagements of divine love may be inscribed the astonishing words, "Bought with the Redeemer's blood." How tender, how affecting, how melting is this thought! If, when we read or hear the promises, the memory of what has been paid for them returned more

frequently to our minds, how precious it would make them to us! How it would engrave them upon our heart! How it would endear them to our affection!

Christ is the fountain of the promises, inasmuch as it is to him, as our Head and Surety, that they are all originally made. The promises are primarily to Christ; and they are made to us only as we are in him. Through him alone are they made over to us. His blessed mediation is the only channel through which their divine benefits can flow into our souls.

This point is cleared in 2 Tim. i. 19. Here the apostle teaches us that the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, "was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." If the grace by which we are saved was given us in Christ from eternity, then all the promises included in that grace must, as a necessary consequence, in time, have been given us in him likewise.

The same truth is plainly taught by the Holy Ghost in Gal. iii. 16, where all the promises of the new and everlasting covenant are declared to be made to the seed of Abraham; not to seeds as of many, but as of one; "and to thy seed which is Christ." This scripture is very remarkable, very instructive, very precious. Beyond a doubt, believers are here included in Christ, and are regarded as constituting together with him that one seed of Abraham to whom alone the promises are made. In verses ninth and tenth, the apostle had spoken of two distinct seeds of Abraham, viz.: "those which are of faith," the spiritual seed; and those which "are of the works of the law," the natural seed. God, he tells us, does not say to "seeds," as if he spake of different classes of men, who are entitled to the promises on different grounds—that is, as well on the ground of natural descent as of faith—but he says, to thy "seed," using the word in the singular.

number, and designating thereby one sort of men only, who upon one sole ground, viz. : faith, constituted that one "seed" of Abraham which is alone interested in the promises. "Thy seed," then, in this passage means Christ and his mystical body ; that is, those who are his members by faith. To this spiritual seed, here called Christ, because he is the head and representative of the whole body, the apostle says the promises are made.

The promises, then, are made to Christ, not simply as he is the second person in the Trinity, for in that absolute relation he is no nearer to us than the Father or the Spirit. They are made to him as Mediator, as the Representative and Surety of his people, as the Head of the Church and King of saints, as the blessed Days-man, as the Depository and Guardian of all the rights of the heirs of life and glory. Of his fulness it is that we all receive, even grace for grace ; the

graces that are in us springing from and answering to the graces that are in him.

Christ is the fountain of the promises, inasmuch as it is in and by him that we have a right to them and to whatever is included in them.

“He that hath the Son hath life.” A great principle is embodied in these words. Christ being ours, all things are ours; Paul, Apollos, Cephas, the world, life, death, things present, things to come, all are ours; much more then the exceeding great and precious promises of the gospel. “There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.” Now, freedom from condemnation implies a title to life, and a title to life of necessity implies a right to all the promises which assure eternal life to the believer. But the promises belong only to those who are in union with Christ. If once a soul close with Christ in the covenant of promise, there is not one promise in the Scripture but he may write this superscription upon it, “This is

mine." Yes, dear reader, it is even so. If you have closed with Christ, you may write your own name upon every promise in the Bible regarding it as addressed to yourself personally, as much as if there was not another individual of the race who could become a partaker of its benefits. The promises of the gospel are for all those who want them. The suggestion that they are not, come from whatever quarter it may, is a lie of the devil. It is of the very essence of faith to embrace the promises in the firm trust that Christ will do all he has said.

Christ is the spring of the promises, inasmuch as it is his grace that prepares and qualifies us for the fulfilment of them.

It is through grace received from Christ that we are enabled to believe the promises. It is through strength imparted by Christ that we are enabled to perform the conditions annexed to the promises. It is through faith, which is the gift of Christ, that we are en-

abled to appropriate all the precious benefits of the promises. If Christ did not help us, we should never believe a single promise. If Christ did not help us, we should never obey the precept on which the promise is conditioned. If Christ did not help us, we should never receive the comfort and refreshment of an appropriating faith in the promise.

So that in reference to the divine promises, as in reference to every other benefit and blessing of the new and everlasting covenant, "CHRIST IS ALL AND IN ALL."

CHAPTER III.

THE TRUTH AND CERTAINTY OF THE PROMISES.

AS Christ is the author and finisher of our faith, so is he the author and fulfiller of the promises. As surely as the promises are given in Christ, so surely will they be accomplished by him. As surely as the promises have their rise in Christ, so surely will they receive their fulfilment through him. As surely as the grace of Christ is magnified in the giving of the promises, so surely his power and faithfulness will be magnified in the accomplishing of the promises.

All this is much more than indicated ; it is unequivocally taught in the passage cited in the last chapter from 2 Cor. i. 20, where the

apostle declares the promises to be “yea and amen” in Christ; sure and steadfast for evermore. They are the promises of the God of truth; of him who cannot lie; of him whose truth, like his mercy, endureth for ever. It is taught with no less clearness and emphasis in Heb. x. 23, where the apostle assures us that “he is faithful that promised.” God, who has given us exceeding great and precious promises, is as faithful as he is kind. He is true to his word. Nay, he has magnified his word above all his name. Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Hath he spoken, and he shall not make it good? There is no deceit, no inconstancy, no unfaithfulness in him.

The Son of God, as Mediator, as the anointed Saviour of his people, is constituted Head over all things to the Church. If, therefore, the promises fail, it must be on one or other of the three following grounds, viz. :

DEFECT OF POWER, DEFECT OF LOVE, OR
DEFECT OF FAITHFULNESS ON HIS PART.

Can the promises fail from defect of power in Christ? No, assuredly; for all power in heaven and earth is his. What Christ has promised he is able to perform. Cherubim and seraphim, all the thrones and hierarchies of heaven, are subject to his will. Lift up your eyes to the heavens above—the sun, the moon, the stars, and the planets which you behold there are the issues of his power, the workmanship of his hand. He it is who stretched out these visible heavens in all their vast and illimitable extent. He it is who hung their lofty arches with those flaming orbs that have poured their brightness on unnumbered ages. He it is who created the earth and the sea by the word of his power. The ocean, the lightning, the cataract, the volcano, and those mightier though silent and unseen agencies by which the earth is

annually renewed in beauty and covered with riches ; yea, all the elements and powers of nature, visible and invisible, are ministers of his that do his bidding. What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is he? What think ye of his ability to make good what he has promised?

Can the promises fail from defect of love in Christ? No, emphatically ; for he rests in his love and changes not. Having loved his own, Christ loves them to the end. His love to his chosen is an everlasting love. Having laid down his life to redeem them, he will sooner lay down his crown than desert them. The covenant of day and night is less stable than the covenant of his friendship to his people. Christ's love is like the sun both for permanence and diffusion. Yea, that glorious orb may be blotted from the heavens, and shine no more upon the nations ; but the Sun of Righteousness shall beam in loving splendour upon his own to eternal ages.

Moreover, as the rays of the sun reach east and west, north and south, and shine alike on bond and free, rich and poor, high and low, so do the rays of divine love extend to all places, all times, all colours and all conditions. "I love them that love me" are the Saviour's gracious words to his loving and obedient disciples. But more than this, his love prevents ours, that is, goes before it; for, says the apostle, "we love him because he first loved us." Oh, then, Christian, though clouds gather thick around you and intercept the present view of your Saviour, doubt not his love, distrust not his promise. Your love is not lost, neither has the object of it withdrawn his love from you. He has himself interpreted your affliction: "In a little wrath, I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart

from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."

Can the promises fail through defect of faithfulness in Christ? No, beyond a peradventure; for faithful is he who has promised. What saith the Scripture? Christ is therein called the "Amen," "the faithful and true Witness." He himself declares: "I will not break my covenant, nor alter the word that hath gone out of my mouth." Other divine testimonies affirm: "The word of our God shall stand for ever;" "The word of the Lord is tried;" "Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God to confirm the promises," &c.; "God is not a man that he should lie; neither the son of man that he should repent;" "All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen."

But there is no need to multiply citations. Every reader of the Bible knows that it would be nothing short of blasphemy to

charge the Lord Christ with infidelity to his word. What is wanted is not arguments to convince the understanding, but appeals, persuasives, motives, that shall command the soul—some power that may avail to bring our affections and our conduct into harmony with our convictions. A firm trust in the promises is an anchor to the soul when the tempest howls without and the waves of corruption swell angrily within. Faith in the divine promises discerns a sun behind the blackest cloud, inspires courage amid a sea of dangers, and lights up the cheek of sorrow with the smile of hope. David had often put God's promises to the test, and never found one of them to fail. He was, therefore, confident and daring. If a troop stood in his way, he ran through it. If a wall crossed his path, he leaped over it. And when his enemies rose up against him, they stumbled and fell.

The word of the Lord has been tried.

It has been tested, and has stood the proof.

Abel tried it; and was accepted in his sacrifice, and received into the heaven for which his sacrifice and his holy living prepared him.

Enoch tried it; and his translated and glorified body has become to the spirits of the just made perfect the pattern and model of their own when they shall be reanimated.

Noah tried it; and was saved by the very waters which drowned all the world besides.

Abraham tried it; and after long years of faith and patience he looked upon the promised heir.

Joseph tried it; and in God's own best time he came forth from his prison-house to sway the destinies of Egypt.

Moses tried it; and the flinty rock yielded water in abundance, while the swelling floods became dry land.

Joshua tried it; and the people heard and

were afraid ; sorrow took hold on the inhabitants of Palestine.

Gideon tried it ; and with his little band of three hundred, armed with their pitchers and their lamps, discomfited and put to flight the swarming hosts of Midian.

David tried it ; and, against all human probability, mounted the throne of his country, and was graced with the crown of his implacable enemy.

Daniel tried it ; and hungry lions became like lambs in his presence.

The three Hebrew youths tried it ; and walked unharmed through the midst of the flames.

Paul tried it ; and the arm of his enemies was paralyzed, and their will became impotent to harm him.

Martyrs, confessors and the saints of every age have tried it ; and to all of them it has stood firm as mountains of brass.

Not one who has truly trusted in God has

ever been confounded. He is a buckler to them that trust in him. A buckler is a piece of defensive armour designed to ward off the hostile spear or arrow. Reader, take God at his word, and he will be your buckler. No fiery dart can pierce through such a shield. The keenest metal of the enemy will glance off as if it had but a feather's weight. Never was there so strong a foundation as that on which a Christian's hope is built. That foundation is laid in the faithful promises of God. These are its strength. The heavens may be rolled together as a scroll and the elements melt with fervent heat; the mountains may be torn from their deep foundations; the stars may rush from their orbits in wild confusion; the mighty pillars that uphold the frame of universal nature may tremble, totter and fall; but God's word of promise shall abide steadfast and immovable amid the crash and ruin of a falling universe. Oh, must not the promises be faithful and unchangeable

which are given by the Father, who is the God of truth ; which are purchased by the Son, who is the messenger of truth ; which are applied by the Holy Ghost, who is the Spirit of truth ; and which are published in the gospel, which is the word of truth.

“How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in his excellent word !
What more can he say than to you he hath said,
Who unto the Saviour for refuge have fled ?—

“The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to his foes ;
That soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake,
I'll *never*—no, NEVER—no, NEVER forsake.’”

CHAPTER IV.

THE FREENESS OF THE PROMISES.

THE freeness of the promises is indicated in the apostle's declaration (2 Pet. i. 4) that they "are given unto us."

THIS ATTRIBUTE OF FREENESS IN GOD'S COVENANT ENGAGEMENTS TO HIS PEOPLE IS THE THEME OF THE PRESENT CHAPTER.

And may the divine Spirit raise our thoughts to a height, and inspire our hearts with a tenderness, in some degree commensurate with the sublimity and sweetness of our subject.

The freeness of the promises appears from a consideration of the sovereign, boundless and everlasting love and all-sufficiency of God in which they have their rise.

Here this freeness shines in all its attractive lustre. That pure, unbought, unmerited love is the fountain of the promises is clear from what God says in Deut. vii. 8. Therein, recounting the great things which he had promised to his people and had done for them, he declares the ground of all to be his great love to them. And he draws the reason of that love from himself. He loved them *because* he loved them. His love is a law unto itself, there being no spring of love but love.

The same thing is clear from the testimony in 2 Samuel vii. 20. God had just announced to his servant David many great and precious promises, whereupon the royal prophet gratefully replies: "According to thine own heart hast thou done all these great things, to make thy servant know them." This is equivalent to saying: The rise and spring of all these promises is thine own self-originating goodness.

God, by the mouth of the prophet Ezekiel, declares that the time of entering into covenant with his people is a time of love. In the promises of the covenant his free and condescending goodness shines pre-eminent.

Mercy is the name given to the promises by the prophet Micah. To fulfil the promises made to Abraham is, in the language of that prophet, to perform the "mercy sworn unto our fathers from the days of old." The promises are called by the name of "mercy," because boundless mercy is the fountain from which they flow.

And there is not only a spring of infinite love and pity in God, but there is also a spring of infinite fulness and sufficiency in him. Hence, when God made a covenant with Abraham, he prefaced it with the sublime announcement: "I am God all-sufficient." While this was designed to assure Abraham's faith, it seems also to have been designed to repress any rising thought of

merit in Abraham as the ground of the divine promise. It was an admonition that there was no excellency or perfection in him on which such a promise could be founded; nothing but an overflowing fulness of mercy in the divine nature itself, to enter into a covenant relation with Abraham, and to engage his power and truth to bestow upon him the blessing promised in the covenant.

The freeness of the promises is seen in the manner and language in which their blessings are offered. The proclamation and offer of these blessings runs thus: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price;" "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink;" "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."

What can be freer in spirit or in form than

these invitations and offers? Their purport is: "Take the promises with all their blessings, if you will." What absolute freeness have we here! A willingness to embrace the promises constitutes a warrant to embrace them. The water that slakes our thirst, the air that sustains our life, are not more free than the promises of a gracious God.

The character of the persons to whom the promises are made speaks their freeness. David reads the freeness of the promises in his own littleness, as we see in 2 Sam. vii. 18: "Who am I, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these great things."

Jacob acknowledges the same thing, when he says: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which thou hast shown unto thy servant."

Reader, have we not reason not only to confess but to admire the freeness of the

promises, when we consider the deep depravity of our nature and the exceeding ill-desert of our life? As the young of the tiger and the lion, though as yet comparatively harmless, because neither their strength nor their disposition is fully developed, do nevertheless give token of their native ferocity, so infant children soon begin to manifest their inborn depravity. They early show by their fruits that they are the degenerate plants of a strange vine, the shoots of a bitter root.

“I sinned,” says Augustine, “in my infancy; and although I do not remember what I then did, I learn it from the conduct of others at the same age. I discovered dispositions which would be blamed in me now, and which, when we grow up, we are at pains to eradicate. I sought with tears things which it would have been improper to give me. I was indignant at my superiors and my parents because they would not comply

with my wishes, and attempted to avenge myself by striking them. I have seen a child that could not speak full of envy, and him pale with anger at another that was suckled along with it."

These early manifestations are but too true an index of what the after life is likely to be. Every imagination of the thought of man's heart is evil and only evil continually, even from his youth up. All our senses and all our faculties are inlets and instruments of sin. Our eyes are the ministers of evil concupiscence. Our ears are open to slander and detraction. Our tongue is rash, irreverent and censorious. Our hands are injurious and unclean. Our will is perverse, stubborn and unsanctified. Our passions are violent and rebellious. Our desires are irregular, impatient and unreasonable. Our imagination is wayward and wanton. Great is the number of our secret as well as our open sins—sins of thought; sins of desire; sins of pur-

pose; sins of voluntary ignorance; sins which a diligent and watchful spirit might have prevented, but we used not the diligence and the watchfulness necessary to prevent them. Most truly has the pen of inspiration said of us, that we have our habitation in the dust and drink in iniquity like waters. Confounded and overwhelmed by the number, variety and aggravation of our transgressions, we may well exclaim: "Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou visitest him?" Surely, promises made to such a being must be free indeed! They can have no other spring than the sovereign, unbought, limitless love and pity of the infinite Jehovah.

The freeness of the divine promises appears from this, that the conditions on which their blessings are to be had can be performed only through strength received from above. Man, since the fall, is essentially weak. He has no inclination to good works, and no ability to

perform them. He is without strength. Such is the plain testimony of the inspired oracles. "No man," said the Master, "can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." Again: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." These scriptures show that an influence must emanate from the Father and the Son to kindle spiritual desire in the sinner, and to quicken his pursuit of spiritual good.

Without the co-operating grace of God we cannot perform a single duty acceptably. It is God who worketh in us both to *will* and to *do*.

Salvation is promised on condition of faith. But faith is the gift of God. "To you," says the apostle, "it is given to believe."

Pardon is promised on condition of repentance. But it is the office of the Holy Spirit to convince of sin and work godly sorrow in the soul.

Heaven is promised as the reward through

grace of a holy life, and a distinguished place in heaven as the reward of distinguished holiness. But it is God who circumcises our hearts and communicates renewing and sanctifying grace.

Thus we may run through all the promises of the new covenant ; and we shall find there is not one of them whose condition we can perform except as Christ our Surety gives us strength to perform it.

What conclusion follows? Surely, that the promises cannot be otherwise than free, when not only are they given without any merit in us as an equivalent, but when also, to fulfil the very conditions on which their benefits are offered to us, it is indispensable that we receive help from the Promiser himself.

The greatness of the things promised evinces the freeness of the promises. If the richest man or mightiest monarch of earth should adopt a poor man, and promise to make him his heir, could such an act be prompted by

any thought of a remunerating return from the person thus adopted and thus raised to new hopes and expectations? Must not such adoption, of necessity, be regarded by the subject of it as an act of free condescension and kindness? He could not have purchased it. He had nothing wherewith to repay so great a benefit. The means of purchase and repayment were wanting. The very magnitude of the benefit, so far beyond his utmost power of recompense, would proclaim and demonstrate its entire freeness.

Consider now the greatness of the blessings promised in God's covenant engagements to his children. Who can declare that greatness? Who can conceive it? Justification, adoption, peace with God, sanctification, eternal blessedness—in a word, every thing included in those two comprehensive and precious words, GRACE and GLORY—such are the blessings promised to penitent and believing sinners. In the greatness of the promises, then, may

be seen, written as with a sunbeam, their absolute freeness.

If the promises of God were of a lower nature, a narrower compass, a magnitude less stupendous and amazing, it would be less a matter of wonder that human merit should presume to interpose a claim, and dare to plead that claim as a ground of receiving their benefits. But when a Christian compares his own unspeakable littleness with the still more unspeakable greatness of the divine promises, he may well exclaim, nay, he must of necessity exclaim: "These are, indeed, the precious gifts, the rich and free donations, of a loving and merciful God; and who am I, and what is my father's house, that thou hast brought me hitherto, and made me partaker of a hope so sweet, so animating, so sublime?"

CHAPTER V.

THE GREATNESS AND PRECIOUSNESS OF THE PROMISES.

THE reader's attention, in the present chapter, is directed to the glorious and consolatory truth conveyed by the words of the apostle Peter: "Exceeding great and precious promises."

THE GREATNESS AND PRECIOUSNESS OF THE DIVINE PROMISES IS OUR PRESENT THEME.

This is a theme most animating and cheering to the Christian heart, and at the same time sweetly persuasive to those who have not yet been made partakers of Christ and his benefits.

The greatness of things contained in the

promises speaks the greatness of the promises themselves.

These things are, in two words, grace and glory—glory as the end, and grace as the means of attaining it. “This is the promise which he hath promised us, eternal life.” Eternal life, then, is the crowning promise of the Gospel. Eternal life! I cannot explain it. I cannot comprehend it. I cannot conceive it. What human thought is broad enough or high enough to grasp the span and altitude of eternity? The mind grapples with this stupendous idea, and attempts to comprehend it. But it is quickly mastered and overpowered in the effort. It spreads its wings and soars into the inconceivable expanse, but it soon falls down wearied with the flight, and sees infinity of duration stretching itself out in illimitable lines, beyond the utmost point to which it can travel.

But if eternity, in the naked conception of it, be so vast, so amazing an object as to

overpower all thought, how does it still enlarge and intensify the idea to see it clothed with a happiness commensurate with its own infinitude? Eternal bliss! Everlasting joy! Delight without interruption and without end! Oh, ought not this to swallow up every other thought, and engross the whole attention and energy of every rational being?

But, though it doth not yet appear what we shall be, though we cannot fully comprehend that eternal life which is the object of divine promise in the Gospel, yet some rays of the heavenly glory do even now shine upon our darkness; some glimpses of our future and everlasting blessedness visit and cheer us with their light even in this dungeon of earth.

The heavenly state is a state of perfect bliss, excluding all presence of evil, all want of good.

This state will be introduced by the resurrection of the body and its reunion to the

spirit; the body now fashioned like unto the glorified body of the risen and ascended Saviour, and no longer subject to pain, decay, or dissolution.

In this state the sources of enjoyment will be greatly multiplied and the capacity for enjoyment enlarged beyond all present power of conception. Now we are in our spiritual infancy; then we shall have reached the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. The redeemed will be with Christ; will behold his glory; and will be changed into the same image from glory to glory. Then communion with the Saviour and with each other will be most intimate and enduring. They will renew their former friendships; will retrace their earthly experiences, and will expatiate for ever in the pleasures of a mutual endearment, a holy and inviolable affection. Heaven is a state of absolute, permanent and ineffable delight. It is an admission into the immediate presence of the Father of spirits.

It is an eternal basking in the unclouded light of the divine countenance. It is a perpetual drinking at the "fountain of all beatitude, the river of eternal pleasures, the fulness of uncreated bliss."

The heavenly state is represented under the notion of an inheritance.

As compared with earthly inheritance, it is declared by the pen of inspiration to be a "better and an enduring substance." Every word in this inspired delineation is significant and emphatic.

The heavenly inheritance is a "*substance*;" it is solid—not shadowy.

The treasures of earth are vanity and emptiness. At best, they can but surround their possessors with a pomp as hollow as it is glittering. They cannot enrich the soul. They cannot irradiate the mind. They cannot impart a solitary mental grace or joy. They cannot meet the wants of the heart. They cannot silence the voice of conscience.

They cannot allay the agonies of remorse. Above all, they cannot shed one ray of hope upon the dark valley, nor procure a single drop of water to ease the torment of the soul amid the living fires of perdition. But the heavenly riches are substantial. They belong to the spirit, and are as indestructible as the spirit itself.

The heavenly inheritance is, also, a "*better substance*;" better than any treasure that earth affords.

Earthly riches cannot satisfy the soul. On the contrary, they enlarge its desires and inflame its passions, rendering them more imperious and insatiable. Not so with the heavenly riches. They fill the soul. They tranquillize the spirit. They meet its strongest desires. They satisfy its loftiest aspirations. They bring solid and lasting contentment to the mind.

The heavenly inheritance is an "*enduring*" as well as a "*better substance*."

How great the contrast here between the riches of time and the riches of eternity! The man who has heaped up treasures upon earth, and is not rich toward God, can carry none of his treasures with him into the eternal world. "He must leave his splendid mansion and equipage behind; bid adieu to his groves and lawns, and the shades under which he reposed; and carry nothing with him but the guilty and the bitter recollection of having abused his earthly grandeur. But the good man carries away with him his heavenly substance. He retains the acquisitions of piety—riches of a kindred nature to the treasures of heaven." Nearly six thousand years have passed since the solitary voice of the martyred Abel raised the first song of redemption on the heavenly heights. That voice has since been joined by a countless multitude, which now swells the harmony, loud as the voice of mighty thunderings, which celebrates the Redeemer's victories.

All this innumerable company of the saved still breathe the element of immortality. Their inheritance of love and joy knows no decay, dreads no eclipse, anticipates no end, but reposes in the confidence of a perpetual fruition.

Must not those be great and precious promises which assure to us so great and precious a happiness, so glorious and enduring an inheritance? No pain is felt in heaven. No tears are shed, no graves are opened, no friends are buried there. No baffled schemes, no blasted hopes, no treacherous friendships, no sudden disappointments are encountered in that blessed world. But one deep and broad stream of happiness rolls through eternity, for ever deepening and widening as it rolls. There are the tree of life, the crystal river, the white-robed company, the glittering city and the radiant throne of God, seen in vision by the rapt exile of Patmos. All this, and much more—yea, more than tongue can speak or heart

conceive—is embraced within those divine promises, which are thence most fitly denominated “exceeding great and precious.”

But not only is eternal glory held out to us in the promises of the Gospel; we are therein also assured of the grace necessary to conduct us to that glory and to fit us for the enjoyment of it.

“The Lord will give grace and glory.” “My grace is sufficient for thee.” “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, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle on thee.” “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able.” “If any man love me, I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him.” The foregoing are but a specimen of those precious covenant engagements by which the presence and aid of the blessed Trinity are assured to believers,

so that every true Christian may boldly say, "The Lord is my helper; and, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me." "The sanctification of Christians (says Robert Hall) is progressive; their likeness to Christ augments; their path is like that of the light, that brightens from the glimmering dawn to the perfect day. Their victory over the world is acquired by faith in Christ. By this they learn to trample upon the world, at least in their better moments, as they proceed on their way to glory. Such is the experience of all true believers, and such the extent of the promises of God."

Are not heaven, the endless enjoyment of God, the society of saints and angels, the supreme calm of the soul, and a felicity where there is nothing in the past to wound, nothing in the present to vex, and nothing in the future to dread,—are not these great and precious benefits? And is not the grace which conducts us to them, and fits us for

them equally great and precious? Yet all this grace and glory is within the bosom of the divine promises. With the utmost propriety, then, may the apostle, from the greatness and preciousness of the promised blessings, name the promises themselves “exceeding great and precious.”

The greatness and preciousness of the divine promises are manifest from a consideration of the price at which they have been purchased. The value of an estate or a commodity is seen in the sum which a wise man, skilled in the knowledge of the property in question, is willing to pay for it. Thus a farm or a diamond is worth what a wise farmer or an expert jeweller is willing to give in exchange for it. Our Saviour commends the wisdom of the merchant who sold all his estates in order to gain possession of one pearl of great price. The wisest of men, however, sometimes make mistakes. But God’s knowledge is infallible. His judgments are always ac-

ording to truth. If, therefore, he has in any case laid down an infinite treasure for the purchase of any blessings, it is and can be only because those blessings are of infinite value. With such a treasure has he purchased the promises of the everlasting Gospel. Upon every one of these promises may be inscribed the astonishing words: "The blood of God's incarnate Son has been paid for this."

If there is anything which can enhance our estimate of the preciousness of the divine promises, it must be the consideration of what it cost the Redeemer to procure these blessings for us. To effect this purchase, it was necessary for him to exchange a world of glory, happiness and purity for a world of meanness, misery and sin. It was necessary for him to descend from heaven and become an inhabitant of earth and partaker of flesh and blood with us; to suffer hunger, thirst, weariness, pain, temptation, the mockery of

foes, the desertion of friends and the rage of devils, and finally to endure the shame and agony of death by crucifixion.

All this was necessary before a solitary promise of the Gospel could be made to a son or daughter of Adam. Surely, when we look at the amazing price which was laid down for God's covenant engagements, we may well pronounce them, with the apostle, "exceeding great and precious." Shall we not, then, place a corresponding value upon them in our thoughts and affections? Shall we barter the blessings which they assure to us for pleasures which are not only base in their nature, but momentary in their duration? Shall we barter these blessings for the sordid gains of avarice or the false splendours of ambition? Shall we barter them even for the delights of knowledge, the purest and noblest of mere earthly pleasures, which endure but for a season, and in which, are too thickly sown the seeds of dis-

quietude, disappointment, vexation and sorrow?

The promises of God are exceeding great and precious because of their certainty. Men often prove false to their engagements. Either their ability comes short of their intentions; or they promise in the dark, and shrink back from the unforeseen consequences of fidelity; or they make pledges under the excitements of a momentary ardour, and repent of their rashness before it has taken effect.

But none of these weaknesses belong to God. Truth, power, knowledge and faithfulness are his, and that in an infinite degree. Measure not the stability of promises which are divine by the instability of promises which are human. God is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should deceive. All his promises are yea and amen in Christ Jesus. They all centre in Christ. They all rest on Christ. They were all pur-

chased by Christ. They are all applied by the Spirit of Christ.

Is it possible for promises to fail which spring from such a source and rest on such a foundation? Never! Nothing but truth can issue from the fountain of truth. We are not sure of anything beneath the sun but that which is certified to us by a divine promise. Doubt, contingency, disappointment, change inhere in all things, human and earthly. The best-laid schemes may never realize their purpose. The brightest verdure is destined to decay. The freshest flowers wither and fade. The tallest trees are most exposed to be uprooted by the storm. The firmest rocks may be displaced by the earthquake. The most massive structures may be leveled by the tornado. The grasp by which we hold to all things earthly is slippery and treacherous.

In his sure Word, in his faithful promises, and there alone, God has fixed an absolute

and unalterable certainty. He has purposely mingled uncertainty in all other things, that we may not confide in them; but here is certainty that we may glory only in the Lord. The humblest, the weakest, who is contrite in heart, may be assured of entering into felicity. The poorest and the feeblest person who thirsts after spiritual blessings will certainly attain them; for the promises which certify these blessings are the promises of him who cannot lie; they are the true and faithful promises of God. Whether success may attend us in worldly affairs depends on a variety of natural causes; but when God has been pleased to give us a promise, we rest upon a sure basis; he makes all things certain. This is the case with all the promises of the Gospel; for thus saith the Alpha and Omega, the faithful and true Witness, "I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely." Surely, those promises are exceeding great and

precious," which make certain to us a happiness as lasting as it is divine—a happiness worthy of the infinite God to bestow, and worthy of an immortal creature to desire.

It is a proof of the greatness of the promises that they are directed to the manifestation of the divine glory. That the promises are designed to this end the apostle expressly affirms in 2 Cor. i. 20: "All the promises of God in him (that is, in Christ) are yea, and in him amen, unto the glory of God by us." It is, indeed true, that the essential glory of the Godhead is incapable of increase. But that glory may be manifested, set forth, made an object of perception, and so of admiration and adoration. It is to the intent that God's glory may be displayed to the view of the universe, and so become the spring and ground of praise to him, that his promises are given. And it is in redemption, with which all the promises of the Gospel are connected, that

the most illustrious display of the divine glory is made. Heaven, with all its splendours, cannot surpass the exhibition of the moral glory of God, made in the redemptive work of Jesus, whose infinite and everlasting benefits are assured to us in the promises. "Exceeding great and precious," then, must those promises be which subserve so exalted a purpose as the manifestation of the divine honour.

The sanctifying power of the promises evinces their preciousness. The apostle Peter affirms that the promises of God are given to this very end, that we might thereby "escape the corruption that is in the world through lust;" nay, that we might, through them, "become partakers of the divine nature." This divine nature belonged to man at his creation, and constituted that original perfection in which he was formed. The image of his Maker shone resplendent in his soul. His understanding was full of light; his affections full

of purity ; and his will sweetly obedient to the dictates of both.

To this primitive perfection of our nature it is the design of the promises to restore us. By embracing them in a true faith, man becomes renewed in the image of God—in knowledge, righteousness and true holiness. “The promises of the everlasting covenant are the pencils which draw the draughts and lineaments of the image of Christ upon the soul.” Exceeding great and precious is this blessing, and “exceeding great and precious” are the promises from which it springs.

The promises are great and precious because of their intimate relation to Christ.

The promises of the Gospel are so many streams flowing from the precious and loving heart of the Redeemer. Now, the waters which flow from a fountain partake of the nature of the fountain. A sweet spring must have sweet issues. Of necessity, therefore, the divine promises must be pre-

eminently and supremely precious on account of their rise in and descent from such a source.

But they are no less precious because of another relation they have to Christ. They not only spring from him, but lead to him. They are the guides of souls to that great object of all evangelical and saving faith. Every promise of the Gospel has a voice, which cries aloud to perishing sinners: "Come to Christ and be saved." As the star that appeared to the Eastern sages at the birth of our Saviour guided them to his cradle, so do the divine promises guide all the tribes of earth to the cross on which he suffered. They all point to the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world.

Finally: *The ineffable sweetness which the saints taste in the promises proclaim their exceeding preciousness.* The holy Psalmist, in the depth of his affliction, when his foot slipped and his soul had almost dwelt in darkness, declares: "In the multitude of my

thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul." And whence could these divine comforts spring but from the divine promises? It was God's mercy made sure to him in the promises that supported and consoled David in the sharpness of his trials. And such is the experience of all the saints. These precious streams of divine consolation—the promises—are their strength and their song in the house of their pilgrimage.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SANCTIFYING POWER OF THE PROMISES.

THE tendency of the promises to promote sanctification is distinctly affirmed by Peter in the passage wherein he declares that we are, through them, made partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. i. 4).

“Partakers of the divine nature.” This is a very remarkable form of expression to be applied to sinful men. It is worth while to inquire carefully into its signification. It cannot, of course, denote a change of the substance of the human nature into the substance of the divine nature. The Christian can, in no sense or manner, become a sharer in the essence of the God head. Such participation is an impossibility for any creature, however

exalted or holy. The change, therefore, must be altogether moral. It has reference to the qualities and operations of the soul, rather than to the soul itself. It implies that the believer, by the power of the Holy Ghost, is made partaker of a nature resembling that of the Deity, so far as the finite can be like the Infinite.

The use of the word "divine" in such a connection is not peculiar to the inspired penman. The best moral writers among the ancient Greeks and Romans drew their strongest motives to virtue from the doctrine of the soul's immateriality and immortality. Hence they applied to the soul the epithets "divine" and "godlike." Of this we have a noted example in a passage of rare beauty which occurs in Cicero's book on Laws. "He that hath known himself," says the great Roman moralist, "will perceive that he hath something within him divine, as it were, an image dedicated to the Deity. Thus he will think

and act worthy of so great a gift ; and by the study of eternal things shadowed forth in the works of nature he will learn that the good man and the good man only, is destined to be happy. Contrasting the things which are perishing with those which are eternal, he will look upon himself as an inhabitant of the universe ; and he will despise and count as nothing those matters which are accounted valuable by ordinary minds.”

What was dim though sublime conjecture to Cicero and others among the best of the ancients, is a blessed certainty to the student of the Scriptures ; and great is the reproach of Christians if they draw no sanctifying energy from a revealed truth whose very shadow gave to a heathen writer aspirations so pure and lofty.

Man, when formed at first by the creative hand of the Almighty, was made in the image of God ; and when formed anew by the divine energy of the Holy Ghost, he is

restored to the same image. But the likeness is one, not of form or essence, but of attributes. It is a moral resemblance. The apostle explains it as consisting in knowledge, righteousness and holiness. A mind filled with divine knowledge, actuated by divine principles, animated by divine affections, and conformed to the divine character and will, is, in the sense of the passages cited from Peter, a "partaker of the divine nature." Such an one resembles God as much as the creature can resemble the Creator.

THE PROMISES OF GOD TEND TO THE PRODUCTION OF THIS RESEMBLANCE OF THE HUMAN NATURE TO THE DIVINE. BUT IN WHAT MANNER AND BY WHAT INFLUENCES? THE ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION IS WHAT WILL BE ATTEMPTED IN THE PRESENT CHAPTER.

Let it be premised, however, that since the blessings which we are about to enumerate come to us through the promises, it is essen-

tial to the reception of the blessings that the promises be believed and personally applied by each individual believer. The promises, discredited and rejected can do the sick soul no more good than medicine refused and untasted can the sick body. With this preliminary remark, we proceed to the task in hand, which is to show wherein consists the sanctifying power of the promises—those gracious engagements of divine love and mercy.

The promises of the Gospel are adapted to promote Christian sanctification by their tendency to beget repentance for sin, to aid in the work of mortifying sin, and to promote moral reformation. Sorrow for sin and hatred of it are produced chiefly in two ways: namely, by the contemplation of the penalty threatened against transgression, and by the contemplation of the promises contained in the Gospel. The divine law was given for our highest good. Every violation of it is at-

tended with two evil consequences: it destroys the happiness flowing from obedience, and it incurs the guilt or liability to punishment attendant on disobedience. When the sinner seriously considers these consequences, he must feel mingled emotions of shame, terror, grief, anxiety and abhorrence of sin. Christ and his apostles often made use of such considerations to awaken a salutary fear in the minds of their hearers. Knowing the terrors of the Lord, they persuaded men. But they made a more frequent use of the other class of motives—namely, those drawn from the love of God as revealed in the promises of the Gospel. Their whole heart, as it were, lives in them. And these motives have a mighty efficacy in promoting reformation of life. When we consider, on one side, the undeserved love and kindness of God, exhibited in so many ways and assured to us by so many great and precious promises, and, on the other, our own negligence, ingratitude,

rebellion and wilful rejection of the means of happiness offered to us by God, we cannot but feel penitence, abhorrence of sin and love to God in Christ, who has done and is willing to do so much for us. But all these emotions have a highly sanctifying influence. Moral amendment and growth in holiness are necessarily and essentially involved in them.

The tendency of the promises to sanctification by helping us to overcome the corruptions of our carnal nature is distinctly declared by Peter (2 Ep. i. 4), where he says that by them we are enabled to "escape the corruption that is in the world through lust." The same truth is taught by Paul in 2 Cor. vii. 1, where he exhorts that, "having these promises," we "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." The promises lay us, as it were, under a divine bond to practice holiness in testimony of our grateful sense of God's love in giving them. They

also minister to us strength for carrying forward the work of sanctification in our hearts and lives. The promises are to the Christian what Samson's locks were to him—they are that wherein his great strength lies. Let a Christian cut himself off from the promises by unbelief, and all his spiritual forces will decay. He will become weak like other men, and unable to make head against the stream of nature. The promises hold out to our faith the glorious reward which attends a holy life. "There are several promises of the everlasting covenant," says an old writer, "that cry forth to the Christian, 'To him that overcometh will this promise be accomplished—to him that overcometh will this truth be fulfilled;' and this doth exceedingly provoke a Christian to wrestle with all the discouragements he meeteth with in the way. He burieth all his anxieties within the circle of his immortal crown, which he hopeth for and seeth in the promise."

The sanctifying power of the promises appears in this, that they prompt to prayer, quicken us in that heavenly duty and give us a relish for and delight in it. This tendency of the promises appears very clearly in the history and experience of David. That eminent saint of the Lord closes a prayer, breathing a most devout and heavenly spirit, in these remarkable words: "For thou, O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house: therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee. And now, O Lord God, thou art that God, and thy words be true, and thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant. Therefore now let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may continue for ever before thee: for thou, O Lord God, hast spoken it: and with thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed for ever." It is instructive to observe with what boldness,

confidence, fervour and importunity the royal suppliant is inspired by the consideration that God had promised the things which formed the matter of his prayer: "Thou hast promised: *therefore* thy servant hath found it in his heart to pray this prayer."

So, likewise, in the 119th Psalm, David declares: "I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried; I hoped in thy word." Here he assigns his faith in God's gracious pledge as the ground of his diligence and fervency in prayer. How often in the same Psalm do we hear him breaking out in such expressions as these: "Quicken me, O Lord, according to thy word: be merciful unto me according to thy word: let thy mercies come also unto me according to thy word: deal bountifully with thy servant and keep thy word: establish thy word unto thy servant: remember thy word unto thy servant, on which thou hast caused me to hope." The word here referred to can be no other than

God's word of promise. We see, therefore, that it was faith in God's covenant engagements which prompted all these devout breathings, and gave them both their earnestness and efficacy.

The sanctifying power of the promises further appears in their tendency to produce submission and patience under afflictions. Many illustrations of this tendency we have in the Scriptures. Let a single citation suffice. David, speaking of God's word of promise, declares: "This is my comfort in my affliction." It is as if he had said: Unless the divine promises had been my comforters, I should have remained comfortless in the day of my adversity.

Great is the influence of faith in the promises on the patient bearing of our crosses and trials. Faith sees the coming dawn even in the dark midnight of affliction. Faith waits on God in the confidence of yet praising him for the health of his countenance. Faith is

the best interpreter of the Christian's sorrows, for it knows not what it is to misconstrue the divine providence. If sense, reason and unbelief interpret our cross, they will make us cry out to God: "Why art thou become unto me as an enemy, or as a liar, or as waters that fail?" But if faith is the interpreter, it will cause us with meek submission to say: "I know the thoughts of his heart, that they are thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give me an expected end." Faith enables the Christian to discern a blessed issue to all the seemingly adverse dispensations which he encounters in his earthly pilgrimage. Faith's creed is: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: though I sow in tears, I shall reap in joy; though weeping may endure for a night, yet joy cometh in the morning: though the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold and

there shall be no herd in the stalls ; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." Many a Marah does the Christian meet with in the wilderness which lies between him and Canaan, but faith in the promises is the tree which, being cast into the bitter waters, makes them to become sweet.

The promises of the Gospel have a sanctifying power, since they tend to detach our affections from earth and to cause us to live as pilgrims here below. That such is their tendency is clear from Hebrews xi. 13, where the embracing of the promises is said to have led those who embraced them to confess that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. It is easy to see how a firm trust in God's truth and faithfulness in what he has promised produces this effect. The soul that rests on the divine promises discerns the emptiness of all mere earthly good, and, in the same proportion, feels the attractive power of

heavenly glory and felicity. His treasure is there. His best-beloved is there. Therefore his heart and conversation are there. This weans him from earth and causes him to feel and act as a stranger and a pilgrim; that is, as having only a temporary and uncertain abode upon it.

The divine promises are a fountain of spiritual joy, and this gives them a sanctifying efficacy. "I will hope continually," says the Psalmist, "and will yet praise him more and more." Observe the relation of ideas here. Hope in God—that is, of course, in God's promises—leads to an abounding in praise. But the Christian who is much in the heavenly exercise of praise is ever the lively, active, cheerful, growing Christian. The joy of the Lord is his strength. He may have little in hand, but he sings in hope and praises in expectation. His present possession may not be much, but his anticipated treasure is vast as the riches of eternity. Having taken the

promises as his heritage, he can sing the songs of Zion even by Babel's streams.

The promises are an effectual means of spiritual life and vigour in those who embrace them, and, as such, their tendency and effect is to promote holy living. "By all these things," says Hezekiah, speaking of the divine promises, "do men live; and in all these things is the life of my spirit." In like manner, David, referring to the same enlivening and actuating power of the promises, declares: "Thy word hath quickened me." Oh what a heavenly life, what an active piety and zeal, are his who is continually exercising faith on the promises of God! Why is it that our graces so often wither and the life of religion decays in the soul? It is because we make too little use of the promises.

CHAPTER VII.

PRACTICAL ISSUES.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE DIVINE PROMISES HAS MANY SWEET AND BLESSED ISSUES, FULL OF STRENGTH AND COMFORT, TO THE BELIEVING SOUL, WHICH IT IS THE DESIGN OF THIS CLOSING CHAPTER TO OPEN AND ENFORCE.

Since the promises of God have their spring in his sovereign, boundless, free and unbought love, let me affectionately press upon my dear impenitent readers the duty and the privilege of embracing Jesus Christ, freely offered in those promises. My unconverted reader! can you doubt the Saviour's willingness to receive you? By what clearer demonstrations, at

what dearer rate, could he have testified his willingness than he has done? Does he not invite, nay, command you to embrace him? Is he not grieved by your refusal to obey? Recall those bitter tears which he wept over Jerusalem because she did not know the day of her merciful visitation nor the things which belonged to her peace. Did he not yield up his life that he might open a way for you to come to him and be saved? Does he not represent himself as rejoicing exceedingly at your return? And does he not hold out to you, as the reward of your coming, a four-fold crown—a crown of righteousness, a crown of life, a crown of joy and a crown of glory? Come then and receive the gift of pardon. Come and receive the gift of justification. Come and receive the gift of adoption. Come and receive the gift of sanctification. Come and receive the gift of peace with God and joy in the Holy Ghost. Come and receive that most excellent of his gifts, the crown of

all the others—himself—and all the infinite and everlasting riches included therein. By all the divine charms and graces of his character, by the deep and everlasting love that fills his precious heart, by the wounds he received, the sufferings he endured and the tears which he weeps over lost sinners, by the pains from which he delivers and the joys to which he introduces, by the compassion you ought to feel for your own soul, by the stupendous interests at stake, and by the greatness and excellency of eternal glory, I invite and entreat you to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ, that you may live by him, that you may die in him, and that you may reign with him for ever.

But I am bound, in fidelity to your soul and your eternal well-being, to present another view; and it shall be in the inspired interrogatory of Paul: How will you escape if you neglect the great salvation offered to you in the promises? Alas! you cannot escape.

That is what the apostle means to affirm by his question. You cannot escape perdition if you neglect the proffered salvation. Is bare *neglect*, then, sufficient to ruin the soul? Yes, it is. It is not necessary to reject Christianity. It is not necessary to be an atheist, a deist, or even a scoffer. Indifference, inattention, neglect—this is enough to shut you out of heaven. Oh could you descend into the pit of woe and interrogate its wretched inhabitants as to the cause of their ruin, what answer would the most of those who have perished from Christian lands return? Without doubt, something like this: “We meant to embrace the Gospel, but we delayed our purpose. We gave it our assent, but not our attention. We knew, but we did not consider. Therefore it is that we perished miserably, perished finally, perished irretrievably. Inconsideration, insensibility, negligence is the cause of our destruction.” Is there one of my readers who recognizes in

this picture his own likeness? Let me say to such an one, in all tenderness: Take heed, lest by imitating the conduct of the lost, you at last come to share in their condemnation and misery.

Since the promises of God are free, it is the believer's privilege to make a free use of them. Christian reader, the promises of God are your strength, and should be your song in the house of your pilgrimage. They are the life and vigour of your graces. Have not all the saints before us lived upon the promises? Have they not accomplished their warfare and gone to heaven through strength received from the promises? "There was not a step of Abraham's life but he walked with a promise in his eye. There was not an affliction that Abraham met with but he took comfort to himself from the promises." So it was with the father of the faithful, and so it has been with his spiritual children ever since. And so it was with the saints who preceded him.

The faith of Abel, the piety of Enoch, the preparation of Noah for the flood, the purity of Joseph, the patience of Job, the sublime heroism of Moses, the fidelity of Caleb and Joshua, the devotion of David, the courage of Daniel and his three friends, the tenderness of John and the flaming zeal of Paul, all drew their nutriment and vitality from the divine promises. Let not the sense of your infirmity and sinfulness keep you from applying the promises to yourself. All the warrant you need is a willingness to embrace and rest upon them. They are not given because you are holy, but that you may become holy.

Nor let your faith in the divine promises be hindered by the fear that you want the qualifications required to apply them to your personal necessities. You think, it may be, that your measure of humiliation is not great enough, your sorrow for sin not deep enough, your sense of the preciousness of Christ not strong enough, to entitle you to appropriate

the promises. If such is your thought, you wholly mistake the ground of faith. This is no worthiness in us, but the free and gracious faithfulness of our covenant God.

But if indeed you want the qualification requisite for trusting in the promises—that is, faith—then come to Christ, that you may get that qualification. Did you ever hear of a person who came to Christ and was rejected? Do all the ages furnish a solitary epitaph like this?—"Here lies a man whom Christ would not receive." Be assured of this, that you can never draw the qualification you need out of yourself. Christ is the fountain, and the only fountain, whence it can be obtained. Therefore close with Christ at once. Would you have conviction? Believe the promises. Would you have sorrow for sin? Believe the promises. Would you have a contrite spirit? Believe the promises. Would you have high thoughts of Christ and warm affections toward him? Believe the prom-

ises. Would you have peace with God and peace in your own bosom? Believe the promises. Would you have spiritual strength, fervour, joy and steadfastness? Believe the promises. Faith in the promises and the Promiser is the spring whence all these precious graces flow.

Since the promises are all absolutely free and without any equivalent in return on our part, let us divest ourselves of every proud conceit of merit, and seek to cherish a growing sense of the love, grace and kindness of God in Christ Jesus. Here I cannot but cite the precious words of a precious Christian of a former age, to which no word of mine need be added: "There is nothing that a Christian receiveth but it is the fruit of infinite love. There is not a conviction that tristeth a Christian but it is the fruit of infinite love. There is not a real sigh for sin but it is the fruit of infinite love. There is not one blink of the precious countenance of Christ but

it is the fruit of infinite love. There is not the least degree of hatred against sin but it is the fruit of infinite love. There is not the least promise that is accomplished unto you but it is the fruit of infinite love. So that upon your receipts from God there is reason to sing that song: 'Not unto us, but unto thee doth belong the glory.' And, therefore, I would press this upon you, O Christians; reduce all your mercies unto the fountain, and there sit down and pen songs of everlasting praise unto him. Will ye but take a view of this, there is not one bit of bread that ye eat, that is within a promise, but it is a mercy that cometh running to you through the bowels and tender heart of Christ. His heart is the fountain of all our mercies; and they sweetly stream out of that precious fountain."

Since through faith in the promises we are made partakers of the divine nature, and so by their living energy constituted in a likeness to

God, let us quicken ourselves in duty and console ourselves amid life's trials with the thought that when our likeness to God is complete we shall be admitted to a blessedness resembling that of God. "God," says an eminent writer, "is infinitely blessed. In the eternal mind there is no jarring doubt, no distracting uncertainty, no fearful hesitation. All is pure, and lucid, and serene. What infinite composure, unruffled calmness and boundless self-satisfaction pervade the spirit of the ever-blessed God! Sublime above storm and shadow and change, the peace of God passeth all understanding. So far as the Christian is like God in knowledge, righteousness and holiness, he will be blessed like God. They will be united in blessedness—the one as the ever-blessed Creator and Sovereign, the other as the happy creature and subject. Their sources of happiness will be the same, because their characters are the same as the Psalmist says, 'I shall be satisfied when I awake with

thy likeness.' When his resemblance to God should be complete, his blessedness would be complete also. To the bosom of God the believer will be taken. The throne of the Almighty secures the happiness of him who lives after the divine holiness. Passion, doubt, fear, sin agitate him no more. He is like God; he is a partaker of the divine nature; and the peace of God, the very peace of God himself, shall keep his heart and mind for ever.

“Such is some faint explanation of the apostle’s meaning when he speaks of Christians becoming, through faith in Jesus [faith in the promises of the Gospel], partakers of the divine nature. How noble a dignity does he propose to our ambition! What exalted felicity to our hopes! What perfect satisfaction to our desires! Go, then, unbeliever, to the foot of the cross and ask that he who purchased by his atonement power to make us sons of God would en-

stamp anew the image of God upon your fallen soul. Go, Christian, close to the same cross. There gain strength to follow Jesus, the Author and Finisher of your faith. Fulfil ye his joy, that his joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full."

Since the promises have their rise and spring in Jesus, they should be in a high esteem with us. How much it should endear to us these gracious discoveries of God's kindness and good will to sinners to know that they are all streams flowing from that ocean of love—the heart of the blessed Jesus! If, as our eye runs over the promises, the thought more frequently found a place in our minds, "This was bought with the Redeemer's blood and is the gift of his love," how precious would both the promise and the Promiser become to our hearts! How such a realization, continually recurring, would endear them to our affections! "And," to borrow the words of an old writer, "let me tell you it is impossible

for the promises to be in an high account with you till once ye reduce them to their rise and to their fountain. But once know that all the promises are sweet streams of love that have run through the heart of precious Christ, and from whence they have flowed unto you, and then, when this is believed, how shall ye sit down and comfort yourselves in the promises and rejoyce exceedingly in them!"

Finally: Since Christ is the fountain of the promises, and they are all yea and amen in him, it becomes us to cultivate the habit of applying them to ourselves personally, to the increase both of our graces and our spiritual joy. It is the privilege of the believer—for in the Gospel he is fully warranted—to say: I am in Christ; therefore all that is promised to Christ, as my Head and Representative, is promised to me. Nay, whatsoever is in him belongs rightfully to me, according to the tenour of the covenant: "I in them, and they in me, that we may be made perfect in one."

And what is there that we need or can desire which is not found in Christ? Do we need pardon? He has power to forgive sins. Do we need justification? He is the Lord our righteousness. Do we need inward purity? He can cleanse us from all iniquity. Do we need counsel? In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Do we need strength? In Jehovah-Jesus is everlasting strength. Do we need direction? He will guide us with his eye. Do we need healing? He is the great Physician. Do we need security for the new and divine life implanted in us by his spirit? He gives it in these amazing words: "Because I live, ye shall live also."

Beauty, riches, honour, health, happiness and heaven we have in Christ. The jewels of the east, the gold of the west, the pearls of the north, and the spices of the south—all the treasures between the poles—are vanity and emptiness compared with Christ. In

him all the scattered rays of beauty and loveliness in the universe meet and shine in one effulgent glow. The wealth of heaven and the glory of the Godhead are his; for it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell. And this fulness, if we are united to him by faith, is ours to console, to animate, to cheer, and to strengthen us amid the duties, the trials and the conflicts of life.

In applying the promises, be much in the contemplation of their truth. Accustom yourself to think of Christ as the faithful and true Witness, and of his words as the true sayings of God. "Thy words are true, O Lord," is the reflection with which David strengthened his confidence in the divine faithfulness. Sense and reason and actual dispensations sometimes seem to run counter to the fulfilment of the promises. They did so in the case of Abraham. The weakness of his own body, the age of Sarah and the long delay of the promised blessing all combine to stagger and confound

his faith. They are objections which he cannot answer. What method does he take to silence them? A very remarkable one. He just shuts his eyes upon them. "He did not consider them," says an apostle. He ignores them. He leaves them out of view. He forgets them and goes about his duty. Do you, Christian reader, imitate so admirable an example. God's paths are often in the whirlwind, and his footsteps are not known. Therefore trust him where you cannot trace him; and rest assured that not one of all the good things he has spoken of and to his people shall ever fail. In his own best time and way he will bring it to pass.

In applying the promises, be much in the contemplation of their sweetness. The promises are not only faithful sayings, but, because of their intrinsic and exceeding excellency, they are worthy of all acceptation. David esteemed the words of the Lord as sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. He accounted

them as more precious than thousands of gold and silver ; and he rejoiced in them as one that findeth great spoil.

In applying the promises, be much in the contemplation of their suitableness. Whatever a Christian's malady may be, there is a precious remedy, a soothing and healing balm always at hand in the promises. Manifold are the engagements of God's love to us if we have but closed with his Son. There are promises suited to every stage of a Christian's progress and to every condition of his earthly being. There are promises not only of final and complete recovery in Christ, but also of sustaining and sanctifying grace by the way. There are promises of free access to God, of fatherly care in providence, of covenant mercy to our children, of sanctified afflictions, of a gracious acceptance of our prayers, of deliverance out of danger, of victory over spiritual enemies, of perseverance in holiness, of support in death and of a glorious resurrec-

tion. There are promises of help in the doing of our duty, of comfort in our sorrows, of strength in our weakness, of wisdom in our folly, of guidance in our blindness, of protection in our perils—promises, in short, of all things needful in our way to heaven, and of everlasting rest and blessedness in heaven.

Had we but a firm trust in God's faithful covenant, we need not, even in our captive state and while sitting by the rivers of Babylon, hang our harps upon the willows; but, tuning them to notes of sweetest melody, we might sing the songs of Zion, though yet in a strange land and far removed from those heavenly hills where our true inheritance lies—that celestial city, which is the seat of our hopes, the solace of our cares and the home of our affections. A morsel of bread and a cup of cold water, seasoned with a divine promise, afford a sweeter relish than royal dainties where the sense of God's covenant faithfulness is wanting.

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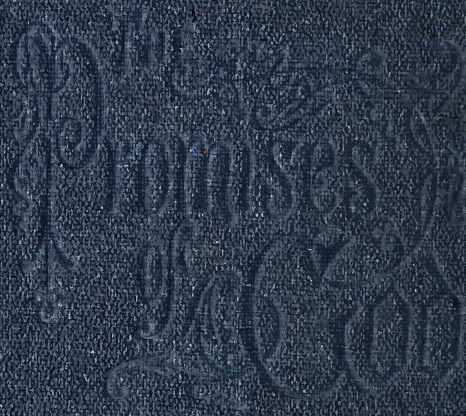
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