

It is more profitable to know Jesus than to know about Him.

Weekly Edition – January 23, 2015

Paul's Letter to the Romans

¹³ It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. ¹⁴ For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, ¹⁵ because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶ Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. ¹⁷ As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

¹⁸ Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ¹⁹ Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. ²⁰ Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. ²² This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." ²³ The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, ²⁴ but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵ He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

The Promise Comes By Faith

- 1) In citing the promise made to Abraham and his response as an example of righteousness by faith, Paul is using a specific example of a specific promise of God to a specific man and woman at a specific time and place, Abraham, to make the more generalized case:
 - a) By faith, Abraham claimed the promise of God and it was credited to him as righteousness.
 - b) In the same manner, by faith, we also claim the promise of God and it is counted to us as righteousness.
- 2) In the face of absolute empirical evidence to the contrary – Abraham was an old man, and Sarah well beyond child-bearing age – indisputable and uncontested facts – God said Abraham's off-spring from his own flesh and blood (i.e. his and Sarah's own natural-born child) would outnumber the stars in the sky.
 - a) Remember, the night sky was not obscured by ambient light in those days, so the view of the night's stars was very great indeed – perhaps the entire unobscured milky-way!

Outline of Romans

1. **Paul's credentials**
(1:1-1:18)
2. **Justification by Faith (1:18-11:36)**
 - a. **Sin – the "need" for Salvation**
 - 1) of Gentiles (1:18-2:16)
 - 2) of Jews (2:17-3:8)
 - 3) universal need for Salvation (3:9-20)
 - b. **Justification by Faith - the "Provision" made for Salvation**
 - 1) God's Righteousness through Faith (3:21-31)
 - 2) Abraham as an Example (4:1-25)
 - c. **Freedom - the "Result" of Salvation**
 - 1) Freedom from Wrath (5:1-21)
 - 2) Freedom from Sin (6:1-23)
 - 3) Freedom from The Law (7:1-25)
 - 4) Freedom from Death (8:1-39)
 - d. **Jew and Gentile - The "Scope" of Salvation**
 - 1) God chooses to save Believers (9:1-33)
 - 2) Israel trusted their own Righteousness (10:1-21)
 - 3) Jew and Gentile can have Salvation through Faith (11:1-36)
3. **The Transformed Life (12:1-15:13)**
 - a. In relation to overall conduct (12:1-21)
 - b. In relation to civil authority (13:1-7)
 - c. In relation to fellow man (13:8-14)
 - d. In relation to weak brethren in the Body of Christ (14:1-15:13)
4. **Concluding remarks, instructions and benediction (15:14-16:27)**

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- 3) Paul said God's promise was beyond all hope. There was no objective way for Abraham to claim the promise; it was an act of faith!
- 4) Abraham believed God's promise, and it was credited to him as righteousness!

The Promises of God

- 1) According to some, there are over 3,500 promises of God in the words of Holy Scripture.
 - a) The first such promise is recorded in Genesis 3:15, *"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."* This was fulfilled in Jesus Christ as it is written in Galatians 4:4; Luke 2:7; Revelation 12.5.
 - b) The last such promise is recorded Revelation 22:20, *"He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.' Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."* This one is the best yet to come! Maranatha, the Lord is coming!
- 2) God never takes back or changes His promises. As it is written in Psalm 89:34: *"I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered."* God's promises are fool-proof and guaranteed to those who by faith believe what God has spoken.
- 3) None of God's promises recorded in Holy Scripture ever fail. As it is written in Joshua 23:14: *"You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed."*
- 4) We claim the promises the same way Abraham did – by faith – even in the face of absolute overwhelming objective empirical evidence to the contrary – God's promises do not fail.

The "Big One's" (a sampling)

- 1) God promises us eternal life. As it is written in 1 John 2:25: *"²⁵ And this is what he promised us— eternal life."*
- 2) God promises that He loves us unconditionally. As it is written in John 3:16: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*
- 3) God promises forgiveness. As it is written in 1 John 1:9: *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*
- 4) We are promised the Holy Spirit. As it is written in Luke 11:13: *"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"* Have you ever asked God for the gift of the Holy Spirit?
- 5) God has promised us new hearts and desires. As it is written in Ezekiel 36:26: *"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."* Justified by faith, God promises to remake us from the inside-out through the power and ministry of the Holy Spirit.
- 6) He has promised the fruit of the Spirit. As it is written in Galatians 5:22-23: *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law."*
- 7) God has promised victory over temptations. As it is written in 1 Corinthians 10:13: *"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."*

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- 8) God's promises are something He always keeps. As it is written in 2 Corinthians 1:19-20: *"For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me, Silvanus, and Timothy—was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes. For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us."*

How Do We Claim God's Promise in Our Lives?

- 1) God's promises are expressions of His love and care for us. Through them, He accomplishes His will and plans for our individual lives as well as His purposes for His kingdom – the kingdom of God.
- 2) Some of God's promises are time and place specific.
 - a) For example, His promise to give Abraham and Sarah a natural born child in their old age does not apply to us today. However, many of the promises in Holy Scripture that are not *to us* can be *for us* because they illustrate how God meets needs and works in the lives of His children.
- 3) Some of God's promises are unconditional, some are conditional.
 - a) His unconditional promises are unchangeable, and there's nothing we can do to thwart them. But the fulfillment of His conditional promises depends on our responses and behaviors. Yet all of God's promises contained in Holy Scripture are just words on paper unless they are claimed and applied in our lives.
- 4) Regarding those promises that are conditional, attainment of the promise requires our cooperation with God: First, we must be living in obedience to God so sin isn't hindering our relationship. Second, we must ask in faith. And third, we must be patient and wait for His timing. God knows exactly when to fulfill every promise because His judgment is perfect. If we do, God will always provide His best.
- 5) The Lord's promises only belong to believers, but there is one major exception. Unbelievers are free to claim His promise of salvation when they trust Jesus as their Savior (Rom. 10:9). Such was the case of the thief who hung next to Jesus on the Cross and asked Jesus to remember (i.e. forgive) him.
- 6) However, even if we belong to the family of God, we can still forfeit our rights when we live in sin (Isa. 59:2), but confession and repentance will bring us back under His canopy of blessing (1 John 1:9). Forfeiting our rights as children through sin is not the same as renouncing our membership in God's family. Once justified by faith, we cannot lose salvation unless we radically "disown" God.
- 7) Finally, we are to take our needs to God in prayer. It is in this context that the promises of Holy Scripture become our own personal promise.
 - a) For example, if our need is for instruction and direction regarding a decision, we can rely on the Lord's commitment to teach us the way we should go because this promise fits our situation (Ps. 32:8).
 - b) Said differently, no one should pluck a promise from the Bible and claim it. In 1 John 5:14-15, the Lord promises to answer our prayers, but the context reveals that it's conditional—our requests must be made according to His will.
 - c) How do we discern His will? It is discerned out of our need as we experience life through our immediate circumstances and vetted in prayer. And it is frequently revealed in the words of Holy Scripture in our daily devotionals or study, as our life circumstances intersect with and are seasoned with the words of Holy Scripture.

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An Example of a Personal Promise from God through Holy Scripture

- 1) On Friday June 27, 2008, ten weeks before the collapse of Lehman Brothers and in the midst of mounting financial distress globally, this bank CEO was crumbling under the anxiety of financial market chaos and unsure what to do.
- 2) These words leapt off the pages of Holy Scripture and spoke directly to my heart in my circumstances: *"The Lord will fight for you; you need only be still."* Exodus 14:14.
- 3) Stillness is an important theme in my life, and the practice of stillness through centering prayer is an important spiritual discipline to me and has been for 30 years. On that day, in that moment, God spoke to me this reassuring promise and I claimed it by faith. I wrote that day in my prayer journal:
 - a) "How often do I take the fight into my own hands? I want to press the issue, take on the problem, gird myself for the battle. But God's promise is that He, Himself, will fight for me. He promises that He cares about the outcome more than I do. He says that it is His work to accomplish; not mine. If I take on the fight on my own terms, if I press the issue trying to solve it, I am being unfaithful to God. I am getting in His way. The battle is the Lord's; He will fight for me. I don't need to do it myself. Yet there is a proviso: I must be still and wait on Him."
 - b) Those reassuring words of Scripture, wrestled out on the pages of my prayer journal, calmed my anxiety, allowed me to feel my feet under me again, and instilled a quiet confidence that would be much need for the balance of 2008 as the world's financial system came perilously close to total collapse. God's promise was real, and personal, and changed me such that I could be present in my circumstances in a new and different way. The circumstance didn't change – but I did!

Not for Abraham alone, But Also for Us

- 1) Faith is the means by which we claim God's promises and make them real in our lives.
 - a) God grants promises because He loves us unconditionally and wants to give us guidance, provision, and protection.
 - b) God reveals Himself by means of His promises in ways that display His awesome wisdom, power, and grace. He loves us more than we can count, measure or imagine. Indeed, even our highest estimation of God's love falls short of its real proportions and depths.

Discussion Questions

- 1) How much time have I devoted to reflecting on God's promise to me? Do I really take His promise at face value, or do I discount it?
- 2) Has there been a time in my life when God spoke a very personal promise through the words of Holy Scripture? What were the circumstances? What changed – me or the circumstance or, perhaps, both?
- 3) What are the things I do in the way of spiritual disciplines or practices that help keep me in proximity to God's promises or help to remind me of them?
- 4) Faith builds on faith. It is a continuous feedback loop that strengthens itself over time. How has my own faith been strengthened through a personal promise of God realized in my past circumstances? How did that occasion embolden my trust in God in later circumstances?