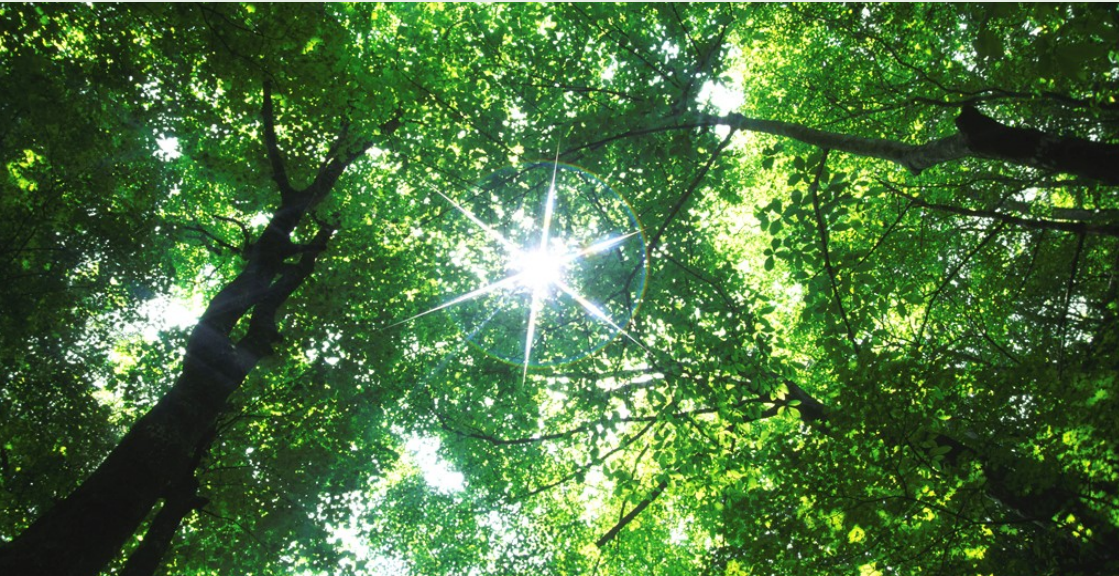


ACCORDING TO PROMISE



Part Two

C. H. Spurgeon



According to Promise

Part Two

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C. H. Spurgeon

7. Whose are the Promises?

The Lord is ever just and good towards his creatures: it is his nature so to be. But there was no necessity either in his justice or in his goodness that he should make promises of grace to those who had rebelled against him.

Man has forfeited every form of claim upon his Maker, which he may have thought he had; for he has broken the pure and holy law which he was under bond to have obeyed. Nothing is now due to man but the reward of his sins. If God should now deal with man upon the ground of strict justice he must condemn and punish him. Anything in the way of favour to a guilty creature must proceed only from the undeserved mercy and sovereign goodness of God: it must spring spontaneously from the goodwill and pleasure of the Most High. *The promises* of grace flow from the boundless love of God, and from that alone. They could not have proceeded from any other source. No single one of the race of man has any natural right to promises of blessing, nor can the whole world of men deserve them. God has made promises to men of his own free will and good pleasure, from no motive but that love which lies within himself.

He has chosen to make his promises to elect persons, who in process of time are discovered by their exercising faith in him.

Those whom God has chosen are led by the Holy Spirit to choose God and his way of salvation by faith in Christ Jesus. Those of the elect that come to years of discretion are led to faith in Jesus; and all who have faith in him may conclude beyond doubt that they are of the chosen number to whom the promises are given. To those who live and die in unbelief there is no absolute and personal promise of God: they are not under grace but under law, and to them belong the threatenings and not the promises. These prefer another method of dealing to that of gracious promise, and in the end they perish as the result of their foolish preference. The chosen of the Lord are led to relinquish the proud way of self and merit: they take to the road of faith, and so find rest unto their souls. To believe the word of God, and to trust in him whom God has sent to be our Saviour may seem a small thing; but indeed it is not so: it is the sign of election, the token of regeneration, the mark of coming glory. So to believe that God is true as to rest one's eternal interests upon his promise, bespeaks a heart reconciled to God, a spirit in which the germ of perfect holiness is present.

When we believe God as he is revealed in Christ Jesus, we believe all *his promises*. Confidence in the Person involves confidence in all that he speaks: hence we accept all the promises of God as being sure and certain.

We do not trust one promise and doubt another, but we rely upon each one as true, and we believe it to be true *to us* so far as it has respect to our condition and circumstances. We argue from general statements to particular applications. He who has said that he will save those who believe in him will save *me* since I believe in him; and every blessing which he has engaged to bestow upon believers he will bestow upon *me* as a believer. This is sound reasoning, and by it we justify the faith by which we live and are comforted. Not because I deserve anything, but because God has freely promised it to me in Christ Jesus, therefore I shall receive it: this is the reason and ground of our hope.

One wonders at first sight that all men do not believe God. It would seem as if this mark of divine election would be universally present; for God cannot lie, and there is no reason to suspect him of change, or failure of ability to keep his word. Yet, so false is the heart of man, that man doubts his Maker. He hates his God, and therefore disbelieves him. It is the surest proof of man's natural enmity against God that he dares to impute falsehood to one who is truth itself. "He that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son" (1 John 5:10).

Real, practical trust in the living God, easy as it seems to be, is a virtue which was never practiced by an unrenewed heart. The glorious atonement made by the incarnate Son of God is worthy of the reliance of all mankind. One would have imagined that every sinner would have washed at once in this cleansing fountain, and without hesitation would have believed in the divine Redeemer: but it is very far from being so. Men will not come unto Christ that they may have life. They would rather trust in anything than in the sacrifice of Jesus. Until the Holy Ghost works a miracle upon a man, he will not confide in the great sacrifice which God has provided and accepted for the putting away of guilt. Hence it is that this simple, commonplace matter of faith, yet becomes the distinguishing mark of the chosen of the Lord. No other token is so infallible: "He that believeth on him hath everlasting life." Feelings and actions may all serve as evidences; but the master evidence of an interest in the promise of God is faith in him. "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness:" there were many other good points in the patriarch's character, but this was the decisive one, — he believed God; indeed, this was the root of all else that was commendable in him.

Worldly-wise men despise faith, and set it in contrast with virtuous action; but this contrast is not fair: one might as well contrast a fountain with its stream, or the sun with its own heat. If true faith be the mother of holiness, let the mother grace have

praise because of its offspring, and let it not be contrasted therewith. Such unfair reasoning comes of wanton malice: if men loved good works as much as they pretend to do, they would love the faith which produces them.

God loves faith because it honours him, and also because it leads to acts of obedience to him, which obedience includes love to our fellow-men. There is more in faith than meets the eye. It is in one aspect the greatest of all good works, even as our Lord Jesus teaches us. The Jews said to him (John 6:28, 29), “What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?” They would fain perform godlike works, works above all others approved of the Lord. Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” As much as to say — the most divinely approved work possible to you, is to believe in the Messiah. To trust in the Lord Jesus is the climax of virtue. Proud men may sneer, but this statement is true. “Without faith it is impossible to please God;” but “he that believeth in him is not condemned.” *The promise* is made to him that believes the promise, and to him it shall be fulfilled. He who embraces the promise is embraced by the promise. He who accepts Christ is accepted in Christ. He who truly believes is surely saved.

READER, DO YOU BELIEVE YOUR GOD?

8. The Promise a Free Gift

“Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises” 2 Peter 1:4.

Observe that word “given.” Peter says, “Whereby *are given* unto us exceeding great and precious promises.” We are beholden for everything to the gift of God. We live upon divine charity. All that we have we have received as a gift, and all we are to have must come in the same way. “The wages of sin is death, but the *gift* of God is eternal life.” We are unable to earn anything, but God is able to give all things. Salvation must be

all a gift, a free gift, an undeserved gift, a spontaneous gift of divine love. The promise of salvation is of the same nature.

“It is more blessed to give than to receive;” and he that is most blest of all, the ever-blessed God, delights to give. It is as much his nature to give as it is the nature of the sun to shine, or of a river to flow. How blessed we are in being receivers! This is emphasized greatly, when we reflect how necessary it is that we should receive; for the things that we need are such that if we do not obtain them we are lost now, and lost for ever. We are without life, without light, without hope, and without peace, if we are without God. If God does not give to us according to the riches of his grace, we are then worse than naked, and poor, and miserable; we are utterly and altogether undone. It is not possible that we should deserve such rich gifts. Even if we could deserve anything, these must come to us without money and without price. A promise from God must be a boon of grace: we cannot claim that God should promise us his favour, and the priceless boons which are wrapped up in it.

This teaches us what posture to take up. Pride ill becomes dependents. He who lives upon gifts should be humble and grateful. We are beggars at the door of mercy. At the beautiful gate of the temple we sit down every day to ask an alms, not of the worshippers, but of him whom angels worship. As often as our Lord passes by, we ask and he gives; nor are we surprised that we receive from his love; for he has promised to bestow great mercies. He taught us to say, “Give Us this day our daily bread,” and therefore we are neither ashamed nor afraid to ask all things from him. Ours is a life of dependence, and we delight to have it so. It is sweet to take all things from the hands of our crucified Lord. Happy is the poverty which leads us to be rich in Christ. We earn nothing, and yet receive everything, thrice blest in being hourly partakers of the gift of God. “Whereby are *given* unto us exceeding great and precious promises.”

Beloved, this teaching as to *the promise* coming of pure gift should be exceedingly encouraging to all who feel their lost

estate, and own that they are spiritually bankrupt. To such it is a word of good cheer, that everything is freely *given* to us of God: why should he not give to them as well as to other needy ones? Those of us who rejoice in God have received all things as a free gift; why should not others receive the like? They say, “There is nothing freer than a gift:” why should not my reader receive as well as myself? To one who is willing to give, poverty, on the part of the receiver, is a recommendation instead of an obstacle. Come, then, you who are without merit, Christ will be your merit. Come, you that have no righteousness, he will be your righteousness. Come, you who are as full of sin as an egg is full of meat, and the pardoning Lord will put away your sin. Come, you who are utterly forlorn, and be made rich in Jesus. The trade of a mendicant will suit you, and you will prosper in it; for I see you have a cruel hunger, and an empty wallet. He that cannot dig should not be ashamed to beg. A beggar needs no stock-in-trade. “Old shoes and clouted,” rags worn and foul — these form a fit livery for a beggar. Are you not dressed in this fashion spiritually? The poorer the wretch, the more welcome is he at the door of divine charity. The less you have of your own, the more welcome you are to him who giveth freely and Upbraideth not.

***“Come, ye needy, come and welcome,
God’s free bounty glorify;
True belief, and true repentance,
Every grace that brings us nigh,
Without money
Come to Jesus Christ and buy.”***

Yes, it is all a gift. This is the gospel that we are sent to preach to you — “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” “This is the record, that God hath *given* to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son” (1 John 5:11). On God’s part it is all giving; on our part it is all

receiving. *The promise* is already made, and freely made: it will be fulfilled, and freely fulfilled. God does not begin with giving, and then go on to charging a price. No commission is payable upon receipt of his grace. He does not ask or receive a farthing; his love is altogether a gift. As a gift you may accept his promise: he will not degrade himself by listening to any other terms.

The word given in the text is a plain invitation to the poorest of the poor.

Oh that they would make bold to avail themselves of it! The great bell is ringing, ringing that all who will to come to the great table of infinite liberality may hear it and draw near. Freely, according to the riches of his grace, doth God promise salvation and eternal life to all who believe on his Son, Jesus Christ. His promise is firm and sure, why is it that men do not believe it?

Reader, what say you to the promise so freely given to all believers? Will you believe it and live thereby?

9. The Promise of God a Reality

Surely it is a wonderful thing that the eternal God should make promises to his own creatures. Before he pledged his word he was free to do as it pleased him; but after he has made a promise, his truth and honour bind him to do as he has said. To him, indeed, this is no limiting of his liberty; for the promise is always the declaration of his sovereign will and good pleasure, and it is ever his delight to act according to his word: yet is it marvellous condescension for the free spirit of the Lord to form for itself covenant bonds. Yet he hath done so. The Lord has made a covenant of grace with men, in which he has confirmed his promises, not only by pledging his word, but by giving his oath; “that by two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.”

In that covenant there are promises many and precious, all confirmed in Christ Jesus, and established forever upon the foundation of divine truthfulness. This is our hope, even as Paul wrote to Titus: "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began." God has promised, and on the faithfulness of that promise we build our confidence for time and eternity. We think it no imprudent thing to rest our soul's salvation upon the promise of our faithful Creator. To help us so to trust, the promises were not only spoken but written. Men say they like to have an agreement in black and white, and we have it so in this case. "In the volume of the book it is written." In the page of inspiration the record stands; and as we believe our Bibles, we are bound to rely upon the promises contained therein.

It is a cause of much weakness to many that they do not treat *the promises* of God as realities. If a friend makes them a promise, they regard it as a substantial thing, and look for that which it secures; but the declarations of God are often viewed as so many words which mean very little. This is most dishonouring to the Lord, and very injurious to ourselves. Rest assured that the Lord never trifles with words: "Hath he said, and will he not do it?" His engagements are always kept. David said of the Lord's promises to him, "Yet hast thou made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure." God speaks deliberately, in due order at determination, and we may depend upon it that his words are sure, and will be fulfilled as certainly as they are uttered. Have any who have trusted in the Lord been confounded? Can an instance be found in which our God has been false to his word? The ages cannot produce a single proof that the promise making Jehovah has run back from that which he has spoken.

We admire fidelity in men, and we cannot imagine it to be absent from the character of God, and therefore we may safely reckon upon his being as good as his word. It is said of Blucher, that when he was marching to help Wellington at Waterloo, his

troops faltered. "It can't be done," said they. "It *must* be done." was his answer. "I have promised to be there — *promised*, do you hear? You would not have me break my word." He was at Waterloo to good purpose: he would not be hindered, for his promise was given. We praise such faithfulness; we should think little of one who did not exhibit it. Shall the Lord God Almighty fail in his promise? No, he will move heaven and earth, and shake the universe, rather than be behindhand with his word. He seems to say — "It must be done. I have promised — promised, do you hear?" Sooner than his promise should fail, he spared not his own Son. Better Jesus die than the word of the Lord be broken. I say again, — depend upon it, the Lord means what he says, and will make good every syllable. Yet none but the chosen seed will believe him. *Reader*, will you?

God must be true, whoever else may deceive. If all the truth in the whole world could be gathered together, it would be but as a drop in the bucket compared with the truthfulness of God. The veracity of the most just of men is vanity itself compared with the sure truth of God. The faithfulness of the most upright of men is as a vapour, but the faithfulness of God is as a rock. If we trust in good men we ought infinitely more to trust in the good God. Why does it seem a singular thing to rest on the promise of God? Somehow it looks to many to be a dreamy, sentimental, mystical business; and yet if we view it calmly it is the most matter of fact transaction that can be. God is real: all else is shadowy. He is certain: all else is questionable. He must keep his word, this is an absolute necessity: how else could he be God? To believe God should be an act of the mind which needs no effort. Even if difficulties could be suggested, the simple and pure in heart should spontaneously say, "Let God be true and every man a liar." To give God less than an implicit faith is to rob him of an honour justly due to his spotless holiness.

Our duty to God demands that we accept his promise, and act upon it. Every honest man has a right to credence, and much

more does the God of truth deserve it. We ought to treat the promise as in itself the substance of the thing promised, just as we look upon a man's cheque or note of hand as an actual payment. Promises to pay are passed from hand to hand in daily business, as if they were current money of the merchant; and God's promises should be regarded in the same light. Let us believe that we have the petitions which we have asked of him. He warrants our so doing, and promises to reward such faith.

Let us regard the promise as a thing so sure and certain that we act upon it, and make it to be a chief figure in all our calculations. The Lord promises eternal life to those who believe in Jesus; therefore, if we really believe in Jesus, let us conclude that we have eternal life, and rejoice in the great privilege. The promise of God is our best ground of assurance; it is far more sure than dreams and visions, and fancied revelations; and it is far more to be trusted than feelings, either of joy or sorrow. It is written, "He that believeth in him is not condemned." I believe in Jesus, therefore I am not condemned. This is good reasoning, and the conclusion is certain. If God has said so, it is so, beyond all doubt. Nothing can be more certain than that which is declared by God himself; nothing more sure to happen, than that which he has guaranteed by his own hand and seal.

When a soul is under conviction, it perceives *the threatenings* of the Lord with an intensity of belief which is very noticeable, since its awe-stricken faith breeds within the heart overwhelming terror and dismay. Why should not *the promise* be accepted with a similar realization? Why not accepted with the same certainty? If it be made true in the conscience that he that believeth not shall be damned, it may be accepted with equal assurance, that he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, since the latter is as much the word of God as the former. The tendency of the awakened mind, is to dwell upon the dark side of God's word, and feel the full force of it; and at the same time to neglect the brighter portion of the record, and cast a

doubt upon it, as though it were too good to be true. This is folly. Every blessing is too good for us to receive if we measure it by our unworthiness; but no blessing is too good for God to give, if we judge of it by his surpassing excellence. It is after the nature of a God of love to give boundless blessing. If Alexander gave like a king, shall not Jehovah give like a God?

We have sometimes heard persons say, "As sure as death;" we suggest that we might as fitly say, "As sure as life." Gracious things are as sure as "terrible things in righteousness." "Whosoever believeth in Jesus shall not perish, but have everlasting life." It must be so, for God's word hath said it, and there can be no mistake about it.

Yes, the Lord means what he says. He never mocks men with barren words and empty sounds. Why should he deceive his creatures, and ask from them a barren confidence? The Lord may go beyond his word in giving more than it might be thought to mean; but he can never fall short of it. We may interpret his promises upon the most liberal scale. He never falls below the largest rendering which expectation can give to the promise. Faith never yet outstripped the bounty of the Lord. Let us embrace the promise, and rejoice that it is substance and not shadow. Let us even now rejoice in it as being the reality of that for which we are hoping.

10. The Peculiar Treasure of Believers

God's promises are the peculiar treasure of believers: the substance of faith's heritage lies in them. All the promises of our covenant God are ours to have and to hold as our personal possession. By faith we receive and embrace them, and they constitute our true riches. We have certain most precious things in actual enjoyment at this present; but the capital of our wealth, the bulk of our estate lies in *the promise* of our God. That which we have in hand is only the earnest penny of the immeasurable wage of grace which is to be paid to us in due time.

The Lord graciously gives us even now all things necessary

for this life and godliness; but his choicest blessings are held in reserve for time to come. Grace given to us from day to day is our spending money for travelling expenses on the road home; but it is not our estate. Providential supplies are rations on the march, but not the ultimate feast of love. We may miss these wayside meals, but we are bound for The Supper of The Lamb. Thieves may rob us of our ready cash; but our peculiar treasure is hid with Christ in God beyond all fear of loss. The hand which bled to make this treasure ours is keeping it for us.

It is a great joy to have a full assurance of our interest in the promises: but this joyful feeling we may lose, and we may find it hard to get it again, and yet the eternal inheritance will be quite as truly ours. It is as though a man should have in his hand a fair copy of his title-deeds, and should much delight himself in reading it until by some mischance his copy is stolen or mislaid. The loss of his writings is not the loss of his rights. His comfortable reading of the title-deed is suspended, but his claim to his property is not shaken. The covenant promise is entailed upon every joint-heir with Christ, and there is no such thing as the breaking of this entail. Many an event may tend to shake the believer's sense of security, but "the promise is sure to all the seed." Our greatest possession lies not in any present comfort or confidence which we receive from the promise but in *the promise* itself, and in the glorious heritage which it secures to us. Our inheritance lies not on this side Jordan. Our city of habitation is not within the borders of the present: we see it from afar, but we wait for its full enjoyment in that illustrious day when our covenant Head shall be revealed in his glory, and all his people with him. God's providence is our earthly pension; but God's *promise* is our heavenly heritage.

Did it ever occur to you to inquire why the way of God's dealing with his chosen should be by promises? He could have bestowed his blessings at once, and without giving us notice of his intention. In this way he would have obviated the necessity of a covenant concerning them. There was no necessity in the

nature of things for this plan of promising. The Lord might have given us all the mercies we needed, without pledging himself to do so. God, with his great strength of will, and firmness of purpose, could have secretly resolved in himself to do all that he does unto believers without having made them the confidants of his divine counsels. Many a decree hath he kept secret from the foundations of the world; why, then, hath he revealed his purposes of blessing? Why is it that his dealings with his people from the gate of Eden till now have been upon the footing of publicly expressed promises?

Does not the question answer itself? In the first place, *we could not have been believers if there had not been a promise in which to believe*. If the system of salvation is to be by faith, a promise must be made upon which faith can exercise itself. The plan of salvation by faith is selected because it is most suitable to the principle of grace; and this involves the giving of promises, that faith may have both food and foundation. Faith without a promise would be a foot without ground to stand upon; and such a faith, if faith it could be called, would be unworthy of the plan of grace. Faith being chosen as the great evangelical command, the promise becomes an essential part of the gospel dispensation.

Moreover, it is a charming thought that *our good God designedly gives us promises of good things that we may enjoy them twice; first by faith, and then by fruition*. He gives twice by giving by promise; and we also receive twice in embracing the promise by faith. The time for the fulfilment of many a promise is not by-and-by; but by faith we realize the promise, and the foreshadowing of the expected blessing fills our souls with the benefit long before it actually comes. We have an instance of this upon a large scale in Old Testament saints. The great promise of the seed in whom the nations should be blessed was the ground of faith, the foundation of hope, and the cause of salvation to thousands of believers before the Son of God actually appeared among men. Did not our Lord say, “Abraham

saw my day: he saw it, and was glad?" The great father of the faithful saw the day of Christ through the telescope of God's promise, by the eye of faith; and though Abraham did not obtain the fulfilment of that promise, but fell asleep before the coming of the Lord, as did Isaac, and Jacob, and many others of the saints, yet he had Christ to trust in, Christ to rejoice in, and Christ to love and serve. Before he was born in Bethlehem, or offered upon Calvary, Jesus was so seen of the faithful as to make them glad. The promise gave them a Saviour before the Saviour actually appeared. So is it with us at this time: by means of the promise we enter into possession of things not seen as yet. By anticipation we make the coming blessing present to us. Faith obliterates time, annihilates distance, and brings future things at once into its possession. The Lord has not as yet given us to join the hallelujahs of heaven: we have not yet passed through the gates of pearl, nor have we trodden the streets of transparent gold; but the promise of such felicity lights up the gloom of our affliction, and yields us immediate foretastes of glory. We triumph by faith before our hands actually grasp the palm. We reign with Christ by faith before our heads are encircled with our unfading coronets. Many and many a time we have seen the dawn of heaven while we have beheld light breaking from the promise. When faith has been vigorous we have climbed where Moses stood and gazed upon the land which floweth with milk and honey; and then, when Atheist has declared that there is no Celestial City, we have answered, "Did we not see it from the Delectable Mountains?" We have seen enough by means of the promise to make us quite sure of the glory which the Lord hath prepared for them that love him; and thus we have obtained our first draught of the promised bliss, and found therein a sure pledge of our full and final enjoyment of it.

Do you not think that the promise also is intended *to lead us constantly away from the things that are seen, onward and upward to the spiritual and the unseen?* The man who lives on

the promise of God has risen into quite another atmosphere than that which oppresses us in these low-lying vales of daily life. "It is better," says one, "to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in men. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes." And so, indeed, it is; for it is more spiritual, more noble, more inspiring. We need to be raised to this elevated trust by divine power; for our soul naturally cleaveth unto the dust. Alas! we are hampered by our idolatrous desire to see, and touch, and handle: we trust our senses, but have not sense enough to trust our God. The same spirit which led Israel to cry in the wilderness, "Make us gods to go before us," leads us to sigh for something tangible by flesh and blood, whereon our confidence may take hold. We hunger for proofs, tokens, and evidences, and will not accept the divine promise as better and surer than all visible signs. Thus we pine away in hungering for tokens and evidences which are visible, till we are driven to try the better and surer things which are invisible. Oh, it is a blessed thing for a child of God to be made to quit the sand of things temporal for the rock of things eternal, by being called upon to walk by the rule of the promise!

Furthermore, *the promises are to our hearts a help to the realization of the Lord himself.* The child of God, when he believes the promise, is brought to feel that God is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him. Our tendency is to get away from a real God. We live and move in the region of materialism, and we are apt to be enthralled by its influences. We feel these bodies to be real when we have pain in them, and this world to be real when we are weighted with its crosses: yet the body is a poor tent, and the world a mere bubble. These visible things are insubstantial, but they appear sadly solid to us: what we need is to know the invisible to be quite as real as that which is seen, and even more so. We need a living God in this dying world, and we must have him truly near us, or we shall fail. The Lord is training his people to perceive himself: the promise is part of this educational process.

When the Lord gives us faith, and we rest on his promise, then are we brought face to face with him. We ask, "Who gave this promise? Who is to fulfil this promise?" and our thoughts are thus led into the presence of the glorious Jehovah. We feel how necessary he is to the whole system of our spiritual life; and how truly he enters into it, so that in him we live, and move, and have our being. If the promise cheers us, it is only because there is God at the back of it; for the mere words of the promise are nothing to us except as they come from the lips of God who cannot lie, and except as they are wrought out by that hand which cannot fail. The promise is the forecast of the divine purpose, the shadow of the coming blessing; in fact, it is the token of God's own nearness to us. We are cast upon God for the fulfilment of his engagements, and that is one of his reasons for dealing with us after the method of promise. Perhaps if the Lord had dropped our mercies at our door without a previous hint of their coming, we should not have cared to know whence they came. If he had sent them with unbroken regularity, even as he makes his sun to rise every morning, we might have slighted them as common results of natural laws, and so have forgotten God because of the punctuality of his providence. Certainly we should have lacked that grand test of the being and loving-kindness of God which we now receive as we read the promise, accept it by faith, plead it in prayer, and in due season see it fulfilled.

That regularity of divine bounty which ought to sustain and increase faith is often the means of weakening it. He whose bread comes to him by a government annuity or a quarterly rent, is tempted to forget that God has any hand in it. It ought not to be so; but through the hardness of our hearts such an ill result does frequently follow from the constancy of a gracious providence.

I should not wonder if those Israelites who were born in the wilderness, and had gathered manna every morning for years, had also ceased to wonder at it, or to see the hand of the Lord in

it. Shameful stupidity! but, ah, how common! Many a person has lived from hand to mouth, and seen the hand of the Lord in the gift of every morsel of bread: at last by God's goodness he has prospered in this world, and obtained a regular income, which he has received without care and trouble, and shortly he has come to look at it as the natural result of his own industry, and has no longer praised the loving-kindness of the Lord. To be living without the conscious presence of the Lord is a horrible state of affairs. Supplied, but not by God! Sustained without the hand of God! It were better to be poor, or sick, or exiled, and thus to be driven to approach our heavenly Father. To avoid our coming under the curse of forgetting God, the Lord is pleased to put his choicest blessings into connection with his own promises, and to call forth our faith in reference to them. He will not allow his mercies to become veils to hide his face from the eyes of our love; but he makes them windows through which he looks upon us. The Promiser is seen in the promise, and we watch to see his hand in the performance; thus are we saved from that natural atheism which lurks within the heart of man.

I think it well to repeat that *we are put under the regime of promise in order that we may grow in faith*. How could there be faith without a promise? How growing faith without grasping more and more of the promise? We are made to remember in the hour of need, that God has said, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee." Faith believes this word, calls upon God, and finds herself delivered: thus she is strengthened, and made to glorify the Lord.

Sometimes faith does not find the promise fulfilled at the moment; but she has to wait a while. This is fine exercise for her, and serves to test her sincerity and force: this test brings assurance to the believer, and fills him with comfort. By-and-by the answer is given to prayer, the promised boon is bestowed, faith is crowned with victory, and glory is given to God; but meanwhile the delay has produced the patience of hope, and

made every mercy to wear a double value. Promises afford training-ground for faith: these are poles and leaping-bars for the athletic exercise of our young faith, by the use of which it grows to be so strong that it can break through a troop, or leap over a wall. When our confidence in God is firm we laugh at impossibility, and cry, "It shall be done;" but this could not be if there were not an infallible promise wherewith faith could gird itself.

Those promises which as yet are unfulfilled are precious helps to our advance in the spiritual life. We are encouraged by exceeding great and precious promises to aspire to higher things. The prospect of good things to come strengthens us to endure, and to press forward. You and I are like little children who are learning to walk, and are induced to take step after step by an apple being held out to them. We are persuaded to try the trembling legs of our faith by the sight of a promise. Thus we are drawn to go a step nearer to our God. The little one is very apt to cling to a chair, it is hard to get it to quit all hold, and venture upon its feet; but at last it becomes daring enough for a tiny trip, which it ends at its mother's knees. This little venture leads to another and another, till it runs alone. The apple plays a great part in the training of the babe, and so does the promise in the education of faith. Promise after promise have we received, till now, I trust, we can give up crawling on the earth, and clinging to the things which rest upon it, and can commit ourselves to the walk of faith.

The promise is a needful instrument in the education of our souls in all manner of spiritual graces and actions. How often have I said, "My Lord, I have received much from thee, blessed be thy name for it; but there is yet a promise more which I have not enjoyed; therefore I will go forward till I attain its fulfilment! The future is an unknown country, but I enter it with thy promise, and expect to find in it the same goodness and mercy which have followed me hitherto; yea, I look for greater things than these."

Nor must I forget to remind you, that *the promise is part of the economy of our spiritual condition here below because it excites prayer*. What is prayer but the promise pleaded? A promise is, so to speak, the raw material of prayer. Prayer irrigates the fields of life with the waters which are stored up in the reservoirs of promise. The promise is the power of prayer. We go to God, and we say to him, "Do as thou hast said. O Lord, here is thy word; we beseech thee fulfil it." Thus the promise is the bow by which we shoot the arrows of supplication. I like in my time of trouble to find a promise which exactly fits my need, and then to put my finger on it, and say, "Lord, this is thy word; I beseech thee to prove that it is so, by carrying it out in my case. I believe that this is thine own writing; and I pray thee make it good to my faith." I believe in plenary inspiration, and I humbly look to the Lord for a plenary fulfilment of every sentence that he has put on record. I delight to hold the Lord to the very words that he has used, and to expect him to do as he has said, because he has said it. It is a great thing to be driven to prayer by necessity; but it is a better thing to be drawn to it by the expectation which the promise arouses. Should we pray at all if God did not find us an occasion for praying, and then encourage us with gracious promises of an answer? As it is, in the order of providence we are tried, and then we try the promises; we are brought to spiritual hunger, and then we are fed on the word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God. By the system which the Lord follows with his chosen we are kept in constant intercourse with him, and are not allowed to forget our heavenly Father: we are often at the throne of grace, blessing God for promises fulfilled, and pleading promises on which we rely. We pay innumerable visits to the divine dwelling-place, because there is a promise to plead, and a God waiting to be gracious. Is not this an order of things for which to be grateful? Ought we not to magnify the Lord that he doth not pour upon us showers of unpromised blessings, but he enhances the value of his

benefits by making them the subjects of his promises and the objects of our faith?

11. The Valuation of the Promises

“Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises” 2 Peter 1:4.

We have thought upon *the promises* as our treasure: it is time that we should take a survey of them, and calculate their value. Since the promises are our estate, let us form a correct estimate of our wealth: possibly we may not fully know how rich we are. It will be a pity to pine in poverty from ignorance of our large property. May the Holy Spirit help us to form a due valuation of the riches of grace and glory reserved for us in the covenant of promise!

The apostle Peter speaks of the promises as “*exceeding great and precious.*” They do indeed exceed all things with which they can be compared. None ever promised as God has done. Kings have promised even to the half of their kingdoms; but what of that? God promised to give his own Son, and even his own Self, to his people; and he did it. Princes draw a line somewhere, but the Lord sets no bounds to the gifts which he ordains for his chosen.

The promises of God not only exceed all precedent, but they also exceed all imitation. Even with God himself for an example, none have been able to vie with him in the language of liberality. The promises of Jehovah are as much above all other promises as the heavens are above the earth.

They also exceed all expectation. He does for us “*exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or even think.*” Nobody could have imagined that the Lord would have made such promises as he has made: they surpass the dreams of romance. Even the most sanguine hopes are left far behind, and the loftiest conceptions are outdone. The Bible must be true, for it could not have been invented: the promises contained in it are greater for quantity and better for quality than the most expectant could

have looked for. God surprises us with the surpassing fullness of his cheering words: he overwhelms us with favours till, like David, we sit down in wonder, and cry, "Whence is this to me?"

The promises exceed all measurement: there is an abyss of depth in them as to meaning, a heaven of height in them as to excellence, and an ocean of breadth in them as to duration. We might say of every promise, "It is high: I cannot attain to it." As a whole, the promises exhibit the fullness and all-sufficiency of God: like God himself they fill all things. Unbounded in their range, they are everywhere about us, whether we wake or sleep, go forth or return. They cover the whole of life from the cradle to the tomb. A sort of omnipresence may be ascribed to them; for they surround us in all places, and at all times. They are our pillow when we fall asleep, and when we awake they are still with us. "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them!" "Exceeding" all conception and calculation; we admire them and adore their Giver, but we can never measure them.

The promises even exceed all experience. Those men of God who have known the Lord for fifty or sixty years have never yet extracted the whole of the marrow from his promise. Still it might be said, "the arrow is beyond thee." Somewhat better and deeper yet remains to be searched out in the future. He who dives deepest by experience into the depths of the divine promises is fully aware that there is yet a lower depth of grace and love unfathomable. The promise is longer than life, broader than sin, deeper than the grave, and higher than the clouds. He that is most acquainted with the golden book of promise is still a new beginner in its study: even the ancients of Israel find that this volume passeth knowledge.

Certainly I need not say that the promises exceed all expression. If all the tongues of men and of angels were given me, I could not tell you how great are the promises of God. They exceed not only one language, but all languages: they surpass the glowing praises of all the enthusiasts that have ever

spoken. Even angels before the throne still desire to look into these marvels, for they cannot yet reach the mystery — the length, and breadth, and height. In Christ Jesus everything exceeds description; and the promises in him exhaust the force of all speech, human or divine. Vain is it for me to attempt the impossible.

Exceeding “*great*” Peter says they are; and he knew right well. They come from a great God, they assure us of great love, they come to great sinners, they work for us great results, and deal with great matters. They are as great as greatness itself; they bring us the great God, to be our God for ever and ever. God’s first promise was that in which he engaged to give us his Son. We are wont to say, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift,” but let not the words glide too easily over the tongue. For God to give his Only-begotten Son is beyond all conception a great deed of love: indeed, “great” seems too little a word to describe such a miracle of love. When the Lord had given his Son, freely delivering up for us all — what then? He promised to give the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, to abide with us for ever. Can we measure the value of that great promise? The Holy Ghost came down at Pentecost, in fulfilment of that ancient prophecy: was not that marvellous descent an exceeding great and precious gift? Remember that the Holy Spirit works in us all those graces which prepare us for the society of heaven. Glory be to God for this visitation of boundless grace!

What next? Our Lord has given us now the promise that he will “come again a second time without a sin offering unto salvation.” Can all the saints put together fully measure the greatness of the promise of the Second Advent? This means infinite felicity for saints, What else has he promised? Why, that because he lives we shall live also. We shall possess an immortality of bliss for our souls; we shall enjoy also a resurrection for our bodies; we shall reign with Christ; we shall be glorified at his right hand. Promises fulfilled and promises unfulfilled, promises for time and promises for eternity — they

are indeed so great that it is impossible to conceive of their being greater.

***“What more can he say than to you he hath said?
You who unto Jesus for refuge have fled.”***

O ye whose minds are trained to lofty thought, tell me your estimate of the faithful promises! I perceive a promise of the pardon of sin. O ye forgiven ones, declare the greatness of this boon! There is the promise of adoption. Children of God, you begin to know what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on you in this; tell out your joy! There is the promise of help in every time of need. Tried ones, you know how the Lord sustains and delivers his chosen; proclaim the largeness of his grace! There is the promise that as your day your strength shall be. You that are working hard for Christ, or bearing his cross from day to day, you feel how exceeding great is that promise of sure support. What a word is this: “No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly!” What a sentence is this: “All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose!” Who can estimate the breadth of such a gracious assurance? No, you need not take that foot-rule from your pocket: it will not serve you here. If you could take the distance of a fixed star as your base, all reckoning would still be impossible. All the chains that ever measured the acres of the wealthy are useless here. A certain millionaire glories that his estate reaches from sea to sea; but no ocean can bound the possessions secured to us by the promise of our faithful God. The theme is so exceeding great that it exceeds my power of expression, and therefore I forbear.

The verse, upon which we are now thinking, speaks of “exceeding great *and precious promises.*” Greatness and preciousness seldom go together; but in this instance they are united in an exceeding degree. When the Lord opens his mouth to make a promise, it is sure to be worthy of him: he speaks words of exceeding power and richness. Instead of trying to

speaking of the preciousness of the promises doctrinally, I will fall back upon the experience of those who have tried and proved them.

Beloved, how precious the promises are to the poor and needy! They that know their spiritual poverty discern the value of the promise which meets their case. How precious, also, are the promises, to those who have enjoyed the fulfilment of them! We can go back in memory to times and seasons when we were brought low, and the Lord helped us according to his word. Even before he brought us up out of the horrible pit, we were kept from sinking in the deep mire by looking forward to the time when he would appear for our rescue. His promise kept us from dying of hunger long before we reached the feast of love. In the expectation of future trial our confidence is in the promise. Thus it is very precious to us even before it is actually fulfilled. The more we believe the promise, the more we find in it to believe. So precious is the word of the Lord to us, that we could part with everything we have rather than throw away a single sentence of it. We cannot tell which promise of the Lord we may next need: that which we have hardly noticed may yet turn out at a certain moment to be essential to our life. Thank God, we are not called to part with any one of the jewels from the breastplate of Holy Scripture: they are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus to the glory of God by us!

How precious are the promises when we lie sick, gazing into eternity by the month together, sorely tried and tempted through pain and weariness! All depressing circumstances lose their power for evil when our faith takes firm hold upon the promises of God. How sweet to feel I have my head on the promise, and my heart on the promise: I rest on the truth of the Most High! Not on earthly vanity, but on heavenly verity, do I repose. There is nothing to be found elsewhere comparable to this perfect rest. The pearl of peace is found among the precious promises. That is precious indeed which can support dying men, and cause them to pass into eternity with as much delight as if they were

going to a marriage-feast. That which lasts for ever, and lasts good for ever, is most precious. That which brings all things with it, and hath all things in it, — that is precious indeed; and such is the promise of God.

If such be the greatness and preciousness of the promises, *let us joyfully accept and believe them*. Shall I urge the child of God to do this? No, I will not so dishonour him; surely he will believe his own Father! Surely, surely, it ought to be the easiest thing in the world for the sons and daughters of the Most High to believe in him who has given them power to become the children of God! My brethren, let us not stagger at the promise through unbelief, but believe up to the hilt!

Furthermore, *let us know the promises*. Should we not carry them at our fingers' ends? Should we not know them better than anything else? The promises should be the classics of believers. If you have not read the last new book, and have not heard the last Act of the Government, yet know right well what God the Lord hath said, and look to see his word made good. We ought to be so versed in Scripture as always to have at the tip of our tongue the promise which most exactly meets our case. We ought to be transcripts of Scripture: the divine promise should be as much written upon our hearts as upon the pages of the Book. It is a sad pity that any child of God should be unaware of the existence of the royal promise which would enrich him. It is pitiful for any one of us to be like the poor man, who had a fortune left him, of which he knew nothing, and therefore he went on sweeping a crossing, and begging for pence. What is the use of having an anchor at home when your ship is in a storm at sea? What avails a promise which you cannot remember so as to plead it in prayer? Whatever else you do not know, do endeavour to be familiar with those words of the Lord which are more needful to our souls than bread to our bodies.

Let us also make use of the promises. A little while ago, a friend gave me a cheque for certain charities, and he said to me, "Be sure that you pay it into the bank today." You may rest

assured that this was done. I do not keep cheques to look at, and play with: they go to the banker's, and the cash is received and expended.

The precious promises of our great God are expressly intended to be taken to him, and exchanged for the blessings which they guarantee. Prayer takes the promise to the Bank of Faith, and obtains the golden blessing. Mind how you pray. Make real business of it. Let it never be a dead formality. Some people pray a long time, but do not get what they are supposed to ask for, because they do not plead the promise in a truthful, businesslike way. If you were to go into a bank, and stand an hour talking to the clerk, and then come out again without your cash, what would be the good of it? If I go to a bank, I pass my cheque across the counter, take up my money, and go about my business: that is the best way of praying. Ask for what you want, because the Lord has promised it. Believe that you have the blessing, and go forth to your work in full assurance of it. Go from your knees singing, because the promise is fulfilled: thus will your prayer be answered. It is not the length of your prayer, but the strength of your prayer which wins with God; and the strength of prayer lies in your faith in the promise which you have pleaded before the Lord.

Lastly, *talk about the promises*. Tell the King's household what the King has said. Never keep God's lamps under bushels. Promises are proclamations; exhibit them on the wall; read them aloud at the market-cross. Oh, that our conversation were more often sweetened with the precious promises of God! After dinner we often sit for half-an-hour, and pull our ministers to pieces, or scandalize our neighbours. How often is this the Sunday's amusement! It would be far better if we said, "Now, friend, quote a promise," and if the other replied, "And you mention a promise too." Then let each one speak according to his own personal knowledge concerning the Lord's fulfilment of those promises, and let every one present tell the story of the Lord's faithfulness to him. By such holy converse we should

warm our own hearts, and gladden one another's spirits, and the Sabbath would thus be rightly spent.

Business men speak of their trade, travellers of their adventures, and farmers of their crops; should not we abundantly utter the memory of the Lord's goodness, and talk of his faithfulness? If we did so, we should all endorse Peter's statement, that our God has given unto us "*exceeding great and precious promises.*"

12. The Lord's Promise — the Rule of His Giving

"And the LORD gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him" 1 Kings 5:12.

How the Lord wrought wisdom in Solomon I do not know; but he promised that he would give him wisdom, and he kept his word. The more you think of this the more remarkable will the fact appear. Solomon was not born under the most hopeful circumstances for wisdom. As the darling child of a somewhat aged father, he was highly likely to be spoiled. As a young man who came to a throne before he was at all fitted for it in the course of nature, he was very likely to have made great blunders and mistakes. As a man of strong animal passions, which in the end overpowered him, he seemed more likely to prove a profligate than a philosopher. As a person possessing great wealth, unlimited power, and unvarying prosperity, he had little of that trying experience by which men acquire wisdom. Who were his teachers? Who taught him to be wise? His penitent mother may have set before him much of sound morality and religion, but she could never have imparted to him the eminent degree of wisdom which raised him above all other men and set him upon the pinnacle of renown. He knew more than others, and therefore could not have borrowed his wisdom from them. Sages sat at his feet, and his fame brought pilgrims from the ends of the earth: none could have been his tutors, since he surpassed them all. How did this man rise to absolute

pre-eminence in wisdom, so as to make his name throughout all time the synonym for a wise man?

It is a very mysterious process this creation of a master mind. Who shall give a young man wisdom? You can impart knowledge to him, but not wisdom. No tutor, no master, no divine, can give another man wisdom: he has much ado to get a little of it for himself. Yet God gave Solomon largeness of heart as the sands of the sea, and wisdom unrivalled; for God can do all things. By operations known only to himself, the Lord produced in the young king a capacity for observation, reasoning, and prudent action, seldom if ever equalled. We have often admired the wisdom of Solomon; I invite you still more to admire the wisdom of Jehovah, by whom Solomon's marvellous genius was produced.

The reason why the Lord wrought this wonder upon Solomon was because *he had promised to do it, and he is sure to keep his word*. Many another text would serve my turn as well as this one, for all I desire to bring out of it is this — that whatever God has promised to anyone, he will surely give it to him. Whether it be wisdom to Solomon, or grace to my reader, if the Lord has made the promise, he will not allow it to be a dead letter. The God who performed his word in this very remarkable instance, where the matter was so entirely beyond human power, and was surrounded with such disadvantageous circumstances, will accomplish his promise in other cases, however difficult and mysterious the process of performance may be. God will always keep his word to the letter; yea, and he will usually go beyond what the letter seems to mean. In this instance, while he gave Solomon wisdom, he also added to him riches, and a thousand other things which did not appear in the compact. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.” He who makes promises about infinite blessings, will throw in everyday things as if they were of small account, and were given in as a matter of course, like the grocer's paper and string

with which he packs up our purchases.

From the case of Solomon, and thousands of a similar kind, we learn first that *the rule of God's giving is — as he has promised.*

The page of history sparkles with instances. The Lord promised to our fallen parents that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head: behold, that wondrous Seed of the woman has appeared, and has gotten for himself, and for us, the glorious victory of our redemption! In the fulfilment of that one promise we have security for the keeping of all the rest. When God promised to Noah that entering into the ark he would be safe, he found it so. Not one of those innumerable waves which destroyed the antediluvian world, could break into his place of safety. When God said to Abraham that he would give him a seed, and a land which should be the possession of that seed, it seemed impossible; but Abraham believed God, and in due time rejoiced to behold Isaac, and to see in him the promised heir. When the Lord promised to Jacob that he would be with him and do him good, he kept his word, and gave him the deliverance for which he wrestled at the brook Jabbok. That long-slumbering promise, that the seed of Israel should possess the land which flowed with milk and honey; it did seem as if it would never be accomplished, when the tribes were reduced to slavery in Egypt, and Pharaoh held them with iron grip, and would not let them go. But God, who undertook for his people, brought them out with a high hand, and with an outstretched arm, on the very day in which he promised to rescue them. He divided the Red Sea also, and he led his people through the wilderness, for he assured them that he would do so. He clave the Jordan in twain, and he drove out the Canaanites before his people, and gave to Israel the land for their inheritance, even as he had promised. The histories of the Lord's faithfulness are so many, that time would fail us to repeat them all. God's words have always in due time been justified by God's acts. God has dealt with men according to his promise. Whenever they have

taken hold upon the promise, and said, “Do as thou hast said,” God has responded to the plea, and proved that it is no vain thing to trust him. Throughout all time it has been God’s unvarying rule to keep his word to the letter, and to the moment.

“This is big talk” says one; then we will descend to smaller talk. *It is God’s way to keep his promise to each individual.* We ourselves are living witnesses that God forgets not his word. Tens of thousands of us can testify that we have trusted in him and have never been confounded. I was once a broken-hearted sinner, cowering down beneath the black cloud of almighty wrath, guilty and self-condemned, and I felt that if I were banished for ever from Jehovah’s presence, I could not say a word against the justice of the sentence. When I read in his word, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins,” I went to him. Tremblingly I resolved to test his promise. I acknowledged my transgressions unto the Lord, and he forgave the iniquity of my sin. I am telling no idle tale, for the deep, restful peace which came to my heart in the moment of forgiveness was such that it seemed as if I had begun a new life; as, indeed, I had.

This is how it came about: I heard, one Sabbath day, a poor man speak upon that promise, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth.” I could not understand how a mere look to Christ could save me. It seemed too simple an act to effect so great a result; but, as I was ready to try anything, I LOOKED — *I looked to Jesus.*

It was all I did. It was all I could do. I looked unto him who is set forth as a propitiation for sin; and in a moment I saw that I was reconciled to God. I saw that if Jesus suffered in my stead, I could not suffer too; and that if he bore all my sin, I had no more sin to bear. My iniquity must be blotted out if Jesus bore it in my stead, and suffered all its penalty. With that thought there came into my spirit a sweet sense of peace with God through Jesus Christ my Lord. The promise was true, and I found it to be so. It happened some six-and-thirty years ago, but I have

never lost the sense of that complete salvation which I then found, nor have I lost that peace which so sweetly dawned upon my spirit. *Since then I have never relied in vain upon a promise of God. I have been placed in positions of great peril, have known great need, have felt sharp pain, and have been weighted with incessant anxieties; but the Lord had been true to every line of his word, and when I have trusted him he has carried me through everything without a failure. I am bound to speak well of him, and I do so.* TO THIS I SET MY HAND AND SEAL, *without hesitation or reserve.*

The experience of all believers is to much the same effect: we began our new lives of joy and peace by believing the promise-making God, and we continue to live in the same manner. A long list of fulfilled promises is present to our happy memories, awakening our gratitude and confirming our confidence. We have tested the faithfulness of our God year after year, in a great many ways, but always with the same result. We have gone to him with promises of the common things of life, relating to daily bread, and raiment, and children, and home; and the Lord has dealt graciously with us. We have resorted to him concerning sickness, and slander, and doubt, and temptation; and never has he failed us. In little things he has been mindful of us: even the hairs of our head have been numbered. When it appeared very unlikely that the promise could be kept, it has been fulfilled with remarkable exactness. We have been broken down by the falseness of man, but we have exulted and do exult in the truthfulness of God. It brings the tears into our eyes to think of the startling ways in which Jehovah, our God, has wrought to carry out his gracious promises.

***“Thus far we prove that promise good,
Which Jesus ratified with blood:
Still he is faithful, wise, and just,
And still in him believers trust.”***

Let me freely speak to all who trust in the Lord. Children of

God, has not your heavenly Father been true to you? Is not this your constant experience, that you are always failing, but *he* never fails? Well said our apostle, “Though we believe not, he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.” We may interpret divine language in its broadest sense, and we shall find that the Lord’s promise is kept to the utmost of its meaning. The rule of his giving is large and liberal: the promise is a great vessel, and the Lord fills it to overflowing. As the Lord in Solomon’s case gave him “*as he promised him,*” so will he in every instance so long as the world standeth.

O reader! believe the promise, and thus prove yourself to be an inheritor of it. May the Holy Spirit lead you thus to do, for Jesus’ sake!

The second of three booklets.

