**Standing on the Promises of God: An Anatomy of Faith**

***An Excurses on Romans 4***

“Apart from thee I quickly die, bereft of thee I starve, far from thee I thirst and droop; But thou art all I need. Let me continually grasp the promise, ‘I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.’” (“Blessings” from *The Valley of Vision*)

1. **The Definition of Faith: *Standing on the Promises of God***

“Trust or dependence on God based on the fact that we take him at his word and believe what he has said. [Saving Faith] Trust in Jesus as a living person for forgiveness of sins and for eternal life with God.” (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 1242, 1254)

“Faith involves the intellect, the will, and the affections. It is knowledge (*notitia*), assent (*assensus*), and trust (*fiducia*). Given definition by doctrine, faith is nevertheless directed to a person: the triune God as he has revealed himself in Christ as our Redeemer. . . . We must always distinguish between what faith is and what faith does. Faith does many things; it is always active, bearing fruit. However, in the act of justification, faith only receives, embraces, and clings to Christ; it does not do anything but receives everything.” (Michael Horton, *Pilgrim Theology*, pp. 268-269)

“. . . faith is that first moment of trust in Christ that brings us into eternal fellowship with God. But faith doesn’t stop after that first moment. It persists throughout the Christian life and is important in our day-to-day relationship with God. Paul says that faith, hope, and love ‘abide’; they remain throughout life (1 Cor. 13:13). We see in Hebrews 11 how the great saints of the Old Testament acted again and again ‘by faith.’ In this passage and elsewhere, there is a contrast between faith and sight (cf. 2 Cor. 5:7). Don’t take this the wrong way. Walking by faith is not walking in the dark. The heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 had a good understanding of where they were going. God’s Word had promised them the blessings of the covenant, and they knew they could trust those promises. As we have seen, faith is based on knowledge. But it’s the knowledge of God’s Word, not the knowledge of the eyes.” (John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, p. 955)

1. **The Object of Faith: *Jesus Christ, the Author and Finisher of Faith***

“Much more then, having now been justified by his blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through him” (Rom. 5:9). “The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 Jn. 1:7). What does it mean that justification is based on the blood of Jesus? It means that justification proceeds on the basis of a ransom paid; it proceeds on the basis of the satisfaction of justice. In other words, when God ‘justifies’ a person, he is not looking at the person himself. Rather, he is looking at the blood of Christ. We are ‘justified by his blood’! God does not justify a man on the basis of anything in the man. In particular, it is not because the man is – in any way, shape, or form – godly that God justifies him. We are specifically told in Romans 4:5 that God ‘justifies the ungodly’! These are truly amazing and wonderful words. Do you feel unworthy of being justified? You are! Everything about you cries out instead for your damnation. Apart from the blood and righteousness of Christ, you have no hope. There is nothing in man that causes God to justify him, including his repentance and faith. Repentance does not pay for sin. A criminal’s remorse for his crimes does not satisfy the just demands of the law. Neither does faith pay for sin! Only the blood of Jesus can pay for sin! Justification is based on the blood of Christ.” (Charles Leiter, *Justification and Regeneration*, p. 34)

“The New Covenant is radically more effective than the old. It is enacted on the foundation of Jesus’ suffering and death. ‘He is the mediator of a new covenant’ (Heb. 9:15). Jesus said that his blood was the ‘blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many’ (Mk. 14:24). This means that the blood of Jesus purchased the power and the promises of the new covenant. It is supremely effective because Christ died to make it so. . . . To guarantee that this covenant will not fail, Christ takes the initiative to create faith and secure the faithfulness of his people. He brings a new-covenant people into being by writing the law not just on stone, but on the heart. In contrast with the ‘letter’ on stone, he says ‘the Spirit gives life’ (2 Cor. 3:6). ‘When we were dead in our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ’ (Eph. 2:5). This is the spiritual life that enables us to see and believe in the glory of Christ. This miracle creates a new-covenant people. It is sure and certain because Christ bought it with his own blood. And the miracle is not only the creation of our faith, but the securing of our faithfulness. ‘I will make with them an everlasting covenant . . . I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me’ (Jer. 32:40). When Christ died, he secured for his people not only new hearts but new security. He will not let them turn from him. He will keep them. They will persevere. The blood of the covenant guarantees it.” (John Piper, *Fifty Reasons Why Jesus Came to Die*, pp. 46-47)

1. **The Life of Faith: *Understanding and Applying God’s Promises***

The various kinds of divine promises (taken from *Living by God’s Promises* by Joel Beeke and James LaBelle):

1. ***Legal*** promises are conditioned on perfect righteousness. An example of such a promise can be found in Jeremiah 7:23: “But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you.” Given our sinful nature and inability to keep a single command of God, this class of promises would be ineffective for us had not Christ, as our Head, Representative, and Savior, rendered the righteousness on which they depend for fulfillment. Through faith in Christ, we uphold the law of God (Rom. 3:31; 8:1-4) and thereby become heirs of these promises (Gal. 3:14, 29).
2. ***Evangelical*** promises are conditional on believing and repenting (Jn. 3:36). . . . These promises are fulfilled, not for the sake of the person who believes or repents, as if those were meritorious acts in the sight of God, but rather because of Christ, the One in whom we have meritorious acceptance before God. . . . [Legal and Evangelical Promises] show the importance of faith but make plain that the faith of those who inherit the promises of God must be in Christ, who alone has satisfied the righteous requirements of God’s law.
3. ***General*** promises are indefinite declarations of good that God offers to all. There is no limit on who may believe and receive such promises because God designed them as the refuge of many and a primary means of drawing sinners to Christ (Jn. 6:44-45). . . . By contrast, particular promises are directed to special groups of people. In Exodus 20:12, God promises long life only to those children who honor their fathers and mothers.
4. ***Principal*** promises are spiritual and therefore are of the greatest concern. They include the promise of righteousness (Rom. 4:5) and the remission of sins (1 Jn. 1:9). Less principal promises are temporal and include promises such as deliverance from affliction, safety in danger, health, and wealth.
5. ***Direct*** promises are made to individuals, such as Paul on his tempestuous voyage to Rome (Acts 27:22-25), when an angel said to him, “Far not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee” (v. 24). . . . In addition, some promises can be distinguished as pertaining either to this life, whether spiritual or temporal, or to the life to come, such as the promise of eternal life. . . . We must distinguish between absolute and conditional promises. An absolute promise declares what the Lord determines to accomplish without any reference to what we do. . . . Conditional promises, by contrast, are “no further promised than God in his wisdom sees to be best for his own glory and his children’s good.” . . . Knowing what kind of promise we are dealing with not only guides us in appropriating it but also guards us against the evil of presumption.
6. **The Fuel of Faith: *Treasuring Our Union with Christ***

Excerpts from “The Stupendous Reality of Being in Christ Jesus” by John Piper January 25, 2012

In Christ, he gave us grace in Christ Jesus before the ages began (2 Tim. 1:9).

In Christ, God chose us before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4).

In Christ, nothing can separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:38-39).

In Christ, we are redeemed and forgiven of all our sins (Eph. 1:7).

In Christ, we are justified in God’s sight and the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us (2 Cor. 5:21).

In Christ, we have become new; the old life is gone (2 Cor. 5:17).

In Christ, we have been seated in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6).

In Christ, all of the promises of God are Yes and Amen (2 Cor. 1:20).

In Christ, you are being sanctified and made holy (Phil. 1:6).

In Christ, everything you really need will be supplied (Phil. 4:19).

In Christ, the peace of God will guard your heart and mind (Phil. 4:7).

In Christ, you have eternal life (Rom. 6:23).

In Christ, you will be raised from the dead at the coming of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:22).