

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
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2 PETER 1 v 4

"Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust"

This is a very great Scripture and each part has greatness. The promises are declared to be great, to be exceeding great and precious, which must needs be

1 because of their Author - the God who speaks them is great

2 because of their contents which, summed up in a word, must be said to be Jesus Christ

3 because of their application and the effects produced by them in all to whom they are applied

These effects you have, as to substance, in the word which I drew your attention to this morning - "that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature". Who can express, who can fully conceive, what God has done in that man in whom He has wrought that almighty wonder of making him a partaker of the divine nature! When you consider what the fall has made every man - a dead thing, a corrupt mass, an alien, a stranger, an enemy, a leper, a wicked person, an unbeliever, covetous, an idolator, ever corrupting his way on the earth - that God should take such a man and not undo his being at all, but make him a partaker of the divine nature, disannulling his covenant with death and his agreement with hell, cutting off from his own old life, turn him out of his ways of idolatry and sin, set his face to God and Christ and heaven, change his appetite, or rather give him a new appetite that would ever conflict with his old one - that God should do this will be to the praise of the glory of His grace through eternity. My brethren, eternity will be needful for us who shall be favoured to

reach heaven, to praise God for taking us there, to praise Him for the way He made from hell to that holy place, for the meetness that he gave us for that holy place, for the union that He gave to us in the Person of His dear beloved Son.

I tried to show this morning what this partaking of the divine nature means, that it is not taking of a human being and making a God of him; it is not drawing him up into Deity, but imparting to him a spiritual nature; Christ, the Head, giving His life to His people; the type of this being in our first creation, when God made Adam upright, in His own image and likeness, and made him the Head under the first covenant, to give life to all his seed. So God conveys to the soul by the quickenings of the Spirit of Christ, eternal life, which was promised in Christ before the world's beginning. And this new man "after God is created in righteousness and true holiness", and is "renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him". That is what, in my apprehension, is intended by this word, being "partakers of the divine nature."

My beloved friends, what does it mean? It means that wretched sinners are taken into union with Christ, as He Himself says: "I in them". O what a union this is! It dissolves our union with Adam, cuts us out of the old stock and wild olive and grafts us into the living vine. "I am the true Vine". This is what it means - that the sinner does not stand in his old head and representative - Adam, but he stands in his new Head and all-blessed Representative - Jesus Christ! It means that the life that Jesus lives as the Head of His people is poured upon the soul from time to time in fresh communications of mercy. Hence the revivings, the quickenings, the attractions. Hence also the comforts and the strengthenings and the victories, and the deliverances, and the supplies, which come to the saints. They all come from this one source, this blessed God-Man Jesus Christ; by which is seen that true religion is not of human effort, but is God's work; that communion with God is obtained by union with Him; that communications from Him made to the soul are the fruit of His love to the soul. It means that He puts away sin, and sees no sin in His people. "Thou art all fair, My love; there is no spot in thee". And this, as communicated, is such an amazement to the sinner, that he says, "Is this the manner of man O Lord?" It also means this - that no

unbelief shall reign to the the exclusion of this mercy, and that sooner or later the unbelief that issues in thousands of doubts and fears in the heart about an interest, shall be removed by the divine persuasion of the Spirit, who shall seal the soul up and who shall make Christ's word good in the experience: "My sheep hear My voice and they follow Me".

Ah, if you have the divine nature, you have a divine appetite, a divine ear, and that appetite cannot be satisfied with earthly things. There is nothing in the material universe that can content the spiritual mind. You know it, some of you, with the best of earthly blessings, robust health, and a sick soul, a fevered soul, a guilty conscience, with doubts of your interest, what are you but an unhappy and weak creature? But if you are afflicted, much afflicted, in many ways afflicted, yet have a pure conscience, and God's smile on the soul, and the light of His love radiating through your spirit, what a happy person you are! O if you can say - "I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine", what else need you say? You may say, have said, that though you have plenty of trouble, what is the trouble compared with this? All this is included in being made partakers of the divine nature.

And this appetite which I have just mentioned is more of a blessing than we sometimes understand. You do not know the blessing of being hungry unless you really look into it, and see how the hunger keeps you lively sometimes. And every man who is hungry for Christ, and by that is kept lively, ought to fall on his knees, and bless God for an appetite for Him. O, hungry people, you do not know what a blessing hunger is really. You may look at the bread and think, well it is at an infinite distance from me. Yet, be it so, if you have hunger for it, is there a God in heaven that will mock you? As you are hungry will He, as you ask of Him bread, mock you by giving you a stone? May we thank God for an appetite; it comes from the possession of a spiritual nature. And remember this appetite is no effort; it is natural; and if you have a spiritual appetite it is not by a religious effort; it is from a religious or spiritual nature, and as its nature is, so must its nourishment be. Hence, as I have said, there is nothing of a material kind that can appease that appetite. "I am the bread of life". "He that eateth Me even He shall live by

Me". But how can a man know what he wants, even when he wants Christ, when he first of all possesses Him not? And how can he eat Christ, if he has not the nature of Christ? The divine nature imparted gives a divine appetite, and also a divine illumination, and men see what they did not before see. Therefore Christ says: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled".

And one word more here, if you partake of the divine nature, you partake of an unloseable blessing! Now the goodness of our nature was loseable. God did not make us infallible; He did not secure us from the possibility of falling in our first creation; and therefore, though it had a goodness never to be estimated for greatness and beauty and glory, yet there was this, if I may so speak of it, there was this defect - it was not immutable, and it was lost; Ah it was lost. And the first sense of the loss of it was the sense Adam had of being naked, and the first sense that a man gets of being a sinner is a sense that he is naked and exposed to the justice of God's wrath. But this new nature is an unloseable blessing. Why? Is it because the man who gets it has such an invincible resolution formed in him that he will never part with it? No. Or because he is never in any circumstances that would seem to be inimical to its possession or to his retaining the possession of it? No. But because it is first in the Head Christ by a covenant that God will not break. Yes, sinner, what you possess from Christ, He is the substance of in the "covenant which is ordered in all things and sure", and it runs thus, as you know - "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put My laws into their hearts and in their minds will I write them I will be their God and they shall be My people; and they shall teach no more every man his neighbour and every man his brother, saying Know the Lord: for they shall all know Me from the least of them unto the greatest of them saith the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more".

Out of this, too, grows another thing, namely the fitness of a sinner for heaven, for that blessed place where sin no more defiles. I speak the truth when I say that not everybody sitting now in this Chapel and hearing me would find heaven to be heaven to them, if they

should get there as they are. You now have no relish for God's throne of grace, have you? You never seek it, do you? How could you bear His face? Heaven will only be heaven to those who possess the divine nature. If you can live, as you do, without the throne of grace, paying no visits to that sacred spot, never getting a sight of God on that throne, never seeing the "glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ", but are satisfied with the face of your pleasures and your friends and the things you have here below, would you find that glorious God to be a heaven to you in eternity? No. Then the meetness for heaven has its first beginning in the soul when God breathes in spiritual life and imparts a spiritual nature there, in the hour of regeneration. We shall, some of us, be at home there; we have been at home many times in the presence of God here, many times we have seen His well pleased face, and that has pleased us; many times have we heard His voice in the Scriptures and the Spirit's voice in our hearts; many times we have tasted that He is gracious and rejoiced in His mercies; many times thanked Him for the forgiveness of sins and the revelation of Christ; many and many times found that His truth has delighted us, and has been as a girdle to our loins; we shall be at home when we get to heaven. Ah, it would be to some of us a disappointment never to be expressed if we were to miss that

.....holy, happy place
Where sin no more defiles
Where God unveils His blissful face
And looks and loves and smiles

Well, this is a poor, brief word concerning partaking of the divine nature.

Now I would desire to take up the last clause of the verse - "having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust". By corruption here I understand "the unfruitful works of darkness", not only and not really, as to the root of it, our awful depravity - for while we live we shall not escape the being of that - but the working of that depravity, issuing in ways of corruption. As the Lord said: "Man hath corrupted his way upon the earth". This corruption the Lord's people do escape by being partakers of the divine nature. And one part of it is walking in darkness, as says the Apostle John "If we

say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie". Walking in darkness is walking in ignorance of God, in the love of this world, at enmity to God and goodness. "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord", says the Apostle to the Ephesians, and he tells them how they had walked in their unregeneracy. "You hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." And a sinner blessed with the divine nature, escapes this corruption; he is light in the Lord, and having light in his understanding, he foresees the evil day. He is a prudent man and he walks according to the light that is in him, and that makes him seek to hide himself from the wrath to come. And in this you see a quickened sinner escapes "the corruption that is in the world through lust". There is a real fleeing away from it, as it is called a fleeing "from the wrath to come". It is called in the Epistle to the Hebrews, having "fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope which is set before us in the gospel." And here is a wonderful thing, to be fleeing from self, fleeing from the wrath to come, and fleeing from the world that lieth in wickedness and in darkness. This shows there has been an act of God in which there was no admixture of the sinner's motion. Ah, may we be clear here. I say, that there is an act of God on the sinner, an elect, a redeemed sinner, in which there is no mixture of any sort or kind of the creature's motion, and it is the act of the new birth, in which the sinner's soul is a passive receiver of the new nature. He is passively transplanted from darkness to light, transplanted into the light of Christ, or rather, the life of Christ is breathed into his soul but from that comes motion. All inherent power of motion is from life. From the life of Christ comes heavenly motion, motion after Christ, desire for Him, fleeing from the wrath to come, fleeing for righteousness to Him whose Name is "the Lord our Righteousness". Fleeing to the fountain of infinite merit for the forgiveness of sins, fleeing from misery to Him who only can give happiness; from danger to Him who alone is a refuge from the storm and a shadow from the heat, and fleeing from want and bondage and evil of all kinds to Him who is goodness itself, and who has laid up all goodness for the poor in Jesus Christ. O what a mercy it is to escape the corruption of our darkness and ignorance! Ah, you may say, you

do not see your interest. That is another part of experience into which may you come, and come, if it were the Lord's will, this night; if it were His will, break out into that gracious, glorious liberty ere you leave this place you are now in! But I say, that is another part of Christian experience. Christlike motion comes from the life of Christ in the soul; knowledge of interest comes from the sweet persuasion of the Spirit of Christ. The first is natural; the second is an added blessing. The first is a necessity, as great, as natural a necessity as breathing is to us as we are men and women. We could as soon live without breathing, we could as soon breathe without an atmosphere surrounding us, as we could possess the life of Christ and not have in our souls some motions after Christ - Christ-like motions. But we may live without full assurance, and we have to live without it; we have to beg for it, and the begging is from life; we have to seek it, and the seeking is because there is a necessity upon us, and that is from life. O what a mercy it is to have this great escape, this escape from corruption by the motions of a divine nature.

Now there is another thing that we escape from, and that is the dead works that are on our conscience. Ah, if ever a man has a guilty conscience he has a troublesome companion. I tell you this, it will live with you, it will spoil your food sometimes, mar your sleep, break up everything in this world to you sometimes. It will be like a fire; it will light up everything that you have got and burn it to ashes. O a guilty conscience is a conscience with a worm in it, a fire in it, God against it, law against it, perhaps a whole life's guilt burning in it! This is corruption, and a child of God feels it sometimes, not once only, but often. The guilt of unthankfulness, the guilt of ingratitude, the guilt of backsliding, the guilt of vain thoughts, foolish conversation, walking according to this world in some particular maxims of it, and walking in the spirit of this world; these things as so many dead works burden the conscience of a child of God. And now his lust and natural depravity issuing in corruption, he has got the fruit, and sometimes he may think himself "a corrupt tree that can only bring forth evil fruit." What is it to escape this corruption? It is for the blood of Jesus to come; it is for the Holy Spirit to speak, to whisper divinely and effectually the pardon of all sin on the conscience; it is for the Spirit of Jesus to bear

witness that "there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit", who mind the things of the Spirit. Their escape is like the live bird let loose flying into its own atmosphere in its own natural way, its pinions blood-sprinkled. O yes, though you have "lien among the pots" the Lord says you shall rise and your feathers be of yellow gold, and as it were tinged with silver, and you shall fly into the atmosphere of grace and truth and Christ some time (Leviticus 14 v 53). Nothing can hinder a man from this flight when his guilt is gone; nothing can keep him from the throne of grace, from loving Christ, pressing after Him, and looking out for His mercies day by day; while this sweetness lasts nothing can keep you on the earth. Then in your affections you rise with Christ, and set your affections on things above, where He sitteth on the right hand of God. Nothing can keep you carrying, so to speak, your own troubles with despondency about them, and thinking the Lord is against you in them, when you have got this liberty. Ah, you will find you will never forget it, if you have had a ray of it in your life; you will never forget the holy flight of your soul on the wings of faith with a conscience unburdened, purged by the blood of Christ; it is so wonderful.

In heaven my choicest treasure lies

one says. And can you have a treasure in heaven and delight in grovelling on the earth? Can you know that you have a treasure in heaven, and delight to grovel here below? It may often be your confession

Look how I grovel here below
Fond of these trifling toys

But now I speak of a particular experience as being purged. I know both sides; I know this liberty, O what an atmosphere is grace, what a Sun is Christ to the soul when the conscience is purged from dead works! I tell you, some of you who need, as I know you seek in your very hearts from time to time, the forgiveness of sins, you have no true conception of the happiness that awaits you; you will find what I say is true; when you get it you will say that the half was not told

you. Half the honour was not told you - it never can be.

Well, this is escaping. To escape is to get away, to flee and become safe. Ah, how men flee here to this blessed fountain by precious faith in their souls as David escaped to Ramah from Saul, when Saul cast a javelin at him; so when the soul escapes from guilt it gets away from it, clean away, so as that Scripture is made good - The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve." (Jeremish 1 v 20). O, seeking soul, be this the great object of your search, the great end of your prayers - "For Thy Name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great." Great then, is the forgiveness, great the love, great the cleansing, great the power that will remove that; that can and does remove guilt from guilty consciences, and leave the conscience better than it was before the fall - pure in the sight of God, and pure in the sense of the sinner; for, blessed with the pardon of his sins, he can say to his God

I'm clean just God I'm clean

The sinner, having inwardly escaped these things, I need scarcely add that he seeks to escape all ungodly practices; his aim is to live according to his inward experience. You will not find one blessed in this way saying practically, I live in sin that grace may abound. Good works are found in good people. "Do good, O Lord unto those that be good". Good fruit is borne by good trees, and if you find in your souls the grace of God, the pardon of sin, and the love of Christ, you truly do all the good you can. Under the power of grace men lay themselves out to do that which is pleasing to God, those things which He has exhorted them to do in the Scriptures.

The Christian works with all his power
And grieves that he can work no more

And you cannot have the love of God in your soul and not lay out plans - if you know people need it - of doing them good in the way God may open to you. If you have this world's good, you may be glad of the privilege of administering to the necessities of the poor; and in all

ways that God opens to you, when you are blessed with His mercy to escape the wrath to come, and to escape from the corruption and guilt of a guilty conscience, you will be glad to do all the good that God gives you the opportunity for. I know the contrary may come, you may be again woefully shut up in yourselves, but I speak of principles as well as of occasional experiences, and the principle is this - that if you do escape corruption in your heart and soul and experience, then you will walk according to that condition that God has put you in. You wont say that your lives are your own, or ask who is Lord over you.

"Having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust". Now look at this word "lust". What is lust? It is desire. Lust is a good old word hardly used now, except in an evil sense - as it is used in this text to express an evil thing; but it was formerly used indifferently for good and evil, and you know the Scripture uses it in a good sense: "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit" - that is using it to express an evil thing. "And the Spirit against the flesh" - that sets forth good. So the word "lust" means desire, and from evil desire comes corruption - corrupt practices come from desires after them. Corrupt relish, corrupt appetite will be from a lustful nature. Lusting against God means that you have the corruption of nature enmity. Lusting against Christ means that you say to Him - "Depart from us for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways". And lusting after the world means that you seek the world and walk in the unfruitful works of darkness. Now you take the word "lust" as it is used in a good sense, of a child of God, and O, at times, how you find you escape corruption through the lustings of the new man; that is, the fervent desire of the new man. Joseph said "How shall I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

This corruption we find to be in the world "through lust", which is in the world. There will come a day when there will be a greater separation between the church and the world than there is today. Material prosperity and lack of the divine presence and glorious, gracious workings among the saints, these things have led to a union between the world - in the spirit of it at least, and in many of the maxims and practices of it - and the professing people of God. The day will come when the Lord will declare a divorce between those of

His people that are now married in their spirits and in their practices to the world. You may depend upon it, my friends, the world is not going to heaven; the church is, the world is not. Therefore, the Lord will have these two separated, and if you belong to Him you will be obliged to come out some day - "Come out from among them and be ye separate". O it is not pleasant to be separated; isolation is not pleasant, especially to some natures; to live so as that men look at you and say, they are a set of people whose doctrine and whose ways are abhorrent; to live so as to be marked is not at all pleasant to some natures; but God says - "My kingdom is not of this world; if My servants were of this world, then would My servants fight" - that is, they would behave just as the world does.

Well, where are you? Where am I? "Having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust". This separation does not mean that you are to walk in lack of courtesy to those that are without; for the Scripture commands us to use that; it does not give us liberty to walk as we like. Scripture precepts bind the saints, and they are like a hedge (as Philpot said) - There are two hedges in the Scriptures; one of them is made up of precepts, admonitions and warnings, and new gospel commandments, and by this we are kept from the world; as we walk rightly we are kept from the world on one hand, and a blessed thing it is to be kept by this hedge of precept - kept from the spirit of the world by grace, and from the practice of it by grace also. The other hedge is made up of God's immutable decrees, and can never be broken through.

Now my beloved friends, may we be enabled to thank and bless God if we are partakers of the divine nature. If we have felt an application by divine power of a promise of God, if the Word has come occasionally to us, "whereby are given unto us" these promises, if one has been made over to us, may we thank Him. It may be in prayer and supplication for a blessing, we have been sweetly, suddenly surprised by the word coming into our thoughts, into our minds; not with marvellous power on all occasions, but perhaps for the most part it has distilled "as the dew", it has "dropped as the rain", but O it was no less effectual! Rain that falls like a torrent, much of it is lost, so to speak, to the earth; rain that falls gently, softly, the whole of it is caught and retained, and the earth made fruitful. Thus

the soft flowing in of the word effectually touching the heart and penetrating the soul, enlightening the judgment and understanding and affecting the will - how good it is for God to make over to us a promise that way!

"Whereby" - by His glorious virtue and power - "are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises". Ah, one may say, they all belong to the people of God. True, absolutely true in doctrine; just as all the land of promise belonged to Israel; but now what did God say to Joshua? "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you". What does He do in the souls of His people but give them His Word? And you can say, every word that you have received in faith, that God has given you; that was a hammer to break some part of your rocky heart; that was His light to lead you to the Lamb; that was His bread to nourish your soul; that was His love to quicken you afresh; that was His way to show you how to walk! Well now, that did you good, and that is how the Lord makes His people partakers of His Word - according to His power. "Whereby" - by the working of His effectual power, - "we are made partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust".

In conclusion, where are we going to? My friends, where is our Head? He is in heaven. Where is our Treasure? In heaven. Poverty-stricken, and hunger-bitten, we may often be here, O but the Treasure in heaven, the Bread of Life in heaven, the blessed God of all grace in heaven, Jesus, the Man Christ Jesus in heaven! Shall He be there alone for ever and ever? No. Why, who shall be His friends? Who but His dear children? His blood-bought, and Spirit-quickened children, these shall be His friends! They shall be with Him for ever and ever!

Now have we a hope that we shall be there? Look, Christian, descend into your heart, find your Saviour there, and as you find Him there, thank God for it, bless God for it, that ever Christ was revealed, and then look for that end that awaits you. "For now is our salvation nearer than when we believed".

AMEN.