

SB
576 1369 q
LaP 812

LIBRARY OF THE
GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday morning 13 September 1908

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"

I made some remarks last Wednesday evening upon the promises here spoken of, the "exceeding great and precious promises". They come from God; they are His promises; they are contained in one; that one was the first that God uttered after the fall: The Seed of the woman was promised, and it was said that He should bruise the head of the serpent. This is the promise of life given in Christ before the world began: "This is the promise which He hath promised us, even eternal life; and this life is in His Son." He who confesses the Son of God, we are informed, possesses eternal life; and he who denies the Son has not life. This is the revelation that God has made in the Scriptures that He sent His Son into the world, "that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life". O happy is the man, then, who is embraced in the divine promises, to whom the Lord gave them in Christ before the world began! This is called grace given us in Christ before the world began: "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."

And it is by participating in these promises - having the substance of them given out to us - that we are made partakers of the divine nature. A great word this "partakers of the divine nature", and if the Lord help me I purpose to speak of this part of the text this morning, and show what it is that is intended here. Such a word is very great, and if the Lord had not in the Scriptures explained it, and made known what He intends by it, none could have found it out.

What is intended then by this word, "partakers of the divine nature". Well, I think we have something like it in our first creation - "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.....so God created man in His own image." He impressed upon our nature something of His own excellencies; He did not infuse into us any of His own intrinsic and incommunicable nature. He made us upright, with no kind of imperfection. He Himself is perfect, divinely, eternally so, and He made man in that image of perfection, but He did not make him infallible in it. He left us with room, with liberty, with power to stand or fall, to obey or disobey. And man, in that garden in which God had placed him, having planted it for him; man, with every endowment of delight, of perfection, of nourishment, and of God's blessing - for God blessed him - man, in that state, notwithstanding, fell and lost the image in which he was made, the excellencies that God created him in. The endowments, the light, the understanding, the purity, the perfection, and the straightness with God's will and nature that he was blessed with, man lost, and he is now as a corrupt corpse in his moral nature, as darkness itself in his understanding, as an inveterate enemy in his will, and the very essence of enmity in his carnal mind; and as unlike God, therefore, as sin can make him. And if you could suppose a sinner to have a will naturally to return to his former condition, you could not suppose him to have power to do that. He is just a dead thing - dead in trespasses and sins, mis-shapen, empty, void, waste, huge, a kind of monster, utterly different from the condition and state he was created in by God. O, what is there to be proud of in respect of ourselves? We have no reputation, nothing at all but sin; our best is sin, and hence that solemn Scripture in the Psalms respecting man - "Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity" and less than nothing. This ill accords with our proud notions of ourselves. All our pride argues this - the intensest, the densest, the darkest ignorance; for who, seeing himself as God declares him to be, sinful, depraved and lost, can think other of himself than that he is an utterly ruined creature and as a corrupt corpse? Ah, if the Lord were to let His light down fully into our hearts, as we could bear it, like the rays of the sun powerfully shining upon a dung-hill, we should see our nature to be as corrupt and as repulsive and as filled with death and contagion as we should see the dung-hill to be full of everything that is forbidding and that would drive us away from it.

Well, now, out of this what is to be brought? "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" Not one. If the Lord convinces a sinner of his sins, he as firmly believes that as he believes he has a being. And yet God has given eternal life to His church in Christ from before the world began and it is that which He put into Christ by covenant before the world began which is to come down into our individual souls - each individual soul in the Church - at the appointed time. And to have the divine nature, that is to be given to each soul, each one partaking of it, is, as I understand it, to be renewed in knowledge and truth, in holiness and righteousness, after the image of Him that created it. "Ye have put on the new man" says Paul, which is created in knowledge after the image of Him that created him; which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. So that when a child of God is born of the Spirit, he is blessed with a spiritual nature. This nature is called "the new man", "the hidden man of the heart" A new heart it is called. "A new heart also will I give you and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and I will give you a heart of flesh". (Ezekiel 36 v 26) This is at the new birth, hence the importance of Christ's words to Nicodemus: "Ye must be born again". "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God". "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of man, nor of the flesh, but of God". "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God". Now these scriptures set forth the nature which is here possessed, of which all the saints are said to be partakers - a spiritual nature, what God will communicate of Himself to His people; and they are made partakers of it in that great day when the promise of life takes effect upon them, when the Lord implants in their hearts the incorruptible seed, by which they are begotten again "by the word of God". Hence they are a kind of first-fruits of His creatures. And this leads us to a most important point, namely that every child of God possesses the divine nature before he comes under the particular acts of the law in his conscience for condemnation. His condemnation under the law comes upon his soul as quickened, when the Lord the Spirit comes down as the Spirit of Christ, and convinces of sin. Hence, again, we are not to judge of our life by the measure we have of the terrors of the law, for life comes not by the law or its terrors, but is the effect of the promise in Christ before the world began.

Ah, this is very encouraging, but some of you may be struck with an opposite kind of feeling respecting it; you may think it discouraging, that you do not possess that life. Well, Hart says

We pray to be new born
And know not what we mean
We think it something very great
And undiscovered yet

Yet that seed of life that was dropped into the soul, that began, in its moving, to make the sinner miserable, though he hardly knew why at times, that seed of life made the soul a partaker of the divine nature!

Now I would like, as the Lord may help me, to bring forward two particular words that relate to this nature in the Scripture. First, the sinner is "renewed in knowledge". He has no knowledge since the fall; he has no proper knowledge of God, and no knowledge of himself, except that he has known in a general way that there is something wrong in his nature. But now that he possesses the new nature, the divine life, the life of Christ, eternal life, spiritual life, he has a knowledge of himself; he is renewed in knowledge. And this knowledge that God renews the soul in, makes it understand what the natural man cannot. He has some conception of God - not an acquired, but an imparted knowledge of Him. He knows Him to be that great and glorious Being who is of too pure eyes to look upon sin, and cannot behold iniquity; and O, this is very solemn!

Now a person may have very great terrors of punishment, and thereby, and therefore, hate God who is the punisher of the ungodly; and while he has all that, may be destitute of the divine nature. But a sinner blessed with the divine nature may not, at times, if ever, have very great terrors, yet he has the most solemn and penetrating views of God at times, views which make him to be, in his own judgment, a vile person; and here he sees that vileness does not consist in open act mainly; no, it chiefly is to be found in the nature. A vain thought, he finds is that for which he is to be condemned. "The thought of foolishness is sin". He need not be afraid of any creature in this world on account of any misconduct

done, but he is afraid of God whose holiness shining on his renewed soul and enlightened understanding makes him know that sin is exceeding sinful. Being renewed in knowledge, he has a knowledge of the law, and sees that he has broken it in his heart, if not in certain things in his open conduct. And he is renewed in the knowledge of justice, and knows that he has outraged God's word and nature so to speak, and therefore has exposed himself to His justice. And he is renewed in the knowledge of God's holiness; therefore he knows that God's word has not an unfair claim when it comes to him and says, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbour as thyself". No man without being first made a partaker of the divine nature can enter into these divine truths in a spiritual manner.

Then secondly he is created in righteousness and true holiness. There is a righteous principle in every new born soul and that righteous principle has a great effect upon him. It has this effect, that it makes him straight with Solomon's words - "The desire of the righteous is only good". "The labour of the righteous tendeth to life". And you know what a tendency is; it is a direction, a trend and movement of the mind in a certain course. Now the labour of a righteous man tends Godward; it is in this that his labour is seen, and that his desire is only good. First he confesses his sins: "If we confess our sins the truth is in us". One would think that a righteous man would have no sins to confess. Ah, but a righteous nature is given to a sinful man, and from that nature is his denomination! I have thought it very kind of God to do this, namely, cause a sinner to take his name and denomination from the nature He has given him in his new birth. Hence a sinner, in himself a vile person, is rightly named a righteous man, a Christian, because he partakes of the divine nature! Then, having that new knowledge and new righteousness he is created in, and true holiness, you see this - where God has put all goodness the righteous man goes, and that is in Christ; therefore the righteous man goes to Christ. He sees Christ as an Intercessor; therefore he goes to Him. He sees ^{that} pardon and strength to leave sin and self are in Christ; light and comfort are in Christ; nearness to God is by Christ; therefore the righteous man comes to God in Christ for these things. Now a man renewed in knowledge enters into these things more or less by the Holy Spirit

and, entering into them, walks according to them, as far as he is renewed. "The labour of the righteous man tendeth to life". Says the Apostle "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest". Now the labour is the soul's motion in prayer; it is the soul's passion and ardent desire to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, which is of the law - and therefore defective - but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

So then the new nature consists in this - righteousness. By the promise of life in Christ taking effect, by the good seed being sown in the heart, a man is made a partaker of this divine nature, this righteous nature. If you have it - and O, blessed be God some of us have! - then this is true of you, namely that you can never be happy in the flesh. I do not mean thereby that the flesh will give up its claim, or that it will be excluded, or that it will easily give up its pursuits, but I mean that the new heart God has given you, coming from, will hanker after, heaven. John says - "I saw the new Jerusalem coming from heaven", and you will find in the same chapter that it ended in heaven. And if you have got this new nature from God it has descended into your heart. John says, I saw it coming down and having the glory of God. You will find your very heart go after that blessed God from whom it has come. And, as God has been pleased that all fulness should dwell in Christ, you will never go elsewhere for supplies in the exercise of this new nature.

But this also brings another point before us, namely, that he who possesses this new nature is a man of conflict. Never, till the child of God's poor body is laid in the grave will he be free from conflict, while the grace of God is in lively exercise in his soul. You will never get away from sin, never be free from the lustings of sin in your heart, and you must not judge another by yourself, because your temperament and your lusts, your weakness, go one way, and his another; but you will both have conflict, both will have opposition, both will want two different kinds of things. And so the new man and the old pull different ways. One toward earth and hell, the other toward God and heaven. "What shall we see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies".

But surely it is true to say that every motion of this new man, as under the direction and light of the eternal Spirit, is towards God in Christ. Righteousness - this is what the old Puritans used to call inherent. Not inherent in nature, for we lost our own original inherent righteousness, but it is inherent as it dwells in people to whom it is given; inherent in the new man, in the hidden man of the heart. And this is why you never get a child of God to be content with this world, because, though the power of the Spirit be withdrawn from him, and though the actings and prevalence of grace may be absent from him for the time, yet this new nature he has must of itself go in its own natural direction and way, and that is after God in Christ. And this is why, when a poor child of God is in a backsliding state, he gets miserable and is wretched, for he is not content, he cannot be, because there is a voice of purity in his soul that protests against sin; there it is within him. It makes him say, I would be holy, I want truth, I want God, I want Christ. O if I knew the Lord for myself! O if I were but a godly person!.

There is one more word I want to say here about this divine nature, and that is, it is created in love. "God is love" and you cannot be born again and be wholly destitute of love, for he that has this nature dwelling in him has that that God has communicated, which is love. Therefore the child of God has two mighty principles in him - a principle of enmity and a principle of love. You know that you have these things. Love is the fulness of the law, or the fulfilling of it; as the Apostle tells us. Now where this divine nature is, in all its actings there is love. You may sometimes say that, if you possessed it, you would give the world to feel love in your soul. But why do you want to feel love? From the principle of life. Did a stone ever want love? You must have human nature to want human love, and if you possess human love, when the object of it is far away, you find an emptiness. Now if you possess a spiritual nature, you will possess spiritual love, and the Object of that love in your soul, even as He is the Author of it, will be the one Object whose presence alone can make you happy. I do not mind where you put a child of God in this world, whatever the circumstances of pleasure may be, you cannot satisfy his new nature, the new man, with anything natural; he must have love's Object, love's blessed end, namely, God in Christ; pardon of sin, holiness of spirit, the righteousness of Jesus, union

with God, the Scriptures of truth, the promise of life. You must have these mercies, together with those communications which God is pleased to give from time to time, before you can be satisfied. Spiritual love is a hungry thing. This is true naturally, as applied to man's nature; you cannot have natural love of an intense nature and strong, without feeling you are a very hungry person for love from others. Ah, you might put a person in a well appointed and well furnished house and with all good; but O, if love were lacking, better in a corner with frugal fare than that place! Now if you put a child of God where the love of God is not made known to his soul, you cannot make him happy.

This then is the divine nature as I understand it, that a child of God is renewed, "is created in righteousness and true holiness" after the image of Him that created him. Hence in the beginning of it there is a conformity of the child of God to the image of Christ; predestinated "to be conformed to the image of His Son". I believe that this is the root of all conformity. However much blessed experience you may get in your life by the Spirit's power upon you, you will find this, as He opens the mystery, that the ground and root of all conformity to Christ's image is this - "Being rooted and grounded in love", which is to be made a partaker of the divine nature.

Well, this will get outside all our prescribed rules. How foolish some of us have been! Perhaps some of you live at times as I do - I live in a way of reflection, and my reflections never make me comfortable when I reflect on myself, on my notions of things, the conclusions I early arrived at, the straight way I thought God must come in to myself and to others, and the standard of experience I had in my own mind. I go back to between thirty and forty years (nearer forty than thirty) when certain things were as fixed principles in my mind, but I find this, today, life comes its own way, life is attracted by its own objects. I have had law and terror; I was killed by a sight of God's justice before I knew anything else of Him, and was brought into a heavy law work indeed in my soul. But if God is pleased to give a sinner life without very much terror, if He is pleased to quicken another and withhold that sight a long time from him, and draw him under some merciful dealings into a deeper

knowledge of himself as a sinner, and more of Christ as a Saviour, and give him a sense of safety almost immediately - what is that to do with me? If He has given him the divine nature, he has that given to him that has made him like Christ in a minute. The sinner here does not see it; what he wants he would have in a moment if he did. No, a man does not know what he has got, but his desire tends to life, his heart is in the direction of truth and Christ, and in his judgment he says, I know none but Christ can do me good. I know I must be lost without His blood, I must remain in rags without His righteousness, I am utter weakness and at the mercy of sin and the devil without the power of Christ; I can never have access to God nor union with Him, but by Christ.

This knowledge comes to him; there it is, he is created in it, created to possess it, he grows into it just in the way God causes him to grow. Do I speak against a law work? No; what I would say is this: A prescribed way for God to work He will never take one bit of notice of, except to put it aside. Ah, He has pulled notion after notion from me, and today, if I feel the attractions of Christ, and find my way to His holy throne of grace, I think I am favoured. And if I see the same in another person, then I see that which I love to see in people.

Jesus draws the chosen race
By His sweet resistless grace

But what is a law work? You may, some of you, be anxiously enquiring at times, what is a law work? Well, the Apostle puts it in a very few words - "By the law is the knowledge of sin". Did Adam have a law work when God came to him and said: "Adam where art thou?" when he tried to hide himself, knowing that he was naked? Yes, and does God do that work in a sinner's conscience, and make him know that he is a sinner? Yes. And yet the Lord may prevent the terrors of condemnation coming into that soul at the time, lest he should be swallowed up with overmuch grief and sorrow. Later on He may give that soul such a sense of it that he may say - I have been very near to it; in the pains of it hell had gotten hold of me.

That by these promises ye might be partakers of the divine

nature. It is the promise of life in Christ before the world began; that is the source and the Lord soon began to open it. He said, "In Abraham shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" - in his Seed, that was Christ, men should be blessed. If you have life, you will never be happy away from Christ; if you possess the divine nature, you will never be comfortable away from Him. In Him it hath pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell. If you get at Him for five minutes you will say, Lord abide with me. When He comes in, you will want to constrain Him to remain, and you will be grieved at times because He is "as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry but for a night"

That by these - these blessed promises - ye might be partakers of the divine nature. Perhaps some of you who have grace never thought before that the reason that you have it is that God fulfilled the promise of life in Christ before the world began, in your souls! And you may be saying to yourselves, at times, O, we wish we had a law work; then we should be like the Lord's people. You may say, at times, so and so had certain heavy convictions; so and so had certain clear discoveries of sin all at once; if I had, then I should be a partaker of grace. My friends, the Lord will give you as much of the law as it pleases Him. If He gives you any of it, you will have a true, spiritual knowledge of sin.

Grace comes, free grace, to save His people from their sins. It flows into their souls like a seed dropped into the ground, God taking care of it. This blessed promise before the world began is therefore the very root, source, seed of the boundless ocean of eternal life, given to all the saints. O to possess a drop from the ocean, a ray from the sun, a spark, a little spark, from that everlasting fire of divine love! And O for one stream of life to come into our souls, will be making us partakers of the divine nature, that nature which God has given to His saints in Christ before the world began!

Ah, it is a great thing if the Lord enables us to make out in His own way that we have this blessing; it will be a great thing if He gives us diligence to seek after it, and is pleased to hear our prayers, and answer them; to make out to us that we belong to Him; that we may say, "I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine". What,

beloved of the Lord? Is it not wonderful? Is it not blessed to belong to the Lord Jesus Christ? Is it not amazing to be a partaker of His nature? To have holiness and righteousness and love created in your soul - the very image of God? This is that in which all the saints are created; this is that that makes them separate from their former selves - this nature.

It is declared that the kingdom of God is different from all other kingdoms, and the laws of it are diverse from all other laws. This kingdom is like the stone cut out of the mountain without hands; it breaks up all other kingdoms, and is itself an everlasting kingdom. And this new nature comes freely from love, from righteousness, from true holiness, begotten and created by the mighty work of the eternal Spirit as He is the Spirit of Christ. Do you long to be like Him? I believe where there is a spiritual longing to be like Christ, it flows from the blessed fact that the soul is already begotten again unto His likeness according to God's predestination! "For whom He did foreknow He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son".

Now may the Lord open this to you. If my poor feeble words and hints should be of any service as a means to this end - that the Lord should open to you the source of spiritual religion and the reason of any one possessing a new heart, holy desires, righteous principles and true love - it will be a great comfort to me, and a great honour put upon me.

AMEN.