

God's Promises Are Not Automatic

Curses... what are they? I believe there are types of curses:

- 1) occultic curses, such as voodoo curses, wherein those in league with the devil, encourage their demon cohorts to attack people. We don't have much of this, thank God, in the USA.
- 2) Hateful words and negative prophecies spoken that when believed or "accepted" by the person hearing the words, hang like a curse upon them, often for the rest of their lives.
- 3) Some who explore the occult, pick up a demon-bondage, leaving them with fear or depression. What a curse!
- 4) Then, there are genetic "curses": diseases, mental illness, predisposition to crime, etc. that last for generations. Exodus 20:5 tells us that iniquities can cause a curse on a family to the fourth generation. Without even realizing, much of our prayer, fasting, and ministry is breaking curses.

I was talking on the phone with a pastor who was trying to size up my theology by asking me, "what do you think about curses". I told him that I believed they were real. He told me something to the effect that he didn't believe that a Christian could have a curse on him, because when one comes to Christ they are broken. He didn't invite me to his church! This really got me to thinking. Are curses really real? Can a Christian really have one upon himself, or would all curses be completely broken the moment one receives Jesus? It really boils down to this question: Are God's promises automatic? The word clearly says, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree" (Galatians 3:13).

That we are "redeemed from the curse" is clear from this verse. But, does being "redeemed" mean it is a past tense accomplished deed, wherein we as Christians need do nothing but enjoy it and celebrate it? Or, is there still something left for us to do to completely experience this redemption? Many boldly say, "God said it. I believe it. That settles it!" But, is it really settled? Can we simply sit back and relax and quote this verse, yawning, arguing that no Christian could ever have any curse on his life because of a Galatians 3:13 promise? Or is there still something that we have to do to see this promised fulfilled? Do we have any further responsibility if we are to enjoy the truth of Gal. 3:13? If we do have further responsibility, what about other promises in the Word? Do we also have personal responsibilities to see other promises come to pass?

In this lesson, I want to establish once and for all this truth: The promises of God are not automatic! To begin this logical study, we ask first about curses. Christ redeemed us from a curse. What was that curse? It was "the curse of the law". When Moses gave Israel the law, he pronounced blessings upon them if they would obey the law, and curses upon them if they disobeyed the law. In Deuteronomy 28:13, Israel was promised a blessing of health and prosperity for obedience, and in verses 15-62, a curse of sickness and poverty for disobedience. The principle was: break God's law, and a curse results. So, since Christ "redeemed us from the curse", the curses mentioned in Deuteronomy 28 are no longer relevant to Christians, right? Wrong! I'll explain why, by asking you a few questions.

Question 1: Are you a completely new person compared to what you were before you were saved? II Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new". When you became a Christian, was everything in your life completely new? Or, did you still struggle for awhile with some of the old

things such as temper, cigarettes, lust, and gossip? In fact, aren't you still struggling today with some of the "old" things. Of course, we all are. But, didn't the Bible say "all things are become new". Is God a liar? No, of course not. If II Corinthians 5:17 isn't fulfilled in our lives, why? The answer is simple: A promise shows a potential reality. It shows an inheritance made possible through Christ, and every Christian has the right to experience it, but it is not always immediately fully realized, and must be obtained. This is really what Christianity is all about.

Jesus "gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world" (Galatians 1:4).

The world is an evil, hostile, fallen environment. The world was a perfect environment before Adam's sin. But, after his sin in Genesis 3, the earth became cursed. "Cursed is the ground for thy sake" (Genesis 3:17).

Jesus came to redeem us from all the cursed miseries of life on this fallen planet. But, there is a process to experience fully this redemption. "The thief cometh not but to steal, to kill, and to destroy" (John 10:10). Satan has stolen and destroyed much from us. But, we can get it back!

Question 2: Are you completely dead to sin yet? You should be, for Colossians 3:3 says, "ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" and "how shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein" (Romans 6:2)?

"Whosoever is born of God sinneth not" (1 John 5:18). The Bible says we are "dead to sin", yet all of us still sin, why? Because deliverance from sin was purchased for us on the cross, but we must learn to walk in this deliverance. Paul explains it this way, "reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God" (Romans 6:16). "Reckon" is an accounting term. 2 plus 2 equals four. Your bank sends you a "reckoning" of your bank account monthly. This reckoning may say you have 100 dollars in your banking account.

It is true you have money in the bank, but you still have to write the check and make a purchase and access that account. You can believe what God says about your heavenly bank account! That's why you can "reckon", that is, believe and confess you're dead to sin, but it may not yet be an actual reality in present experience. You can count on being free. It's God's promise, as sure as 2 plus 2 equals four. But, if you don't have it yet, you must do something to get it. You must go to the bank and cash it!

Question 3: Are you completely delivered from all the works of the devil? Does he never harass, tempt, attack your mind, soul, marriage, children or body? 1 John 3:8 says, "For this purpose was the son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil". 1 John 5:18 says "that wicked one toucheth him not". 1 John 4:4 says, "greater is he that is within you than he that is in the world". Glorious promises indeed, but, do we always conquer the devil in every situation? NO! Why? Because Christ made our promised victory over Satan a possibility, and a potential, but there is something we must do to realize victory over him. This is what spiritual warfare is all about! This is what Israel fighting the enemy to enter into their promised land typified. The land was promised, but had to be possessed. And it didn't happen regardless of what they did. Many promises too must be possessed!

Question 4: Do you have a need for more money? If you pay your tithes, you shouldn't, because God promised He would "pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" Malachi 3:10. If God promised this, and you still have more "room" in your bank account for more money, then this must mean that there is something more than tithe that must be done to fully enjoy this "promise". God will rebuke the devourer for you, but not always without you! You

may first have to "bind on earth" the devourer who is devouring your finances before God "binds (him) in heaven" (Matthew 18:18).

Question 5: Are you in perfect health? You should be, because God promised that if you serve the Lord "I will take sickness away from the midst of thee" (Exodus 23:25). And, he promised "no plague shall come nigh thy dwelling" (Psalm 91:10). If you aren't in perfect health, then since it is promised in the Word, there must be something more that we must do than simply serve the Lord to experience such health.

I think if we are honest about these five questions, we cannot avoid the fact that God's promises aren't automatic. I am not diminishing the glorious truths of God's Word! Not one bit! I am just saying that the fact they are written on the pages of your Bible does not mean they will always come to pass in our lives. There are conditions to all God's promises. I believe the primary condition is faith, but the method that carries our faith unto victory, is prayer! Let's examine each of the five topics mentioned above to see how prayer is the scriptural basis for seeing the fulfillment of God's promises through our faith.

Promise of new life: Yes, according to II Corinthians 5:17, we are indeed new creatures. Paul told the Ephesians that they were sitting "together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6) and were "blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ". But, he didn't leave it there. No, he "prayed" that they would "know" and experience fully these truths (Ephesians 1:16-19, 3:14-20). Paul believed prayer was the method God had chosen to enter into promises. "He ... Must believe that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. Now, that's prayer!

Promise of victory over sin: "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit" (II Corinthians 7:1). These Promises don't work by themselves. Paul taught, on the basis of these promises, we have a right to be victorious over sin. But, we still have to "cleanse ourselves". That prayer is a primary method to do this is taught by Jesus who warned us to "watch and pray that you enter not into temptation" (Matthew 26:41).

Promise of financial provision: Oh what wonderful promises of financial provision are offered in the Bible. "My God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:19). He promised to supply, but we are still told by Jesus to pray, "give us this day our daily bread". When people come to me saying a "spirit of poverty" is attacking them, I first ask them if they pay their tithes. If they do, I always tell them to take a Bible, open it to Malachi 3:8-11 where God promised to bless the tither and tell them to read it frequently and pray it! Christians aren't automatically financially successful. We tithe, give offerings, and then pray daily for Christ's promised heavenly provision.

Promise of victory over Satan: "He hath delivered us from the power of darkness" (Colossians 1:13). If Paul really believed this, then why did he tell the Ephesians that if they are to be effective in spiritual warfare that they are to be "Praying always" (Ephesians 6:18)? Probably for the same reason that Jesus told Peter, "Satan hath desired to have you . . . But I have prayed for you" (Luke 22:31, 32). Satan has no legal right to attack us. We're delivered from his power (authority). But, prayer is the method we are to use to overcome his attacks, along with quoting and believing the Word!

Promise of Healing: "Is any sick among you ... Let them pray" (James 5:14). In almost every single healing in the Bible, somebody was praying! From the first healing in the Bible where Abraham "prayed" and Abimelech was healed (Gen. 20:17), to the last chapter of the book of Acts where Paul "prayed" for the father of Publius and he was healed (Acts 28:8).

Many teachers today want to put the emphasis on "faith", and that is necessary, of course. But, "the prayer of faith" in James 5:16, in my opinion, isn't one loud, strong 15 second attempt in "bold faith" to seize a promise of healing. But at times it can be an ongoing commitment to stand in faith through a season of prayer that might take months or even years until finally the promise is realized!

How many times I have seen people come into my prayer line, straining every muscle in their face to try to "believe" for their healing, and then, after prayer I've watched them check their body to see if there is any change. And, when they sense no improvement, they immediately show their disappointment and sadly drag themselves back to their seat, convinced that I didn't "pray the prayer of faith" for them. It used to bother me greatly too, but, now I look at things differently and understand that the evangelist, pastors, gifts of healing, etc. are only a part of the healing process.

If through these agencies healing is not realized, God's promises of healing haven't failed. If others have prayed for you and you are not yet healed, you must not give up in unbelief because "through faith and patience, we inherit the promises" (Hebrews 6:12). There is a process to obtain promises, and this requires two things: faith and patience. Yes, we must believe and confessing God's word is part of that faith. "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering" (Hebrews 10:23). But, this profession is not the "method" of obtaining our healing, but rather is God's way to help keep us from wavering in our prayer. "Let him ask (pray) in faith, nothing wavering" (James 1:6). "We have not, because we ask not (and don't keep on asking!)" (James 4:2). We prove our faith by our unwavering stance of prayer. Confessing the Word helps keep us from wavering in our prayer, because "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:19).

The whole basis of our prayer is the promise we find in the Word. We lay claim to it, and confess it to the devil when he brings doubts, we confess it to the Lord as the "authority" of our prayer. Then reason we come to his throne to "lay claim" to his promise, and we confess it to ourselves to remind us why we are praying in the first place. But, you really best show your faith by how much you pray! This is where the "patience" comes in to inherit the promise. If you really believe God's promise to heal you, you are going to stay in his presence until you are healed.

This goes for every other promise of God: new life, victory over sin, over Satan, financial provision, as well as healing. If it hasn't happened in your life yet, but you see it promised in the word, your "faith" should drive you to your knees, laying hold of the horns of the altar, crying day and night (Luke 18:7) "Lord, you promised this. Where is the answer. I hold you to your Word. I will not let go until you bless me!" (Genesis 32:26).

Hebrews 4:1-6 shows the A,B,C's for entering into a promise.

A. Verse 1: "Let us fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it". God promised Israel rest in the promised land. But, many did not enter. Their carcasses fell in the desert. How scary! And, now, even in the New Testament we are to "fear" lest we come short of experiencing the "rest" or promised land of God's blessings today. In other Words, it is not up to God's promises, it is up to us! God wants us to fear the complacency, the disobedience, the unbelief that would keep us from personally entering our "promised land". Our "fear" that God's promise won't be realized in our life motivates us to ...

B. Verse 11: "Labor therefore to enter into that rest". Labor means "good works". "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:20). And, the primary "works" to enter into that rest are prayers. "Epaphras (was). . . always laboring fervently for you in prayers that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will (promises) of God" (Colossians 4:12). Laboring fervently in prayer is the

best way to "labor" to enter into your personal rest (rest=the job's done, promise is inherited, so you need work no more). But, you can only "rest" from prayer after you've got it!

C. Verse 12: "For the word of God is quick and powerful" reminds us that the Word is what gives power to our prayer and is our "two-edged sword" (Psalm 149:6; Ephesians 6:17) pointing the way to victory! Prayer is quite powerless without promises.

D. Verse 14: "Let us hold fast our profession" shows that we are indeed to speak or "confess" God's word. Memorize the promises, shout them to the devil, hold them up to the Lord, tell everyone around you what you are boldly believing for.

E. Verse 16: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace" is clearly speaking about prayer!!! "Let us therefore" means the things mentioned before this verse are leading up to this one climactic event: Coming in prayer to the Father, asking, seeking, and knocking to obtain the "good things" (Matthew 7:7-11) promised in his word. Good things don't just happen! We must come boldly with the "prayer of faith" and make them happen! Yes, because we "fear" missing God's will for us, we are highly motivated to "labor" to enter in to God's promises. We have found our promise in the Word of God. We are holding on to that promise and confessing it daily. And, we are determined to boldly come into God's presence with "persistence" knocking on the door of the throne room (Luke 11:5-9) until we have the answer.

Christ said "it is finished" on the cross. From His side of the equation, it is finished. He has already done his part. Now, we must do ours. Are your prayers finished yet? Are we that last day church? If so, that explains why there has been such emphasis on prayer the last few decades. Great faith and great prayer will be necessary to overcome in the last days, but God promises the last church on earth will know how to overcome horribly difficult worldly obstacles and Satan himself. How? "They overcame him by the blood of the lamb, and by the word of their testimony and they loved not our lives unto the death" (Revelation 12:11).

For the final conflict, all we need are three overcoming tools:

"The blood of the lamb" - The cross is the means that secured the rights of our victory. We do not have to be under a curse in our life, with sin, or financial problems, or demonic attack, or physical infirmities. But, it takes more than just the work of the cross alone, we must add to that work ...

"The word of their testimony" - Here is a picture of the saint taking his stance of faith, standing on the promises of God and confessing those promises boldly. "And they loved not their lives unto the death" - For some this may mean martyrdom, to others it may just mean death to sin, or death to the self life. Perhaps next to martyrdom, nothing epitomizes not "loving our life" more than prayer:

"Take up your cross daily" (Lu. 9:23) is a call to lay aside worldly pleasure, perhaps leaving the kitchen table, the television, sports, family and friends to enter into the prayer closet to wrestle with the enemy of our souls, even as Christ did in prayer in the garden as he prepared to bear his cross (Luke 22:44, Heb. 5:7, 8). The cross means suffering, and my flesh considers prayer suffering indeed! But, remember, the cross is not just a sign of suffering but it is a glorious instrument of victory as well (Colossians 2:14, 15).

Paul "gloried" in the cross. It was the instrument by which he was "crucified unto the world" (Gal. 6:14). The world in all it's fallen-ness had no hold over him. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse" so we are no longer bound by all the constrictions of a fallen world. Your lack of "new life",

bondage to sin, Satanic attack, poverty, or sickness could indeed be a curse. Curses are real! Don't lose sleep worrying how some family curse began.

I don't think you should be as concerned about what causes the curse, as you are what will break the curse: And that's prayer! Freedom is your purchased privilege! But, freedom is not automatic. We must lay hold of that cross and carry it into our prayer closet to lay claim to it's merits. It's hard work to carry the cross, but it is how we "labor to enter into that rest". It can be difficult indeed to spend hours in prayer daily, monthly, yearly. But, just as there was no other way but the cross for Christ (Matthew 26:44), so there may be no other way but the cross of prayer for us!

Jesus is the captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10). From fasting and praying forty days in the wilderness, to spending all night in prayer (Luke 6:12), and finally wrestling in prayer in the garden, our "way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), has shown us the "way" to obtain promises. That way is prayer. If God's promises were automatic, Jesus would have known that and would simply have named it and claimed it. No, he bore the cross of prayer, becoming a curse for us. His cross broke the curse's authority. You break curses in prayer too! It's up to you.