

"IF" and "IF NOT"

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Such small words! But what a world of significance they hold? The availability to us of the promises of God depend upon them. How often we would grasp these promises without considering whether or not we qualify for them.

The Bible is full of examples where the promises depend on our own attitude to God and his commandments. "If" we relate ourselves according to God's requirements, such and such will take place but "if not", then certain other results will follow.

For instance, in the garden of Eden, the state of perfection would have continued "if" Adam and Eve had remained loyal to God. We know the sad result when they did not do so. Now consider that golden text of the Bible, John 3.16: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Here is a most wonderful promise, but what must we do to qualify for its reception? We must BELIEVE IN HIM. Read further in verse 18: "He that believes in Him is not condemned, but he that believes not is condemned already, BECAUSE he has not believed in the NAME of the only begotten Son of God." In other words, "if" you do so believe, you are saved from condemnation. "If not", you are still under the condemnation pronounced on Adam and Eve when they disobeyed God's command: "Thou shalt surely die." Gen 2.17. We read in Acts 4.12: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is no other name

under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

The heathen trust in other names as Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed, Baal, Chemesh, Ashtoreth -- but these are not LIVING gods as is our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who rose from the dead and lives forever more. (Heb. 7.25) We were reconciled to God by the death of his Son for He bore the sins of the whole world, (I John 2.2), but we are "saved by His life", Rom. 5.10. The fact that Jesus lives in the heart of the believer, saves us from the power of sin and in this way, we are saved by his life in us.

Consider now some other promises God has given to mankind down the stream of time. He called Abram out of the idolatrous city, Ur of the Chaldees, at a time when knowledge of the true God was almost extinct in the world. (Gen. 12.1-5) Then He promised: "Thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth ... and in thee and in thy seed shall all families of the earth be blessed," Gen. 28.14. He also promised: "Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt (this by the way is not the Nile) unto the great river, the river Euphrates." Gen. 15.18.

These promises had both an earthly or natural content and a spiritual one, as we shall see. The possession of the land of Caanan became an accomplished fact as we read in Neh. 9.7-8 and in Joshua 21.43-5 which latter records: "The Lord gave unto Israel all the land which He sware to give unto their fathers ... there FAILED NOT ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto

the house of Israel; ALL came to pass!"

The spiritual blessings promised through the SEED were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the SEED of Abraham, as we read in Gal 3.16: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He says not 'and to seeds, as of many; but as of ONE (and to thy SEED which is CHRIST)!'." In making these promises, God had said to Abraham: "I AM the Almighty God; walk before Me and be thou perfect, and I will make my Covenant between Me and THEE."

Notice Abraham's part was to live a holy life, so that he might come into this covenant relationship with God Who also said of him: "I know him that HE WILL command his children and his household after him and they shall keep the way of the Lord ... THAT the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He has spoken of him." (Gen. 18.19)

SO IT WAS A CONDITION OF THE COVENANT THAT ABRAHAM SHOULD BE LOYAL AND FAITHFUL TO GOD. In this way, he qualified to received the promise.

The important "if" is prominent again in the wilderness of Sinai where God said to the children of Israel: "IF ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, THEN ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people ... and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Reference is made to this covenant condition in Jer. 11.3-5: "CURSED BE THE MAN THAT OBEYS NOT THE WORDS OF THIS COVENANT; WHICH I COMMANDED YOUR FATHERS, IN THE DAY THAT I BROUGHT THEM FORTH OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT, ... saying 'obey my voice, and do

them according to all which I command you: 'SO shall you be my people, and I will be your God: THAT I may perform the oath, which I have sworn unto your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey.'

The CONDITION was very plain, was it not? All through the Scriptures we find that God's promises are CONDITIONAL UPON OUR ATTITUDE TO HIM. For example, we read in 2 Chron. 15. 2: "The Lord is with you WHILE YOU BE WITH HIM, and IF you seek Him, He will be found of you, BUT IF you forsake Him, He will forsake you!"

Did Israel obey God's voice and keep his commandments? We read the answer in Rom. 10.22: "To Israel He says: 'All day long, I have stretched forth my hands unto a DISobedient and gainsaying people.'"

Take another example: When Solomon came to the throne of David, God appeared to him and said: "IF you will walk before Me as David your father walked, in integrity of heart ... to do according to all that I have commanded you, and will keep my statutes and judgments; THEN I will establish the throne of your kingdom upon Israel forever ... BUT "IF" you shall at all turn from following Me, you or your children, but go to serve other gods and worship them; THEN WILL I CUT OFF Israel out of the land which I have given them ... and Israel shall be a proverb and a byword among all people." I Kings 9.2-9.

We find that the "if not" prevailed in Solomon's experience, for subsequently, Solomon, in direct opposition

to God's explicit command, took many heathen wives who "turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father ... and Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord ... and the Lord was angry with Solomon ... wherefore the Lord said unto Solomon: 'For as much as this is done of thee ... I will surely rend the kingdom FROM thee and give it to thy servant. Notwithstanding, in thy days I will not do it, for David, thy father's sake, but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son. Howbeit, I will not rend away ALL the kingdom, but will give one tribe to thy son, for David my servants sake which I have chosen.'" History tells how all this came to pass and Israel was divided into two kingdoms, north and south, known as Israel and Judah. The "if not" of Solomon bore its inevitable consequences.

The royal line however, was preserved through Judah, though constantly almost eliminated by the onslaughts of Satan in his endeavour to bring to nought the promises of God. In due time, however, the promise was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ, the SEED of Abraham and the SEED of David. Thereafter was brought to pass that first promise made in Eden that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head, while He himself would be wounded. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ fulfilled this promise and forecast his subsequent resurrection, Ascension and enthronement at the right hand of the Majesty on high and brought about also the fulfillment of the promise to David, that: "IF thy children

take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail thee a man on the throne of Israel." (I Kings 2.4) Jesus Christ, the root and offspring of David fulfilled these conditions and David himself has testified that it was Jesus indeed who was to be the everlasting king upon the throne of Israel. (Acts 2.29-36) Peter, preaching on the day of Pentecost, said: "Let me speak freely unto you of the patriarch David ... being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before, spake of the RESURRECTION OF CHRIST ... This Jesus has God raised up ... therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this which you now see and hear ... Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both LORD and CHRIST," that is, KING and SAVIOUR! David's faithfulness to God reaped the promised reward in his greater son, Jesus. Great David's greater son now sits upon the everlasting throne.

There is another "if" in Col 1.21-3 which we shall now consider. Paul, speaking to "the faithful brethren in Christ" said: "You who were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now has He reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblamable and unreprouvable in his sight; IF YOU CONTINUE IN THE FAITH, grounded and settled, AND

BE NOT MOVED AWAY FROM THE HOPE OF THE GOSPEL." What shall we say of the "if not" in this case? If we do not continue in the faith but ARE moved away from the hope of the gospel, what then? Compare this scripture with our Lord's words in John 15.5-6: "I am the vine, you are the branches ... IF a man abide NOT in Me, he is CAST FORTH as a branch and is withered; and men gather them and cast them into the fire and they are burned." This is comparable to what we find in Romans 11 which narrates how the "blind part of Israel" rejected and crucified the Messiah. They are likened in verse 17 to branches BROKEN OFF from Israel, the olive tree of Jer. 11.16. Believing gentiles, grafted into the tree in place of the broken-off branches, are warned that a similar fate will await them unless they "continue in God's goodness". So here again, we find the "if" and "if not" resulting in blessing or in sad consequences.

How often throughout the bible we read the words, "take heed lest ..." For example in Deut 27.9-10, Moses said: "Take heed and hearken O Israel; this day thou art become the people of the Lord thy God. Thou shalt therefore obey the voice of the Lord thy God and do all his commandments and his statutes." In both Old and New Testaments, we find this same requirements for God's people -- HOLY and OBEDIENT lives! Profession of faith without a corresponding NEW LIFE of RIGHTEOUSNESS is but a farce! We read further in Deut. 28.15: "It shall come to pass, IF you will NOT hearken unto the voice of the Lord your God to observe to do all his commandments, THEN ALL THESE

CURSES SHALL COME UPON THEE." Then follows a list of curses culminating in the words of v. 45: "All these curses shall come upon thee ... till thou be destroyed" and vv 63-4: "and you shall be plucked off the land ... and the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth unto the other."

As we know, this is exactly what happened to Israel. The "if not" once more bore its inevitable result. What hope then has the Christian of being found faithful? It lies in the "IF" of our abiding in Christ.

We read in Col. 1.27: "God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the gentiles: which is CHRIST IN YOU, the hope of glory." As Christ in the Christian lives His life, the fruits of righteousness are seen in us. Another "if" in Heb. 3.6 points to the same truth. We are Christ's house "IF we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end."

Now we shall consider just one more "if" in Heb. 2.1-3. This sounds one more warning for us to "take heed":

"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to those things we have heard, LEST AT ANY TIME we should let them slip ... for, how shall we escape IF WE NEGLECT so great salvation!"

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