

;Our Promised Covenant Blessings in Christ

(The Promises of God)

by
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Many believers in the body of Christ today, even the most zealous and faithful, are confused about the promises of God, especially when they are convinced that they have stood on some particular promise by faith but have not received. Did they misunderstand the promise of God? Did their faith fail? Did God's sovereign will override the promise for some reason?

Sadly, many believers in America find themselves in a position of compromised fellowship with the Lord, in desperate need of healing or of being rescued from financial bondage, and, on the basis of their need, they seek faith "techniques" that can produce the needed blessings in spite of their current status with the Lord. And when the emphasis is on "seek first the hidden treasure of God's promises" instead of ***seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness***, then the divine order has been perverted.

It is true that the promises of God are received through faith, but it is not true that believers, based on personal need or desire, can presumptuously claim any promise found in scripture. That teaching leads to confusion for believers when the promise does not manifest, and the faith "techniques" they have been taught fail. This is especially painful when our desperate need or the desperate need of a family member or friend is involved. The resulting failure drives us even deeper into despair, causing us to be angry with God for withholding what we believe we should have received.

This kind of "faith" teaching is based on the presumption that all believers are equal recipients of the promises of God and, therefore, have a right to any promise found in the whatever version of the Bible they are using and then "claimed" by "faith." This teaching also presumes that the promises of God are like entrees discovered in the Luby's buffet line and then "claimed" by carrying to the checkout. This simply isn't true. The Holy Spirit may cause the believer to have faith for any promise found in scripture, regardless of the original application, but the Holy Spirit will not cause every believer to have faith for all the promised covenant blessings in Christ.

Indeed we are not all called to have the same experience in Christ. We are all called and gifted uniquely according to God's purpose. Therefore, we are not all called to receive the promised covenant blessings in Christ equally. Rather, each one receives the appropriate promises inherent in the measure of faith they have been given as they pursue the will of God in their lives.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. Romans 12:3 ESV

Admittedly the majority of believers today lack an understanding of their covenant with God through Jesus Christ and the promised covenant blessings that are ours in Christ, but putting the pursuit of the promised blessings first, as if that is our real treasure, is both wrong and ineffective.

When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. James 4:3 NIV

Nor is it true, as some traditions teach, that God, apart from the believer's faith, simply dumps His covenant favor out on believers on the basis of His sovereign will. That teaching leads to a kind of passive expectancy regarding the promises of God, as the believer makes excuses both for himself and for God when the blessings don't come.

Any study of the promises of God must be done in the context of our covenant relationship with God through Jesus Christ, because the promises are not ours individually, either on the basis of merit or on the basis of God's sovereign will. They are ours only "in Christ", received by faith, as the Holy Spirit directs, for the purposes of God.

For no matter how many... (covenant)... promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him... (by faith)... the "Amen" ... (our obedient faith response)... is spoken by us to the glory of God. 2 Corinthians 1:20 NIV (emphasis and inserts are the author's)

In this key passage it is important to remember that we do not have an individual covenant relationship with God. The New Covenant is between God, the Father, and Jesus Christ, the "Son of Man", who is the mediator between God and man and our High Priest. Thus our participation in the New Covenant is through Jesus Christ, with whom we have been spiritually united by the baptism and sealing of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, the limitless covenant promises of God are all "yes" to Jesus Christ, the mediator of the New Covenant, but they are not all "yes" to us individually on the basis of our own wills.

The specific covenant promises of God become ours individually, even without our conscious knowledge, whenever we make a faith-filled response to the Holy Spirit revealed will of God. Thus, saying the "Amen" does not have to literally include the saying of the word, "Amen". Saying the "Amen" ("so be it") is responding in obedience to the revealed will of God, whether we are talking about some monumental moment of special faith, like instantaneous healing or raising the dead, or the still small voice of the Spirit prompting us in some small act of agape love.

Our faith-filled obedience, whether monumental or miniscule, glorifies God by revealing His nature, His will, and His love in our lives and our circumstances, with the resulting "grace" operating in us and through us as the evidence and glory of His presence.

It is also important to remember that we only have access to the throne room of grace "in His name." That is, we do not approach God, the Father, in our own name or on the basis of our own merit, but in the name of the one to whom we are spiritually united. Likewise we cannot presume our right to any covenant promise of God except as we are specifically authorized by the one in whose name we make our petition.

The question that comes to mind, then, is, "How do I know when I am authorized to petition for some promise of God in the name of Jesus Christ?"

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. John 14:12-14 NIV (emphasis is the author's)

There are two promises included in this amazing passage. First, there is the promise that we, as the church, will be doing everything Jesus did and more, though not individually doing everything that Jesus did. And, second, that Jesus will do whatever we ask in His name.

Asking in His name is an authority issue. It is not just saying, "in the name of Jesus." To ask in His name is to know by the Spirit that we have the specific authority to ask for something according to His revealed will.

When I hear, "if it be thy will", in some prayer, I know that the one praying does not have the specific authorization or a living word of faith for whatever is being requested in the name of Jesus. Therefore, even if the one praying ends the prayer with the words, "in the name of Jesus", that one is not saying the "Amen" as it is being used in our key passage of 2 Corinthians 1:20.

In order to say the "Amen" ("so be it") we have to be in agreement with the personally revealed will of God (the Truth, promise, or command of God). The "amen" then becomes our consenting response to the Truth, promise, or command of God as it is revealed as a living word of faith for that specific circumstance.

But why do we have to consent when we are the ones making the petition?

Faith does not originate with us. It originates with God. It is God who reveals His will to us through the Holy Spirit and received by us through reading, studying and meditating on the written word, through the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, the still small voice of the Spirit acting as our spiritual conscience, the spiritual gifts of others, the spiritual gifts operating in us, certain circumstances, spiritual dreams, spiritual visions, and, even, angelic visitation.

We can enter the throne room of grace at any time on the basis of our spiritual union with Christ, and we are always granted authority by the Lord (who always lives to intercede on our behalf) to do so, but we cannot petition the Father for the promised covenant blessings in the name of Jesus on the basis of our own wills. We can only petition the Father in the name of Jesus when our specific petition is prompted (commanded) by the Lord Himself...though this prompting and His authority may be continuous and instantaneous where the specific petition is concerned.

That's what it means to pray, speak, or act "in the name of Jesus Christ." (That's also what it means to pray in the Spirit whether in tongues or with understanding). It means that we are making an obedient faith response to the revealed will of God in our thoughts, words, or actions. And, in the prayer of faith, we receive our promise from the Lord, and, on that basis, we petition the Father by faith, requesting what we know we have already received as a living word of faith "in His name".

NOW FAITH is the assurance (the confirmation, the title deed) of the things [we] hope for, being the proof of things [we] do not see and the conviction of their reality [faith perceiving as real fact what is not revealed to the senses]. Hebrews 11:1 Amplified (emphasis is the author's)

When we have the "title deed" to the Truth, promises, or commands of the Lord as we make our petition, we know that we have what we are asking for. Sometimes in the middle of

our prayers, praise, and petitions we receive a confirmation or inner assurance from the Holy Spirit that we have the title-deed to what we hope for. This inner assurance is beautifully described by the Amplified Bible as *faith perceiving as real fact what is not revealed to the senses*.

One night in our home Bible study and prayer group we had been praying for each other for almost thirty minutes, and, as I started to close our time of prayer, I was powerfully prompted by the Spirit to say that someone in the group had an overwhelming need that they had not brought to the attention of the group.

The husband of the young woman in need raised his hand and told us that his wife had a degenerative and inoperable eye disease that permanently scars the retina, causing blindness. His wife was already completely blind in her left eye, and her doctor told her that the disease had spread to her right eye.

She would be completely blind in six months or less.

Now, I am reasonably certain that there was no one in that group of Southern Baptists who had ever prayed for the healing of blind eyes, but as we prayed I noticed the prayers getting bolder and bolder as the Holy Spirit gave one after another the “title-deed” to the thing we hoped for and the proof of what we did not see.

I do not encourage validation of the word of God by emotion, but I felt the joy of the Lord rising up in me as I knew it was the will of the Lord to heal her blindness.

On the following Sunday she could scarcely wait to announce to the class that she now had perfect vision in both eyes and that her doctor had never witnessed or even heard of a remission of that particular disease.

The question that follows an experience like that is, why isn’t everyone we pray for healed?

I was working with a young man at the time who attended a Charismatic fellowship, and I asked him what they did when they prayed for the sick. He answered that they generally followed the formula of James 5:14, 15. The elders anointed the sick person with oil and laid hands on them as they prayed.

I asked him if the people they prayed for were always healed, and he said, “no”.

I wondered why not, and as I meditated on James 5:14,15 I saw that it said, “And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well...” It did not say, “will sometimes make the sick person well.” Therefore, the difference in outcome had to be in, “the prayer offered in faith”.

I was reminded of the disciples’ question of why they were unable to cast the demon out of an epileptic boy. Jesus answered by saying, *Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’, and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.*

As Jesus spoke, I believe he pointed to a specific mountain, “this mountain”, and, apparently, no born again believer in two thousand years has spoken the command to this mountain.

Has there been no one with faith even the size of a mustard seed? Or have we missed something here?

Consider the classic scripture defining faith:

That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.
Romans 10:9,10 NIV (emphasis is the author’s)

The reason no one has spoken to this mountain by faith and told it to “move from here to there” is not because no believer in two thousand years has had faith the size of a mustard seed, but because the Lord has not commanded or given the authority to any believer in two thousand years to say to this mountain, “be moved from here to there.” Therefore, no believer in two thousand years has had the authority “in His name” to say, “be moved from here to there.” But, if a believer ever does receive that authority and says the “amen”, that mountain will surely be moved from here to there.

Peter exercised this principle after seeing the Lord walk on water, and, instead of presumptuously walking on water, he said, “Lord, bid me to come” (i.e. asking for the Lord’s authority). Jesus said, “Come”, and Peter walked on water.

Nothing is impossible for the one who receives specific authority to say the “amen.” Raising the dead, healing the sick, casting out demons, stopping a tornado, surviving a venomous snake bite, walking through the fire, or even withstanding an atomic blast at ground zero are not impossible for the one who believes in his heart and says the “amen” in His name. But the one who presumes on that authority without actually receiving the command or the authority of the Lord to speak to the mountain, will fall flat on his face.

Pastor Cho, the senior pastor of the world’s largest church located in Seoul, Korea once felt the specific prompting of the Holy Spirit to call a group of deaf people to the front for prayer. Pastor Cho does not operate in the gift of healing and had never done anything like that before, but when he boldly said the “amen,” every deaf person who came forward for prayer was instantaneously healed.

The entire church was in a stir, and on the following Sunday hundreds of deaf people came forward to receive healing as Pastor Cho gave the invitation. To his chagrin none of those who came forward for prayer on that Sunday received healing.

As Pastor Cho went to his prayer closet in embarrassed anguish he asked the Lord why those he called down for prayer did not receive their healing.

He said the Holy Spirit caused him to hear so distinctly that it was like hearing the Lord’s audible voice as He said, “Because I did not command you to call them forward for healing.”

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. John 15:7 NIV

Saying the “amen” (“so be it”) is not a faith “tool”, it is our obedient response to the Holy Spirit prompted revelation of God’s will in the form of a specific covenant promise.

“Grace” is most often defined as the unmerited favor of God, but “grace” is also the power of God operating on behalf of His people, operating in His people, and operating through His people. When Paul uses the phrase, ***it is by grace through faith***, he is stating the foundational principle for receiving the manifestation of the promised covenant blessings of God. “By grace” means that God’s favor and power toward us are appropriated by our obedient faith responses (i.e. “through faith”), and it is impossible to initiate or manufacture faith on our own, no matter how desperate our need.

It is at this point that I need to warn readers that a spirit of witchcraft and divination is sometimes given an open door by believers who attempt to manufacture faith for their circumstances. I noticed this for the first time when I watched a documentary on the Appalachian group that drinks poison and allows themselves to be bitten by venomous snakes to “prove” their faith.

It is not the Holy Spirit that manifests in those circumstances but the unholy spirit.

It was ***by grace through faith*** that we were saved and received the covenant promises that were ours initially in Christ, as well as the guarantee of our eternal promises, and it is only ***by grace through faith*** that we receive the manifestation of the promises of God included in the measure of faith that God has foreordained for each of us individually in Christ.

Every covenant blessing we have received and will receive from God comes to us “in Christ” on the basis of our faith. As an example, it was on the basis of our initial faith in Christ as Savior that we received the promise of the indwelling Holy Spirit (the “baptism of the Spirit”), were included in the spiritual body of Christ, and were justified, forgiven and sanctified. We were sealed, adopted as sons, and made to be joint heirs with Christ. And we received all that even without necessarily knowing what the promises of God were for those who made an obedient faith response to the revelation of the Holy Spirit that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died for our sins.

We also received the assurance of a future eternity with the Lord, and, as amazing and awesome as all that was, there is still more, much, much more.

His divine power... (grace)... has given us everything we need for life... (the new life in Christ, not just biological life)... and godliness... (His nature)... through our knowledge ... (relationship knowledge)... of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 2 Peter 1:3,4 NIV (inserts are the author’s)

In verse 3 Peter says that through God’s divine power or grace we already have everything we need for life (the new life in Christ), not for our life in heaven but for our life here on earth in our physical bodies. This favor of God toward us is not imparted apart from faith. God’s favor is imparted toward us because of faith. We did not necessarily know what the specific promises of God were for those who received Christ by faith, but we received them initially and will receive others in the future, just the same, on the basis of our initial faith in Jesus Christ as Savior.

Did you know, for instance, that you have already been given everything you need for your life as a “new creation” in Christ? Or did you think you had yet to receive, or, worse, that you would not receive anything along those lines until you got to heaven?

“Have been given” is past tense. But this raises a question, because we know by experience that both godliness and this new life in Christ do not manifest automatically at the moment of regeneration. We also know that certain spiritual gifts and areas of faith do not automatically manifest themselves in us at the moment of saving faith, but they are already ours in Christ as we appropriate them through the progressive manifestation of His will in our lives.

The simple but profound answer to any question that arises about the difference between who scripture says we are “in Christ” (our “position” in Christ) and what we actually experience on a day to day basis (our “condition”) is found in the phrase ***through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness***, because it is through our intimate fellowship with the Lord that the promises of God and our new lives in Christ are both manifested.

In this phrase we find an implied command to pursue ***knowledge of him***, because we only implement or realize what we need for our new life in Christ ***through our knowledge of him***. I may accept by faith that I am now ***the righteousness of God in Christ***, but I will only ever realize and implement that truth through my ***knowledge of him***.

The word translated “knowledge” here is the Greek word transliterated as *epignosis*, which means exact or full knowledge and an intimate, participatory knowledge in that which we

“know”. Therefore, our new life in Christ, our life as a “new creation”, only manifests as we maintain an intimate, participatory fellowship with the Lord.

Paul realized the importance of pursuing this supernatural, intimate, participatory “knowledge” of the Lord, and he said, ***I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...***Phillippians 3:10 NIV

In this passage Paul associated his participatory fellowship with the Lord with his experience of the power of Christ in his walk as a “new creation”. He also associated his fellowship with the Lord with trials and suffering, even to the point of martyrdom.

So, here we have the promise in 2 Peter 1:2-4 of having everything we need for the new life in Christ received at the moment of our saving faith in Jesus Christ, but not implemented or realized unless we maintain an intimate, participatory relationship with Him (which includes the promise of “troubles” and the possibility of martyrdom).

This relationship is best described in John 15:1-4ff:

I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he trims clean so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. NIV

Because of our faith in Jesus Christ as Savior we have been *grafted in* by God to the true vine, who is Jesus. It is our calling (command) then, as ingrafted disciples of Christ, to *remain in* Him so that our intimate, participatory relationship with the vine will produce the fruit of godliness (His nature).

Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself... (Amplified: “make myself real”)... ***to him.*** John 14:21 NIV

Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us. We know it by the Spirit he gave us. 1 John 3:24 NIV

The way we “remain” in him is to have and obey his commands, which is active faith. (Passive faith is the faith we already have in Jesus as Lord and Savior.)

God’s moral law is plainly visible in scripture, even to non-believers, but knowing God’s moral law and obeying it on the basis of our natural understanding is not “having” and “obeying” as taught in John 14:21.

An illustration is found in the command, ***Do not commit adultery.*** This command interpreted with the natural understanding alone, means that a married person is not to have sex with someone other than his/her own spouse, but Jesus said that anyone who lusts for someone other than his/her own spouse is already guilty of adultery. The lesson here is that the written word is limited and can be misinterpreted. What we need then is an attorney to convey the exact meaning as it specifically applies to us. That attorney or “Counselor” (Greek: *parakletos*) is the Holy Spirit.

We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words

taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. 1 Corinthians 2:12,13 NIV (emphasis is the author's)

That we may understand implies that we will not understand what God has freely given us in Christ (i.e. our promised covenant blessings in Christ) unless it is revealed to us by the Holy Spirit.

This does not mean that we cannot logically and reasonably interpret what scripture is saying about our promised covenant blessings in Christ without illumination from the Holy Spirit, but it does tell us that, no matter how accurate our natural understanding may be, we will not have absolute understanding or “exact” knowledge. Absolute understanding or “exact” knowledge is natural understanding that has been illuminated, expanded, confirmed, and applied supernaturally by the Holy Spirit so that we now believe in our hearts, as if we have received the Truth directly from God, which, in a manner of speaking, we have.

For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. Hebrews 4:12 NIV (emphasis is the author's)

Remember: faith is believing in your heart (the part of your inner being that can receive illumination, prompting, and revelation from the Holy Spirit) and confessing or obeying with your mouth (and your actions). Thus we do not “have” His commands when we are merely aware of them as religious rules or even as exegetical truth. Outward obedience to religious rules or to a natural, logical understanding of God's will is not “having” and “obeying”. We only “have” His commands when we have received them and have a supernatural, absolute, exact understanding of them through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and we can only “obey” when we act on what we have thus believed in our hearts (Hebrews 11:1 Amplified - ... *faith perceiving as reality what cannot be perceived by the senses.*)

Therefore, all true obedience is a grace empowered act of faith.

Some who are reading this will be distracted by their heartfelt belief that intense Bible study and the accurate, inductive, logical division of scripture is “having” the commands of the Lord, but, as I will demonstrate later in this text, the real importance of accurate, inductive Bible study is to position ourselves to receive absolute, exact understanding as the Holy Spirit illuminates our natural, logical understanding through supernatural “guidance.”

When we have His Truth, commands, and promises in our hearts they are more real and more compelling than what we can know and believe with our natural understanding alone. If we are in obedience to what we now have in our hearts, we are then “walking by faith”, and we experience the very real joy of our fellowship with the Lord. It is then that we experience the Lord's love for us and the Lord's love being expressed outwardly through us, and He makes himself real to us.

Do not be confused by the promise in John 14:21 that both the Father and the Lord will *love* the one who has and obeys His commands, as if that love is experienced on the basis of merit. God's covenant love for all of his adopted sons is equal to His love for the Son, but those who “have” His commands and “obey” them are the ones who experience, in a participatory way, the amazing and unfathomable love of God and are thus enabled to express it outwardly to others.

The Truth, commands, and promises we have in our hearts are no longer hearsay messages posted on some bulletin board or announced impersonally by someone with mere worldly authority. They are now the Truth, commands, or promises of God spoken directly and applied specifically to the believer by the Teacher, the Lord of Lords and King of Kings Himself.

Through these...(the glory and goodness of God)...***he has given us his very great and precious promises...***(in Christ)... ***so that through them...***(through the promises by the operation of faith)...***you may participate in the divine nature...***(of Jesus Christ Himself)... ***and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*** 2 Peter 1:4 NIV (emphasis and inserts are the author's)

The promise contained in all the promises of God is that through them, by faith, as they are specifically revealed and applied by the Holy Spirit, we will participate in the divine nature, the nature of Jesus Christ himself, and, by doing so, we will escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

This activity of knowing (“having”) and doing (“obeying”) the will of God transforms us by the renewing of our minds, so that our absolute understanding replaces erroneous and sinful thinking patterns with the mind of Christ.

The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ. 2 Peter 1:4 NIV (emphasis and inserts are the author's)

As we identify by faith with who we are in Christ, having an absolute, God-inspired understanding of it in our hearts, and making obedient faith responses to what we now believe in our hearts, we are transformed, becoming like Him in our thoughts, our words, and our actions, from one degree of glory to another, expressing the very character of Jesus Christ and the love of God to others.

And all of us, as with unveiled face, [because we] continued to behold [in the Word of God] as in a mirror the glory of the Lord...(seeing with spiritual eyes who we really are in Christ)... ***are constantly being transfigured into His very own image in ever increasing splendor and from one degree of glory to another; [for this comes] from the Lord [Who is] the Spirit.*** 2 Corinthians 3:18 Amplified (inserts are the author's)

Thus the purpose of God fulfilled in his promises is that we will have a supernatural, intimate, participatory fellowship with our Abba, Father, and our Lord, Jesus Christ, a fellowship that literally transforms us from the inside out so that we experience and live out His love in a way that glorifies Him and frees us from the corruption experienced by unregenerated men in the world.

The only thing that counts...(with God)...***is faith expressing itself through...***(agape)...***love.*** Galatians 5:6b NIV (inserts are the author's)

Man is not naturally capable of experiencing or expressing agape love except as he is supernaturally empowered by the Holy Spirit. The best natural man is capable of is an exalted form of brotherly love, the kind of love embraced by the New Age movement and other non-Christian religions, including secular humanism. Therefore, it is God's intention (His purpose)

that we participate in the divine nature (the nature of Jesus Christ Himself), expressing our faith through God-empowered acts of agape love, to the glory of God. (2 Corinthians 1:20b...*and so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God...*)

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us... (for not complying with the love of God)... For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

*Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us... (in regard to our compliance with the love of God)..., we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask... (Why?)... *because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.**

1 John 3:16-22 NIV (emphasis and inserts are the author's)

How do we set our hearts at rest in His presence? We “have” and “obey” His commands by expressing His love with actions and with Truth. Peter tells us in 2 Peter 1:2-4 that we do that through the promises that are ours in Christ as they are specifically revealed and applied to us individually by the Holy Spirit, and this includes biblical prosperity and healing.

How do we do that?

The promised covenant blessings of God “in Christ” are always accompanied by a condition of obedience (either specific or implied). Remember: faith is believing “in your heart” and “confessing” or obeying with your mouth (or by your act of obedience). Thus every promise contains either a specific or an implied command. This is most often demonstrated in the written Word as an “if”. (“If you believe in your heart...If anyone would follow me...If you walk in the light as He is in the light...etc.)

Example: John 15:7 NIV

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

“Remaining” in Jesus with His words “remaining” in us is the condition for receiving what we ask for in prayer. Remaining in Jesus is not merely a matter of our supernatural connection with Him through the baptism of the Spirit. That connection is inviolable. “Remaining” in Jesus is a matter of maintaining our intimate, participatory fellowship with Him by “having” and “obeying” his commands, and the promise is that we can have whatever we ask for as long as we are maintaining this fellowship.

Naturally it follows that we will not be asking to fulfill the needs and desires of the flesh (as if we were “mere men”) but only asking for those things that are an expression of God's agape love or His covenant love.

The implied command in this instance is, “remain in me”, and, once received as a Holy Spirit revealed command (though not necessarily received as an inspired understanding of this particular Bible verse) remaining in Jesus Christ becomes a command that we “have” in our

hearts. Our obedience, then, flows from what we already have in our hearts, and the command does not have to be repeated time after time.

If we do not guard our hearts, though, the imparted command may lose its power. We find ourselves out of fellowship with the Lord, and the Holy Spirit has to prompt us again to ***remain*** in Him.

Just as God's promised covenant blessings include either an implied or a specific covenant condition (command) requiring obedience by faith, every covenant command we receive or "have" in our hearts includes either an implied or a specific promised covenant blessing. The blessings require obedience to a command. The command obeyed results in blessing.

Some commands are received with a specific promised covenant blessing. ***Therefore go into all the nations making disciples*** is the command followed by the promise ***and surely I will be with you always, even unto the end of the age.***

Other commands contain an implied promise, and even when the implied promise cannot be discerned there is always the promise of John 14:21 – ***My Father will love you. And I, too, will love you, and I will make myself real to you,*** which is the promise of intimate participatory fellowship.

Just as it is impossible to enumerate and catalog the promised covenant blessings of God from our natural understanding of scripture, it is, likewise, impossible to enumerate and catalog the commands of the Lord on the basis of our natural understanding of scripture (i.e. religious rules), because even our spiritual consciences and the inner witness of the Holy Spirit produce "commands" of the Lord.

The Holy Spirit's restraint when you are about to gossip or about to entertain evil, corrupt thoughts is a command from the Lord. The command is "No", and even that command implies a promised covenant blessing, the blessing of continued fellowship with the Lord and the peace and joy of the Lord.

Likewise the promptings of the inner witness of the Holy Spirit to comfort a brother in trouble, is a command from the Lord, "Comfort your brother", and that also implies a promised covenant blessing.

At this point I want to make another important observation. Our obedience to the promptings and inner witness of the Holy Spirit is an act of faith, and it is also what is meant by "walking in the Spirit", which is how we maintain our fellowship with the Lord.

When we maintain our fellowship with the Lord even the smallest and most mundane details of our life, like eating, cleaning house, and going to the grocery store can be acts of faith.

Do you consult the Lord in prayer concerning the details of how you spend your money? Or do you consult him only in the matter of giving? Do you consult the Lord in prayer and then listen for the prompting of the Holy Spirit as you decide what you and your family are to eat or whether and how to exercise? The one who is in true fellowship with the Lord is in fellowship with Him about everything, and the result will be that we make wise (God-inspired) decisions about everything.

As a new believer I knew in my heart that the Lord wanted me to have a specific, daily quiet time, during which I would read His Word and commune with Him in prayer. Getting up an hour earlier meant that I would have to get up at 5 am, so I said, "Lord, I want to have that time with you, but I know the weakness of my own flesh. If you will wake me up I will surely get up, but if I am merely awakened by my alarm clock I will be tempted to hit the snooze button."

The next morning I was awakened at one minute until 5 am by the sound of my name, and for almost a year I was awakened the same way each morning at exactly one minute before 5 am.

These days, though, the Lord expects me to be self-disciplined as I set the alarm clock and get up at the time I have agreed to for my quiet time.

On another occasion I was traveling alone on business and praying in the Spirit, but in my own understanding, as I interceded by faith for person after person and situation after situation. At one point the Holy Spirit gave me a sudden awareness, *your gas tank is almost empty and the last gas station for fifty miles is coming up on the right.*

What was the implied command? *Stop and get gas.* What was the blessing for my obedience? I didn't get stranded twenty miles away from the nearest gas station. Why did the Holy Spirit intervene in that way to prevent me from experiencing trouble? Because I was obedient to the command of the Lord to pray for others by faith as he prompted me and guided me.

If I had denied the prompting of the Spirit to pray and had, instead, been daydreaming about deer hunting, I probably would have missed that gas station, and I would have experienced all the troubles to follow (i.e. the discipline of the Lord).

In another example, *Give* is the command followed by the promise, *and it will be given unto you.* In this case "give" is a general command that we receive in our hearts, and we obey by being open to the specific promptings of the Holy Spirit in regard to the application of the general command. Where both husband and wife are believers, the specific promptings normally come to both at the same time, because the giving of money or things belonging to both is meant to be a joint decision. The prompting of the Holy Spirit is also confirmed in this manner, even in regard to specific amounts.

Keep in mind, too, that giving is a specific gift of the Spirit for some believers, and their response to the command "give" will be according to the measure of faith they have been given. I have known three men in whom this gift was well developed, and the extent of their giving was far above what is expected from most disciples of Christ. The promise of "and it will be given to you" was also far above what most disciples of Christ should expect.

The same is true of most other commands and promises. The general command and promise is in our heart as a living word of faith, but the specific application for each believer is made through the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer itself is a covenant action. God is the "grantor" of our promised covenant blessings, and, according to 2 Corinthians 1:20, it is Jesus Christ, the mediator of the new covenant who receives. Therefore, we go to God the Father in the throne room of grace offering thanks, repenting of our sins, and making our petitions in the name of Jesus Christ with the same expectation as if we were Christ. This is not a formula, but a matter of faith as we believe Ephesians 3:12 in our hearts:

In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

Remember: all the promises of God are "Yes" in Christ, and our confidence that the Father will both hear and grant our requests comes from our faith in Christ, not from any merit we might think we have.

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of him. 1 John 4:14,15 NIV (emphasis is the author's)

How do we know that we are asking something according to His will? We know because His Truth, commands, and promises are already a living word of faith in our hearts. We “have” His commands (believe them in our hearts), and we say the “amen” by confessing what we have believed in our hearts. This confession, then, becomes our “title deed” to the promise (*faith perceiving as real fact what cannot be revealed to the senses.*)

I am sometimes asked, “How do you know when to stop praying for something?” My answer is, “When you know with absolute, exact, joy-filled certainty, that the Father has said, ‘yes,’ ‘no,’ or has provided some other answer.”

There are also times when we know we are speaking specifically to the Lord in prayer. As disciples, our commands always come from the Lord, and it is the Lord with whom we communicate concerning our thoughts, words, and actions. At the same time we do not need to address the Holy Spirit in prayer as He does not seek this attention, and when I know that I have offended the Holy Spirit I go, instead, to the Father, asking His forgiveness and restoration according to 1 John 1:9.

One does not have to make these distinctions between the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit in order to pray effectively, but my prayer life has been enriched by adopting this internal awareness of the distinctions.

There are times when it seems like the favor of God and His blessings is being poured out on us without any specific connection to our acts of obedience, sometimes even in times of disobedience, but we need to remember that our understanding is limited. Most of the covenant blessings of God come to us without our specific awareness of related acts of faith and obedience, but that doesn’t change the covenant process. It only proves that we are not omniscient.

If we were doing it right we would scarcely be aware of cause and effect. Our passionate pursuit of the will of God would produce it’s own reward, which is the joy of fellowship with the Lord, and the blessings and favor of God that flowed to us would simply be acknowledged with thanksgiving.

Instead, disappointment often follows our passionate and presumptuous pursuit of the promised covenant blessings as we are taught to simply “stand” on the promise by faith until the promise is manifest in our lives as if it is our right to pursue the promises on their own without an accompanying condition of obedience.

An example would be the oft quoted verse in Philippians 4:19 - *And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*

It is impossible to “stand” on this verse without also making an obedient faith response to the implied command, *give and it will be given unto you*, as the Philippians had done. And when we are giving in perfect response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit there is no need to “stand on the promise”. We simply trust God to meet our needs appropriately.

I might add that the most appropriate way for us to have our needs met in Christ is found in Matthew 6:33 – (insert is the author’s):

Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things... (food, clothing, shelter and all other necessities for physical life and our relationships in the world)... will be added unto you..

Most of us put the needs first and the seeking of the kingdom of God and His righteousness somewhere further down the priority list. We also add our “wants”, even the

“wants” of the sin nature, to the list that we expect the Father to provide, but the promise of Matthew 6:33 does not apply to “wants”.

Traditionally Philippians 4:6,7 has been used to instruct believers in how to approach God when we are anxious about our needs or when we are anxious about anything, but this passage is not an instruction on how to obtain by faith what we need from God. It is, instead, a command not be anxious about our needs and an instruction on how to obey the command. The result being that the promised covenant blessing, not of having our needs met, but of having our peace and trust in God restored, will be met (inserts and emphasis are the author’s):

The Lord is at hand...(therefore)...Do not be anxious about anything;...(the command)... but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God...(the commanded process of regaining our peace)...And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding...(transcends any confidence we might have as a result of our natural understanding)..., will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus...(the manifested promise).

In this passage Paul is instructing believers who no longer believe in their hearts that God will meet their needs, to enter into prayer with thanksgiving, remembering all the promised covenant blessings He has already bestowed, so that the Holy Spirit can revive their faith and trust in God to meet their needs. It is not a scripture teaching us how to pray to God to have our needs met.

The scripture doesn’t say, “and God will meet your needs.” It says, ***And the peace of God, which transcends understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.***

What is implied, though, is that our restored peace (or restored faith) will result in our needs being met.

Since the promised covenant blessings of the Lord are received by our obedient faith responses to the specific or implied commands of the Lord as received from the Holy Spirit, how then do we proceed in those times of trial and trouble, when we face a financial crisis, an impending divorce, or life-threatening sickness in the family and simply do not know how to proceed?

There are times when even those who are in fellowship with the Lord face personal trials that they cannot overcome through their own faith. In that case the first line of defense is to lean on others whose faith is strong and whose fellowship with the Lord is obvious in all that they think, say, and do. Those who do not fellowship with other men and women of faith, then, are at risk when these kinds of trials are experienced.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything...(of the Christian character)... If any of you lacks wisdom...(about his trials)..., he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does. James 1:2-6 NIV (inserts are the author’s)

How interesting that James tells us to consider the trials (temptations, circumstances, troubles) we face with joy. No one in his right (natural) mind wants to face trials and troubles,

but the strongest, most intense, joy-filled moments of our life occur when we experience fellowship with the Lord in the midst of a trial, whether the trial is personal or a result of our intercession on behalf of others.

James says that trials are a testing of our faith (the Truth, commands, and promises we “have” in our hearts) and that the testing of our faith is what brings maturity (developing the character of Christ in us) so that we can ***escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.***

So, while we do not desire trials, like Paul and Silas in prison, we can look forward to and experience the joy of our fellowship with the Lord in the midst of a trial.

If we do not already have a living word of faith in our hearts concerning some trial we are facing (or facing on behalf of others through intercession) James instructs us to ask God for wisdom.

“Wisdom” is defined as knowing the specific truth of God or the specific promise (command) of God in a particular situation. Acquired wisdom is something already imparted to us (like “look both ways before crossing the street”).

But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice...(through obedience to the revealed will of God)... ***have their senses trained to discern good and evil.*** Hebrews 5:14 NASB (inserts are the author’s)

This acquired wisdom guides us through many trials, but at times we need God’s specific wisdom or illumination concerning a trial (like “look out for that truck on the right”).

When we receive light concerning a trial or dangerous circumstance, the light we receive becomes both a command and a promise. The command is “look out for that truck on the right”, and the promise is “if you look out for that truck on the right you will not get run over.”

James instructs us that when we receive the supernaturally imparted wisdom of God (when we “have” the command and the promise) we need for the circumstance, we are not to waver then between the limited wisdom of the flesh (i.e. “if you hurry you can make it across the street before the truck gets to you”) and what we have thus received from God. If we do waver we will not receive the promise, which is “you will not get run over.”

How many times have we, God’s beloved covenant children, gotten run over in this life because we ignored or wavered when it came to the wisdom of God?

James’s instructions also include not wavering on the issue of expecting God to give us wisdom in a time of trial. Simply asking the Father for wisdom in prayer is not enough if the asking is not prompted by a living Word of faith in our hearts that God will impart wisdom during a time of trial.

The problem for many believers is that they may follow the form of asking God for wisdom, but their asking is without real expectancy, the kind of expectancy that comes from ***faith perceiving as real fact what cannot be revealed to the senses*** (Hebrews 11:1 Amplified).

So, what, then, is our responsibility in regard to receiving the wisdom of God?

The answer is simply that we must ***remain*** in him (vitality connected to him in fellowship by “having” His commands and “obeying” what we have already received) and His words (what we believe in our hearts because they have been imparted by the illumination, prompting, and revelation of the Holy Spirit) must ***remain*** in us. To do so, means that we must eagerly,

passionately and continually position ourselves with a very real sense of expectancy to receive everything we need for life and godliness, including wisdom, healing, and biblical prosperity.

Would you go to a board meeting at your company without paying attention and taking notes or studying the notes afterwards to determine how you should proceed in order to successfully carry out your duties and responsibilities?

I am not making this a religious rule to be obeyed as a discipline in the flesh, but if we are truly seeking to participate in the divine nature through the Holy Spirit imparted commands and promised covenant blessings of the Lord then we will deliberately position ourselves with expectancy to receive them through inspired preaching and teaching (taking notes as we listen), intense personal Bible study, meditation on scripture, journaling, ministry, and obeying the commands and promises we already have in our hearts.

Our sensitivity to the Holy Spirit in this matter depends on the status of our fellowship with the Lord, and there is a natural progression in this. In the beginning, as infants in Christ, our fellowship with him is simple (like baby talk). As we mature, though, we are able to receive much more in the way of the commands of the Lord and the promised covenant blessings of God, and much more is expected of us.

As we pursue the Lord with a sense of expectancy, both as infants and as mature believers, we are trusting God to impart or inspire whatever faith we need at exactly the time we need it, trial after trial, circumstance after circumstance, without fail, exactly as He has purposed for our benefit and the benefit of those who experience God's love through our obedience.

This removes any confusion about what promises and commands apply specifically to us and when they apply to us, because the Holy Spirit will reveal each promise and command at exactly the right time to those who love the Lord with all their heart, all their soul, all their mind, and all their might and are seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Receiving the promised covenant blessings does not require our knowledge of what those covenant blessings are, as evidenced by the blessings we received upon our initial faith in Jesus Christ. If we are meeting the conditions (obeying the commands we have in our hearts) the blessings will flow to us whether we know about them or not.

This natural flow of the blessings of God could be described as simply being in the favor of God, and that is a position to be greatly desired.

Our knowledge of the promises may enhance our expectancy, but it is not a specific requirement for receiving. The one who is remaining in Christ with the Lord's words remaining in his heart does not have to know what blessings are supposed to be his in order to receive them, but knowing may help him stay in the peace of God during times of trial.

Sometimes we pervert the divine order, because we are not maintaining our fellowship with the Lord. The resulting confusion, discord, and depression seems "normal" to us because we see so many other believers around us in the same condition. It's natural, in times like this, to be desperate to have our needs met, especially when the need is for healing or for freedom from financial bondage, and to be attracted *with itching ears* to those who teach that we can receive the promised covenant blessings of God apart from maintaining our fellowship with the Lord.

To come out of that state of being, though, we ultimately have to confess that we have not maintained our fellowship with the Lord or our obedience to the revealed will of God in our lives. The flesh strongly resists the disciplines that are required to maintain that fellowship, but, if we are true disciples, that discipline will be appropriately inspired by the prompting of the Holy Spirit and energized by the joy of our intimate, supernatural, participatory fellowship with our Abba, Father, and our Lord, Jesus Christ who loved us and gave Himself for us.

The disciplines of a disciple that are difficult and burdensome to the believer who is out of fellowship with the Lord become *easy* and *light* for the one who is in fellowship with the Lord, because the joy of the Lord is a powerful motivator.

The reality of our walk is that there will come times when we feel that our faith has failed or even that God has failed us in our time of need. In those times we need to remember that God's ultimate purpose is to transform us into the image of his Son so that we might glorify the Father by our faith. Like Peter denying Christ, our failures may become the very discipline and hardship that leads to overcoming victory and glory in the future.

... God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness... (participate in the divine nature)... *No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.* Hebrews 12:10,11 NIV (insert is the author's)

As a new believer I once asked God for wisdom concerning a franchise I wanted to invest in. I conferred with other Christian businessmen who thought that the investment was sound, but in the DFW airport, as I read my Bible and waited for my flight to Phoenix, I prayed, "Father, I don't really have peace about this investment. I confess my failure to discern your peace, and I'm asking you for a sign to confirm my decision or reveal that I need to go another way."

When I looked at the clock, thirty minutes later, I realized I had missed my flight. I asked the lady at the gate what had happened, and she said, "We don't know. The PA system went down just before we were going to call your flight, and it didn't come up again until after your plane pulled away from the gate."

I should have known that a lack of peace is the Holy Spirit's way of telling us that we are not in the will of God, but when I asked for wisdom according to James 1:5 and God shut down the entire DFW public address system as a "sign" that I should not pursue this venture, I should have run as fast as I could in the opposite direction.

But what did I do? I wavered. I had faith that I would receive the wisdom of God, but I trusted the natural wisdom of my flesh more than the wisdom of God. So, I got on the next plane to Phoenix and went through with the deal.

Oh, yes, I was that stupid, and that investment became a black hole. I never recovered one dime, but, like Peter, I never forgot my failure, either, or what the discipline of God revealed to me.

What it revealed was that my Father loved me enough to allow me to experience the pain of my double-mindedness so that I would not waver at some point in the future when something even greater than financial loss might be at stake.

There are times when we will have to exhaust the strong arm of the flesh before we can receive, believe, and obey.

One man I know came under the conviction of the Spirit in regard to smoking cigarettes. He believed in his heart that the Lord wanted him to stop smoking cigarettes, but he did not, yet, know how to obey by faith.

He tried will power. That didn't work. He tried nicotine gum. That didn't work. He tried the patch. That didn't work. He even tried hypnotism, and that didn't work. The key here is that "he tried", and it was only when he confessed, brokenhearted, in prayer that he was powerless to obey the Lord's command, that the Holy Spirit suddenly caused him to remember Philippians 4:13.

I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

He had read that scripture many times. He had even memorized it. But it was not until that moment that he received the Word, as from the Lord, and he believed in his heart that the Lord would give him the strength to overcome his addiction.

That night he threw away a brand new carton of cigarettes, and his wife said, “Again?” “It’s different this time,” he told her. “This time I got the word of the Lord.”

From that moment forward he never smoked another cigarette and never even wrestled with the temptation to pick up the habit again.

The Holy Spirit will also prepare us in advance for the commands of the Lord and the resulting covenant blessings that we will experience in the future. When David faced Goliath he had already been prepared for the experience by fighting off bears and lions in the power of the Holy Spirit as those predators attacked his father’s sheep. When facing Goliath he simply said, ***The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.***

The experience of faith in the promises of God that he experienced in the past prepared him to receive and believe the promise of victory over Goliath, the giant, in spite of his natural understanding and the natural understanding of those around him. He did not come to the battle already knowing he was going to face Goliath. Once he was there, though, he acknowledged the prophetic promise of victory given to him by the Holy Spirit.

This experience, and the previous experience with the lions and the bears, was not chosen by David. It was chosen by God, and David simply participated in the divine nature through his obedient faith responses in a way that glorified God. (See [Giant Killing Faith](#))

So it should be with us.

Headlines to remember:

1. The promised covenant blessings of God are not ours individually. They are ours only “in Christ”, received by faith, as the Holy Spirit directs, for the purposes of God.
2. God’s favor toward us is not imparted apart from faith. God’s favor is imparted toward us because of faith.
3. The promised covenant blessings of God, as well as the commands of the Lord, are not limited to what we can discern from the form and context of the written Word of God alone.
4. The simple but profound answer to every question that arises about the difference between who the Word of God says we are “in Christ” – our “position” in Christ - (which includes the promised covenant blessings) and what we actually experience – our “condition”- is found in the phrase *through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness*, because it is through our fellowship with the Lord that the manifestation of both takes place.
5. The promise contained in all the promises of God is that through them, by faith, as they are specifically applied by the Holy Spirit, we will participate in the divine nature, the nature of Jesus Christ himself, and, by doing so, we will escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

6. We maintain our fellowship with the Father and with the Lord by “having” and “obeying” the Lord’s commands (which is our condition for receiving the promised covenant blessings).
7. We do not have to know what our promised covenant blessings are in order to receive them if we have already met the condition of obedience to a specific or implied command.
8. We “have” the Lord’s commands when we believe them in our hearts as the Holy Spirit illuminates, prompts, and reveals them to us through scripture, through the spiritual gifts of others, through our own spiritual gifts, through spiritual dreams and visions, and through the still, small voice of the Spirit.
9. We “obey” the Lord’s commands when we make obedient faith responses to what we believe in our hearts.
10. External obedience to religious rules, religious traditions, or the expectation of men is not true obedience. All true obedience is a supernatural act of faith.
11. Our faith-filled obedience glorifies God by revealing His nature, His will, and His love in our lives and our circumstances, and the resulting “grace” operating in us and through us is the glorious evidence of His presence.
12. We have everything we need for our new life in Christ as a result of our initial faith in him as Savior, but we implement or realize this new life in Christ by maintaining our fellowship with him (“having” and “obeying” the commands of the Lord).
13. When we know we have been prompted by the inner witness of the Holy Spirit we then “have” the Lord’s command concerning whatever it is that we are being prompted to think, say, or do, and our obedient response is an act of faith.
14. All of the promised covenant blessings of God contain either a specific or an implied command. All of the Lord’s commands contain either a specific or implied covenant blessing. Command + obedience = blessing.
15. We cannot have faith (i.e. “claim”) for a covenant blessing (promise) apart from being obedient to the specific or implied command.
16. We receive the promised covenant blessings of God on the basis of our obedient faith response to the direct or implied command that we have already received in our hearts.
17. We cannot manipulate God on the basis of our needs and desires. Our responsibility in receiving the promised covenant blessings of God is to trust that we will receive the appropriate promises and commands in a time of need and to act on what we receive in our hearts as if it is more real and more compelling than any doubts and fears that may arise out of our natural understanding.
18. This faith-based expectation to receive both the appropriate promises of God and commands of the Lord will naturally lead to inspired (grace empowered) disciplines such as intense Bible study, meditation on the Word, prayer, journaling, ministry, etc.
19. Both our failures and our previous victories will be used by God to prepare us for the Lord’s commands and the accompanying promised covenant blessings that will come to us in the future.
20. Our obedience to the revealed promises and commands of the Lord glorifies the Lord and pleases the Father.