

great. They're far superior to all other promises, of men and angels, because they're backed by God's omniscience, omnipotence, and veracity. To be more exact, God's promises are based on His foreknowledge. God always keeps His promises. He won't renege and He can't be forced to break them. God knew He could keep His promises before He ever made them. To the contrary, the promises of men are often unreliable because we don't know the future. Nor can we control the future. Worse, we forget we made promises or think nothing of breaking them. There is a great difference—no, a very great difference—between God's promises and our promises because reliability depends on the nature of the one who makes a promise.

Claiming Promises

Perhaps, at this point, a word should be said about claiming promises. You ask, "How do I claim a promise?" Easy. Find an appropriate promise and apply it to the situation you find yourself in. For example, if someone wrongs you, an appropriate promise would be Romans 12:19: "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord." Claim it. Apply it to your situation. Believe that God will keep His word. God has promised to repay all wrongs done to His children, so trust Him to avenge you and wait for justice to be done.

Claiming a promise involves several things. First, you have to know a promise exists before you can claim it. As we have seen, there are more than 7000 promises in the Bible. You need to know what they are and when to apply them. The more promises you know the more promises you can claim. Be patient. You won't learn them all overnight. And be wise. Memorizing a promise doesn't guarantee you can use it. Promises must be understood before they can be claimed, and that requires prior Bible study. Memory work must be accompanied with understanding before any benefit can be derived from God's promises.

Second, claiming a promise requires faith. You have to believe they are for you; that they exist for your own personal use and benefit. And, furthermore, you must believe that God will keep His word, that He will be true to His promises.

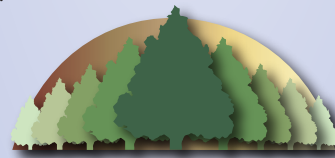
Third, claiming a promise does not guarantee an immediate fulfillment. God always keeps His promises, but He doesn't have to fulfill them right away. Some are fulfilled immediately, others have delayed fulfillments. For instance, 1 Corinthians 10:13d–e promises that all temptations will come to an end: "But with the temptation [God] will make

a way of escape, in order that you may be able to endure it." The way out, however, may not open up for days, weeks, or even months after the temptation begins. This delay keeps you waiting—and trusting. It provides a good opportunity to test your faith. And through testing you may learn new things about yourself: Can I keep trusting God or will I start doubting, worrying, and fretting?

Now, we must pause for a moment to make some important distinctions. There is a difference between claiming promises, sharing the divine nature, and fulfilling promises. God may take His time in fulfilling promises, yet believers can appropriate the divine nature immediately after claiming promises—always, without exception, and without waiting. Again, we must distinguish between claiming a promise, the immediate benefits of claiming a promise, and the eventual fulfillment of a promise. Fulfillment may be days, months, or years away, but the benefits of sharing the divine nature may be experienced immediately. What does this mean in terms of our previous example? The answer is easy. Even if the way of escape doesn't materialize for many months, you can have joy and peace in the midst of temptation or testing as soon as you claim 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Fourth, you will learn from experience that it's often necessary to claim the same promise over and over, even many times a day, until God decides to fulfill it. Keep claiming promises until God acts. He will act when He's ready. And while you're waiting, forget about your problem. Let your mind rest. Faith. Rest. Wait. How can you ever be happy unless you have faith while you wait for Him to keep his promises? You can't doubt or worry and be happy at the same time. Trusting while you wait is one of the great secrets of happiness in the Christian life.

And fifth, it's important to note that claiming promises is the means of producing the fruit of the Spirit. Bible teaching, on the other hand, causes the fruit of the Spirit to grow to maturity.



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Claiming Promises & Sharing God's Nature

...Promises, promises, promises, promises...



He has given to us the valuable and very great promises, in order that by them you may become sharers of (the) divine nature (2 Peter 1:4 RCL).

Why did Peter write this verse? Three reasons: (1) to reveal why God put promises in the Bible, (2) to point out their value, and (3) to show how these promises can benefit us.

Sharing the Divine Nature

For years I read this verse quickly without thinking about what it says and missed one of the great principles of Scripture: *God put promises in the Bible so we can share His nature.* In other words, if you or I put our faith in one of God's promises, we will *immediately* share some aspect of God's essence. I call this "sharing the divine nature" or simply "sharing God's nature." It's tremendous. And it's life-changing. I want to

sear it in your mind so you never forget. Promises were placed in the Bible so we can share God's nature.

Created in the Image of God

This is truly remarkable: it's possible for a human being to share God's nature! Why? Because we're made in His image (Gen 1:26–27). The human soul is very much like the divine nature. In fact, the human soul is more like God than anything else on earth. Sharing the divine nature, then, is possible because God has created us in His image. God is a Spirit Being (John 4:24). He has no body. And no one can see Him (Col 1:15; 1 Tim 1:17; 6:16). In like manner, the human soul is immaterial and invisible. Now, since God has no body, sharing God's nature can only be sharing things that are immaterial and invisible such as God's knowledge, love, compassion, goodness, holiness, righteousness, faithfulness, joy, peace, and patience.

Now here's something even more remarkable: we can share God's nature *in our fallen state* . . . by using the promises of Scripture. The fact that you and I have sin natures does not in any way keep us from sharing His nature. Right now, while alive on this earth, we can partake of the divine nature because we're made in God's image. But, and this is important: being made in His image is no guarantee you'll ever taste His nature. As you'll see, it all depends on whether you use the promises in the Bible. Sharing the divine nature opens up a whole new world of possibilities for the human soul. The soul can rise above itself and experience the very nature of God!

Promises, Promises

There are about 7000 usable promises in the Bible (7487 to be exact, according to Everet R. Storms, *Time*, Dec. 4, 1956). These promises cover every situation you'll ever face in life. And they're addressed to you—to all believers regardless of time, race, or geographical location. God has promised to help, guide, protect, avenge, and answer your prayers. The following are a few of the more beloved promises in the Bible: Matt 11:28–29; Rom 8:38–39; Phil 4:6–7, 19; James 1:5 . . . Now, why are there so many promises in God's Word? I can think of four reasons: (1) so we can walk by faith, (2) so we have something (an object) to place our faith in, (3) so we can share God's nature, and (4) so we can know God intimately.

Promises Enable Us To Walk By Faith

When an unbeliever places his faith in a promise of salvation such as John 3:16, he has "saving faith." When a

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believer, however, places his faith in one of God's promises, he has what may be called "daily faith." Saving faith is the means of receiving eternal life; daily faith is the means of walking by faith. Walking by faith is walking and using the promises at the same time, claiming them, applying them in your life wherever you go, to every situation you encounter (2 Cor 5:7).

Promises Give Us Something To Put Our Faith In

Faith must have an object. We must have something to put our faith in. And God's promises are the divinely ordained objects of faith. I don't have to tell you that faith in the promises is ultimately faith in the God who made them. You should realize by now that man's faith and God's promises are two sides of the same coin: they must be used together.

Promises Enable Us To Share God's Nature

But, you say, how do I claim a promise? Simple: just put your faith in one of the many promises and trust God to bring about what He has promised. When you do this, immediately you will taste some aspect of the divine nature. To repeat: We share God's nature when we use His promises. Now here's the important thing. *Claiming a promise has a reciprocal effect on your soul.* You can't claim a promise without that promise changing your attitude in some way. For example, if you claim Romans 8:28 in times of tragedy, *you will immediately receive back joy and inner peace.* And some promises can be used to replace mental attitude sins such as worry with God's attitudes such as peace of mind. Claiming 1 Peter 5:7, for instance, replaces worry with inner peace.

Here is something else that's important. When you share the divine nature, God's nature is present in your soul. Now, if this is true, men and women should be able to see it, and therefore see God in you. When you claim a promise, you become like God in your soul. You share one or more of His attitudes. And others, when they see these divine attitudes in you, may want them for themselves. Plainly, when you claim promises, God can use you to reach others by showing them something of Himself . . . through you!

One last thing: You can share God's nature immediately, any time you want, no matter what level of spiritual growth you have reached. Why? Because sharing the divine nature does not depend on spiritual maturity, but on faith. It's an immediate result of claiming a promise, and anyone, regardless of maturity, can place their faith in one of God's promises. Now that's exciting!

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Promises Enable Us To Know God Intimately

Through the ages many have thirsted for a closer, more intimate relationship with God. They want to know God, to experience Him in a more concrete way. They seek dreams. Visions. Audible revelations. Miracles. And they're frustrated because God doesn't speak to them as He spoke to the prophets. They feel that God's self-revelation in nature and in the Scriptures isn't enough. They want something more than walking by faith. But that isn't God's way, at least not now. God, however, has found another way for us to know Him intimately, even though we can't see or touch Him. He has made it possible for us to taste or experience His nature, to share some of His attributes, to feel as He feels here and now and not some day far off in the future. On this planet we can understand in a limited way what He's like by sharing His nature. This is one of the ways He reveals Himself to us. And this is one of the ways we can experience God now. Once again, it's impossible to claim a promise without immediately experiencing some aspect of the divine nature. By claiming promises you and I can come to know God experientially. I, for one, did not realize this for many years. When I found out about it, I discovered that I knew God much better than I thought. I had claimed promises for years but didn't realize that I was experiencing the same kind of love, joy, peace, and patience that God has.

Precious Promises

The promises of God have intrinsic and extrinsic value. They are valuable in and of themselves, and they are valuable to us. Naturally, one of the words used to describe the promises is "precious" (Greek *timios* in 2 Peter 1:4). This word is often used in the Bible of precious stones—costly gems of great value and worth (1 Cor 3:12; Rev 21:19). In short, the promises have inherent value because they're backed by God's infinite mind, power, and faithfulness. God is able to bring to pass what He has promised, and what He has promised He will bring to pass. On top of this, the promises are extrinsically valuable because they allow us to share God's nature. They make it possible for you and I to enjoy such things as inner peace and inner happiness.

Great Promises

Another word used to describe the promises is "very great" (Greek superlative *megistos* in 2 Peter 1:4). God's promises are not average or ordinary. They're not just great, but very

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