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Teaching Letter

Receiving the Promise



Part 4/6
God's Abundance
By Derek Prince

In the previous two letters in this series, *God's Abundance*, I provided a list of five basic principles concerning God's provision.

1. God's provision is in His promises.
2. The promises are our inheritance.
3. God's promises are the expression of His will.
4. All God's promises are available to us through Christ.
5. The fulfillment of God's promises does not depend upon our circumstances but rather upon our meeting God's conditions.

Two specific promises

As a practical application of these principles. I want to consider two specific promises of God, found in the Psalms.

> Oh fear the Lord, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him. The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing. (Psalm 34:9–10)

> For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly. (Psalm 84:11)

Both of these are clear promises that God will provide everything good that His people may ever need. However, before we plunge into claiming the promises, let's take the logical step of examining the conditions. Neglecting this step is where many people go astray. They say, "Oh, that's a beautiful promise. I want that," but don't pause to examine the conditions. Most of God's promises are conditional: "If you do this—I will do that."

Of course, there are some unconditional promises of God. For instance, "In the last days ... I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh" (Joel 2:17). Another is God's promise of the restoration of Israel. These are unconditional promises of God related to a certain time. There are some promises that

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God will do unconditionally when it suits Him. However, most of God's promises are conditional.

The conditions

Before we claim the promises contained in the verses above, then, we need to do some simple biblical analysis to discover the conditions that are attached to the promises, bearing in mind that the promises are only given to those who fulfill the conditions. Combining the two passages, we find that there are altogether three simple conditions stated. Can you pick them out?

We must:

1. Fear the Lord.
2. Seek the Lord.
3. Walk uprightly.

Provided we meet these three conditions, then the Scripture says God will not withhold any good thing from us. Isn't that exciting?

However, some further analysis in the realm of logic is still needed. The key word in these promises is "good." No good thing will God withhold from those who meet His conditions. Before we decide that something we are claiming from God on the basis of these promises is "good," we need to ask ourselves two further questions.

First of all, is the thing good in itself? Or (to use philosophic terminology) is the thing absolutely good? This is the invariable in the situation. A thing that is absolutely good is always good.

Secondly, however, we need to ask: Is the thing good for me in my particular situation? To use philosophic terminology once again, is the thing relatively good? This is the variable in the situation. Something that is good in itself may not be good for us in our particular situation. In other words, it may be absolutely good but not relatively good.

This distinction between that which is absolutely good and that which is relatively good must be examined in light of the subject at hand. How does Scripture evaluate wealth, riches, abundance, and prosperity? In themselves, are they bad? Or are they absolutely good?

It is most important that we ask ourselves this question and that we find an answer that is both objective and scriptural. In the background of most Christians there is a religious attitude that anything nice is sure to be bad. Conversely. anything that is good for you cannot be enjoyable. That attitude was instilled into us as children regarding the medicines we were required to take: the worse they tasted, the more good they did for you!

I know something about this from personal experience. When the Lord saved me and baptized me in the Holy Spirit, I went through a tremendous personal struggle to change my thought pattern that maintained: "If you are going to be a Christian, prepare to be miserable." I once heard Pat Boone give a similar testimony. As a high schooler, he came to the conclusion that if he were to become a committed Christian it would mean seventy years of misery and then heaven at the end. And he wasn't sure that heaven would be worth seventy years of misery!

Good or bad?

The questions I want to pose in this letter are: "Is poverty good or bad?" "Are riches good or bad?" Rather than an answer based on emotions or religious tradition, I want a logical, objective and scriptural answer—one that will have a decisive effect on the way we live. If riches are bad, we should dissociate ourselves from them and not be involved in any activity or process that would generate wealth. However, it is my conviction that Scripture clearly and consistently gives the opposite answer: riches, or wealth, are essentially absolutely good. There are multitudes of Scriptures we could use to support this conclusion, but I must content myself with just a few.

The first is Revelation 5:12. In this verse the angels and the living creatures and all the hosts of heaven are speaking. They are voicing the unanimous consensus of all heaven, and their evaluation is absolute and unchanging. With a loud voice, they are saying:

> Worthy is the Lamb who was slain [Jesus Christ] to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!

My conviction is that every one of those seven items is essentially good, and they all belong by eternal right to the Lord Jesus Christ. The second one mentioned there is riches. Let's look at the others: power, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, blessing. That puts riches in very good company, doesn't it? All these seven items are essentially absolutely good.

On the other hand, nearly all of them can be misused and abused. Obviously, power can be misused and abused, and very often is. Strength, riches, wisdom—they, too, can be misused. I believe Solomon is an example of a man who

had tremendous wisdom and misused it, for he ended up in idolatry. The fact that something is absolutely good in itself does not mean that it cannot be abused or misused. But we would be very foolish to refuse the thing simply because it can be abused.

And yet, this is one of Satan's favorite tactics—to make us refuse something good because we have seen it abused. For instance, I worked in East Africa for five years with a Pentecostal missionary organization based in Canada. After about a year, I realized that they almost never exercised any gifts of the Spirit. So I asked, "Why don't we have any gifts of the Spirit in operation?" They responded, "Oh, in Canada they've been misused." But that's not logical! So what if they have been misused? Does that mean we are not to use them?

If that is sufficient reason for not availing ourselves of God's provision, then there will be nothing good left to us, because the devil can always find people to misuse any good thing. Yet multitudes of Christians are influenced by this kind of reasoning to the point where they no longer appropriate what is good and what is theirs by right because somebody has misused it. For my part, I cannot accept such reasoning. No matter if the whole world misuses riches! If it's good, I want it! Likewise for wisdom, power, strength, honor, glory or blessing.

The source is God

One important factor in evaluating something is to determine its source. In 1 Chronicles 29:12, David is praying to the Lord and he says very simply, "Both riches and honor come from You." What is the ultimate source of riches and honor? God Himself!

We need to lay hold of this scriptural fact: God is the ultimate source of riches and honor. Anything that originates from God must be good in itself. There are many other passages in Chronicles which confirm that, but we will not look at them here. Rather, we will look at a parallel text in Deuteronomy 8:18:

> And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers.

It is God who gives us power to get wealth. Many men misuse that power, but it comes from God. Why does God give it to His people? "That He may establish His covenant." It is part of God's covenant commitment to His people. Let us therefore focus on the covenant-keeping faithfulness of God, rather than on the unfaithfulness of men who often misuse the power given to them by God.

When I look at the people who are wealthy, it is evident to me that it does not depend primarily on their level of education. Many educated people are financial failures, while others, who can't even spell their name right, become very wealthy.

There was a man in Britain some years ago whose interview appeared in the newspaper. He couldn't read or write, so he applied for a job as a janitor. They said, "You're very suitable. Just sign your name on this application form." But he said, "I can't sign my name—I don't know how to write." So they refused to give him the job.

Having been turned down as a janitor, he started to sell cigars. The result was he became a millionaire. The man interviewing him said, "Isn't that remarkable? You can't even sign your own name and you've become a millionaire. Why, think what you would be if you could sign your name!" To that the man replied, "I'd be a janitor!"

If you think about the wealthy people you know, you will find that wealth does not necessarily go with education. The most unlikely people get rich. Doubtless there are some overall principles that apply. Nevertheless, the ability to gain wealth is not to be explained purely in natural terms. Ultimately, its source is God.

The obedience factor

This leads us to a basic principle that is consistently emphasized through out Scripture: Obedience to God brings prosperity and abundance. Consider, for example, what God says in Deuteronomy 28. This chapter is divided into two portions. The first part, verses 1 through 14, lists the blessings that follow obedience to God. The second part, verses 15 through 68, lists the curses that follow disobedience to God. In a moment we'll look at both—the blessings first, and then the curses.

But before we do that, we need to understand the first, essential requirement of obedience itself. This is stated in the opening words of the chapter:

> If thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God. (Deuteronomy 28:1, kjv)

Obedience begins with listening to God's voice. Conversely, we see in verse 15, which opens the list of curses, that disobedience begins with precisely the opposite: "If thou

wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God" (kjv). Here, then, is the point at which the two paths divide.

The path to all blessings begins when we listen to God's voice; the path to all curses begins when we do not listen to God's voice.

The same principle runs all through Scripture. In Jeremiah 7:23 the Lord tells Israel what He, as their God, requires of them:

> Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people.

What marks out the people of God? Simply this, that they obey His voice. This principle is carried over, unchanged, into the New Testament. Jesus says, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27). Here is the one essential mark of those who truly belong to Jesus: They hear His voice, and so follow Him. In the last resort, everything depends upon whether we hear God's voice or not.

Now let's look at the list of blessings for obedience that commences in Deuteronomy 28:2:

> All these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God: Blessed shall you be in the city, and ... in the country. Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl ... The Lord will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand, and He will bless you in the land. ... And the Lord will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your ground. ... The Lord will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand." (vv. 2–5, 8, 11–12)

Notice how all-inclusive are the phrases used: "all to which you set your hand," "all the work of your hand." The same all-inclusive phraseology is repeated in Deuteronomy 29:9:

> Therefore keep the words of this covenant, and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do.

The blessings promised are in exact proportion to the obedience required. Total obedience brings total blessing. No area of our lives is excluded. No room is left for failure, frustration or defeat. There is no room for anything but success.

Now let's look briefly at the opposite—the curses for disobedience.

> But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God ... all these curses will come upon you and overtake you. (Deuteronomy 28:15)

We have already seen that the basic point of departure from God is not listening to His voice. If we trace the history of men or tribes or nations that have gone away from God, it always begins there. They cease to listen. Often the beginning is subtle and hard to detect. We can still maintain outward conformity to God's commands for a long while after we've really ceased to listen. But if we trace our problems to their source, they begin when we no longer listen to God.

The list of curses is very lengthy, but one that applies particularly to our subject is in Deuteronomy 28:29: "You shall grope at noonday, as the blind man gropes in darkness; and you shall not prosper." The Bible is consistent with itself. Just as prosperity is a blessing, so not prospering is a curse. This aspect of the curse is described again more fully in verses 47 and 48:

> Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything. (v. 47)

Let us pause here for a moment and notice that this verse states the positive will of God for His people—that we serve Him with joy and gladness for the abundance of everything. However, if through unbelief and disobedience we do not enter into God's positive will, then the negative alternative is set before us in the next verse:

> Therefore you shall serve your enemies, whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in need of all everything. (v. 48)

Look at that list for a moment: hunger, thirst, nakedness, and need of all things. Picture it. No food, no drink, no clothes, nothing. Sum that up in one word: Poverty! In fact, I would say: absolute poverty. Which is it—a curse or a blessing? The answer is, absolute poverty is a curse.

In the next letter in this series, we will examine the way in which Jesus has dealt with that curse of poverty on our behalf, so that we can be totally liberated from its effects.

Teaching Letter
Transcript: TL-L074-100-ENG
Last Updated: 27 Oct 2026
Website: Derekprince.com/en/resources



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