



THE BIGGEST LITTLE WORD IN THE BIBLE:

“ IF ”

IF:
“A
STIPULATION,
A
CONDITION,
A
SUPPOSITION”
Webster

**THERE
ARE 1,522
“IF’S”
IN THE BIBLE...
THEY
APPEAR
IN EVERY
BOOK
OF THE BIBLE...**



The Bible is filled with what the apostle Peter called, “...exceedingly great and precious promises” (2 Pet.1:4). It has been estimated that there are over 5,000 such promises recorded in God’s Word that express His will for His covenant people, both Israel and the Church.

However, there are also 1,522 if’s recorded in God’s Word, many of which spell out the stipulations and conditions that are attached to those precious promises. An unconditional promise is an oxymoron. Often it is the “if’s” of the Bible that spell out for us what are the conditions attached to those exceedingly great and precious promises. This newsletter is dedicated to drawing your attention to what I like to call the biggest little word in the Bible.



As I was preparing to write this newsletter, the above little spiritual jingle came to mind. It is an old song from my early days in the Assemblies of God. Its theme was centered upon the believer's right to inherit every applicable promise in the Bible. Many years have passed since I learned that little jingle about the importance of God's promises. I would now view every jot, every tittle to specifically include the multitude of if's that contain the stipulations and conditions that are attached to the promises of God.



Another thing that was really popular back then were those little quick access boxes containing the promises of God. Every day you could draw out a card as a daily reminder of one of God's exceedingly great and precious promises He has written specifically for the believer. The only thing wrong with these little boxes of promises is that the back side of the cards were left blank. What a wonderful thing it would be if you could turn over the card containing the promise and have the stipulations and conditions spelled out that are necessary to inherit the promise. I suspect many of them would begin with the word "if". I also suspect that my suggested revised version of those promise cards with the conditions printed on the back would not sell.

In this age of what Leonard Ravenhill called, "paperback theology", I suspect that any book emphasizing the if's of the Bible will never end up on the best seller's list. The whole counsel of God has never been popular. Even Jesus experienced opposition when He gave the whole counsel of God. Consider this example:

**"SO ALL BORE WITNESS TO HIM,
AND MARVELED AT THE GRACIOUS WORDS WHICH PROCEEDED OUT OF HIS MOUTH..."**

Luke 4:22

Jesus was speaking some wonderful words of promise in a general sense (see vs. 18-19). However, when He began to qualify those promises as being selective and conditional (see vs. 23-27), we find a different response from this same group who previously "marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth":

**"THEN ALL THOSE IN THE SYNAGOGUE, WHEN THEY HEARD THESE THINGS
WERE FILLED WITH WRATH, AND ROSE UP AND THRUST HIM OUT OF THE CITY...
THAT THEY MIGHT THROW HIM DOWN OVER THE CLIFF."**

Luke 4:28-29

Moral to the story, both then and now, is that promises are popular - conditions are not.

Paul was a minister who preached the whole counsel of God so that he would be innocent of the blood of all men (see Acts 20:26-27). In these prophetic passages he warns of teachers who would be as savage wolves that would not spare the flock, but rather would speak perverse things in order to draw disciples after themselves (see Acts 20:29-30). The willful act of separating the promises of God from their stated stipulations and conditions is a manifestation of Paul's prophetic warning of what would come. Today we have the gospel selectively presented with clichés like "believe and receive." Acts 10:43 is often used as the basis for such a gospel. The volume of other passages with prerequisites attached to God's plan of salvation such as the repetitious call to repent are carefully avoided in favor of selected passages that just state the promise in a general sense such as "believe and receive." This purposeful selectivity of verses qualifies as avoiding to preach the whole counsel of God as it was preached by Jesus and Paul.

If only selective gracious words are spoken as the complete gospel message, then men will marvel at such words as they did with Jesus. The if's of the Bible state the conditions and stipulations that are to be presented as part of the message, even if they provoke people to be filled with wrath as it was with the above example of Jesus. The deceitful heart of man wants to hear a gospel message that puts all the responsibility upon God and nothing upon the recipient. There are plenty of men willing to give them what they want to hear (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Such a one-way gospel does not exist in the Bible. Let me prove that statement to you as we consider a host of the biggest little word in the Bible-if.

How important are the if's of the Bible? You can't even be saved without fulfilling its requirement:

“THAT IF YOU CONFESS WITH YOUR MOUTH THE LORD JESUS AND BELIEVE IN YOUR HEART THAT GOD HAS RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD, YOU WILL BE SAVED. FOR WITH THE HEART ONE BELIEVES TO RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND WITH THE MOUTH CONFESSION IS MADE TO SALVATION.” Rom. 10:9-10

So much for the popular just “believe and receive” theology. Salvation does not come by merely believing and receiving the promise of God for salvation. Several stipulations and conditions are mentioned as prerequisites to the stated promise, “...you will be saved.” They are prefaced by the use of the biggest little word in the Bible, “if.” It is insufficient just to believe. Confession is also necessary. Note that it is not confession that Jesus has become your savior, but rather it is “the LORD Jesus” that must be confessed unto salvation. There is a big difference between confessing Jesus as savior vs. Jesus as Lord. The word Lord means “ authority, controller, ruler and master.”



**“I AM THE LORD,
THAT IS MY NAME...”**
Isa. 42:8

I have this passage from Isaiah 33:22 displayed on the wall outside our bookstore as a reminder of who the Lord is. He is far more than our Savior. The Lord is also our King, our Lawgiver and our Judge.

Pharaoh once stated, “Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?...I do not know the Lord” (Ex. 5:2). Far too many of God's people do not obey His voice and for the same reason as Pharaoh:

“I do not know the Lord.” The word “savior” appears 41 times in all of Scripture, but the name Lord appears 5,000 times.

Which do we hear preached as the image of Jesus, Savior or Lord?

The real question is, “Which name are we to confess in order to be saved? Romans 10:9 tells us, “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus...”

The modern-day gospel message is presented with popular but unbiblical clichés like, “once saved, always saved,” and “unconditional eternal security.” How does this message stack up against the if's of the Bible? It does not:

“BUT CHRIST AS A SON OVER HIS OWN HOUSE, WHOSE HOUSE WE ARE

IF WE HOLD FAST THE CONFIDENCE AND REJOICING OF THE HOPE FIRM TO THE END...”
Heb. 3:6

“FOR WE HAVE BECOME PARTAKERS OF CHRIST

IF WE HOLD THE BEGINNING OF OUR CONFIDENCE STEADFAST TO THE END.”
Heb. 3:14

In context, there are two more if's that are an intricate part of the message the writer of Hebrews is seeking to convey to God's people who are in danger of fatal backsliding, “Beware brethren, lest there be in any of you and evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God...lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:12-13). Surrounding this sober warning written to brethren are two more if's:

“THEREFORE THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYS:

‘TODAY, IF YOU WILL HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS IN THE REBELLION...’ ”
Heb. 3:7-8

“WHILE IT IS SAID:

‘TODAY, IF IF YOU WILL HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS IN THE REBELLION...’
Heb. 3:15

Rather than supporting today's “unconditional eternal security” and “once saved, always saved,” premises, the Holy Spirit warns the believer with four conditional if's in one chapter that require something of the believer. He/she must not depart from the living God by means of an evil heart of unbelief and the deceitfulness of sin. Twice repeated is the call to hear His voice rather than becoming like the rebels in the wilderness. Also twice repeated is the call to hold fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end. Do you see how the if's of the Bible clarify the message?

Let us examine another presentation of the message of the gospel in which we find the biggest little word in the Bible. Here is the message Paul presented to the Church at Colossi:

“AND YOU, WHO WERE ONCE ALIENATED AND ENEMIES IN YOUR MIND BY WICKED WORKS, YET NOW HE HAS RECONCILED IN THE BODY OF HIS FLESH THROUGH DEATH, TO PRESENT YOU HOLY, BLAMELESS, AND IRREPROACHABLE IN HIS SIGHT-

IF **INDEED YOU CONTINUE IN THE FAITH, GROUNDED AND STEADFAST, AND ARE NOT MOVED AWAY FROM THE HOPE OF THE GOSPEL WHICH YOU HAVE HEARD...”**

Col. 1:21-23

What follows the if in this statement alone dispels the concept of “unconditional eternal security,” and “once saved, always saved,” does it not? Why aren’t the contents of the warning in verse 23 presented along with the gracious words found in verses 21 and 22 about what Christ has done and wants to do for us? Verse 23 is the rest of Paul’s sentence! There is no period found after the thought that God wants “...to present you holy, blameless, and irreproachable in His sight”. The stipulations and conditions to inheriting that beautiful promise follow the biggest little word in the Bible, if! The believer is required to (1) continue in the faith, (2) become grounded and steadfast, and (3) not be moved away from the hope of the gospel if he/she is going to be presented as “...holy, blameless, and irreproachable in His sight.” The fact that Paul even lists these criteria tell us that it is possible for a believer not to continue in the faith, and it is possible for a believer to be moved away from the hope of the gospel once having embraced it!

Again, the if’s of the Bible clarify and qualify the whole message God wants to impart pertaining to His promises. The if’s impart the whole counsel of God. Take them away and you are left with half truths that can be easily placed under the all too simplistic banner of just “believe and receive.”

There is another place in which Paul gets so swept up in the use of the word “If” that he uses it four times in three short verses:

“THIS IS A FAITHFUL SAYING:

IF **WE DIED WITH HIM, WE SHALL ALSO LIVE WITH HIM.**

IF **WE ENDURE (SUFFER), WE SHALL ALSO REIGN WITH HIM.**

IF **WE DENY HIM, HE ALSO WILL DENY US.**

IF **WE ARE FAITHLESS, HE REMAINS FAITHFUL; HE CANNOT DENY HIMSELF.”**

2 Tim. 2:11-13

In spite of the terse sayings above, the condensed “believe and receive” gospel teaches God’s people that (1) they can live with Him without dying with Him, (2) that they can reign with Him without suffering with Him, (3) that even if they deny Him, He will not deny them, and (4) His faithfulness to them prevents Him from ever denying them. Look, He just said in the third if that “If we deny Him, He will also deny us.” The fourth if is not contradicting the contents of the third! We deny Him by being unfaithful and faithless! This is not a statement of “unconditional eternal security.” Jesus cannot be unfaithful or faithless. Therefore, He cannot deny Himself, but He will deny those who deny Him! Oh yes, I know the verse that says, “I will never leave you or forsake you” (Heb. 13:5). However, that famous quote is half a sentence containing half the message God spoke. Here is that verse in context in which we find the stipulations and conditions attached to that beautiful promise:

**“MARRIAGE IS HONORABLE AMONG ALL, AND THE BED UNDEFILED;
BUT FORNICATORS AND ADULTERERS GOD WILL JUDGE.**

**LET YOUR CONDUCT BE WITHOUT COVETOUSNESS, AND BE CONTENT WITH SUCH THINGS AS YOU HAVE.
FOR HE HIMSELF HAS SAID, ‘I WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU OR FORSAKE YOU.’ “**

Heb 13:4-5

Will God forsake and leave unrepentant believers who continue to practice fornication, adultery and covetousness which Paul called idolatry in Col. 3:5? According to Paul, those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God (Eph. 5:3-8, Col. 3:5-6, 1 Cor. 6:9-11). In context, God is encouraging those who live in holy matrimony as they should and keep their hearts from idolatrous practices, that He will never leave them or forsake them.

Let us look at another pair of significant if's. This time let us look at Paul's epistle to the Romans:

"...YOU HAVE RECEIVED THE SPIRIT OF ADOPTION BY WHOM WE CRY OUT, 'ABBA FATHER.' THE SPIRIT HIMSELF BEARS WITNESS WITH OUR SPIRIT THAT WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD,

AND IF CHILDREN THEN HEIRS OF GOD, AND JOINT HEIRS WITH CHRIST

IF INDEED WE SUFFER WITH HIM, THAT WE MAY ALSO BE GLORIFIED TOGETHER."

Rom. 8:15-17

These two if's are very significant since they single out the different stipulations and conditions between a believer becoming (1) an heir of God, and (2) a joint heir with Christ. Paul is not endorsing the idea that all children of God, as heirs of God, are automatically guaranteed to also be joint heirs with Christ. The two If's each have their own stipulations and conditions enumerated for each category. All born again believers become children of God by means of receiving the spirit of adoption (the new birth). As children of God, Paul states that they become "heirs of God." The second if states the stipulation and condition to heirs of God becoming joint heirs with Christ. It is obtained if we suffer with Him that (in order that) we may be glorified with Christ. It is not heirs of God that will be glorified with Christ, but rather only the joint heirs of Christ who choose to suffer with Christ. This is not the common teaching in the Body of Christ. Most Christians expect to be glorified together with Christ simply because they have believed in Christ. Listen to how the apostle Paul makes a distinction in this area:

"FOR TO YOU IT HAS BEEN GRANTED ON BEHALF OF CHRIST, NOT ONLY TO BELIEVE IN HIM, BUT ALSO TO SUFFER FOR HIS SAKE."

Phil. 1:29

If you only embrace half of what has been granted unto us as believers, namely believing in Him, then we will only be heirs of God as children of God in eternity. To be a joint heir with Christ requires that we embrace the second half of what has been granted to us, which is to also suffer for His sake. This leads to being glorified together with Christ in eternity with a better inheritance than children of God. As children of God we become sons and daughters of God. There is a name and a place offered to God's people that is better than that of sons and daughters:

"FOR THUS SAYS THE LORD: 'TO THE EUNUCHS WHO KEEP MY SABBATHS, AND CHOOSE WHAT PLEASES ME, AND HOLD FAST MY COVENANT, EVEN TO THEM I WILL GIVE IN MY HOUSE AND WITHIN MY WALLS A PLACE AND A NAME BETTER THAN THAT OF SONS AND DAUGHTERS...'"

Isa. 56:4-5

You only need to read Revelation Chapter 3:12-13 to see what this place and name is that has been promised to this overcoming church. It is the Bride of Christ reigning in New Jerusalem:

"HE WHO OVERCOMES, I WILL MAKE HIM A PILLAR IN THE TEMPLE OF MY GOD, AND HE SHALL GO OUT NO MORE. AND I WILL WRITE ON HIM THE NAME OF MY GOD AND THE NAME OF THE CITY OF MY GOD, THE NEW JERUSALEM WHICH COMES DOWN OUT OF HEAVEN FROM MY GOD (see Rev. 21:2).

AND I WILL WRITE ON HIM MY NEW NAME.

HE WHO HAS AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAYS TO THE CHURCHES."

Rev. 3:12-13

Earlier we looked at this if in which Paul stated very simply that suffering with Christ is the key to reigning with Him:

"... IF WE ENDURE (SUFFER), WE SHALL ALSO REIGN WITH HIM." 2 Tim. 2:12

"...AND IF CHILDREN THEN HEIRS OF GOD, AND JOINT HEIRS WITH CHRIST

IF INDEED WE SUFFER WITH HIM, THAT WE MAY ALSO BE GLORIFIED TOGETHER."

Rom. 8:15-17

Paul, here in Romans, is merely elaborating on the simple statement he made in 2 Timothy. These two if's have revealed to us a distinction that will last for all eternity between heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. It is a distinction between the destiny of the Body of Christ and the Bride of Christ.

Here is another if worthy of pondering:

“IF MY PEOPLE WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME WILL HUMBLE THEMSELVES, AND PRAY AND SEEK MY FACE, AND TURN FROM THEIR WICKED WAYS, THEN I WILL HEAR FROM HEAVEN, AND WILL FORGIVE THEIR SIN AND HEAL THEIR LAND.” 2 Chron. 7:14

These passages are not a message to be applied to the unregenerated, heathenistic, or atheistic Americans who inhabit this land. God wrote these words to HIS people! The depraved condition for this country (or any country) is to be laid at the feet of God's people who abide in it!

If God's blessing does not abide upon a land, this "if" tells us it is because of the sins of God's people who abide in it. God's laws were not given to govern the lives of unbelievers, but rather to govern those who are in covenant relationship with God. Clearly the Scriptures teach that the heathen have no such relationship with God and therefore are outside the promises of the covenant (Eph. 2:12).

For instance, it isn't divorce among the heathen that God singles out that He hates (Mal. 2:14-16). In these verses from Malachi, God states that He is after godly offspring from the union of His people (Mal. 2:15). I believe God is quite angry at the divorce rate among Christians that has recently surpassed the rate of the heathen. Perhaps this statistic is affected because so many heathen don't even bother to get married, but so does this worldly philosophy exist among God's people. More and more "Christians" are living together and are, in reality, committing fornication as a lifestyle, but believe it's quite OK because everybody does it. However, what everybody does as the norm in society is not the measuring stick as to whether it is acceptable in God's sight. Christians are not to be conformed to the world (Rom. 12:2). God's Word is specific as to why His people must be properly married:

“MARRIAGE IS HONORABLE AMONG ALL, AND THE BED UNDEFILED, BUT FORNICATORS AND ADULTERERS GOD WILL JUDGE”

Heb. 13:4.

No doubt we live in a violent land permeated with murderers (The U.S. has the highest rate of incarceration of any nation in the world). However, God calls His people murderers when they practice hatred toward a brother or a sister (1 Jn. 3:15, Matt. 5:21-22, Jm. 4:4).

The point I want to make here is that Christianity is blaming the unregenerate for the condition of America, however God places the blame upon His people as the above if clearly states.

Here are two more sober if's that are worthy of careful scrutiny in the midst of the rage over popular doctrines like "once saved, always saved", or unconditional eternal security."

“FOR I TESTIFY TO EVERYONE WHO HEARS THE WORDS OF THE PROPHECY OF THIS BOOK:

IF ANYONE ADDS TO THESE THINGS, GOD WILL ADD TO HIM THE PLAGUES THAT ARE WRITTEN IN THIS BOOK;

AND

IF ANYONE TAKES AWAY FROM THE WORDS OF THE BOOK OF THIS PROPHECY, GOD SHALL TAKE AWAY HIS PART FROM THE BOOK OF LIFE, FROM THE HOLY CITY, AND FROM THE THINGS WHICH ARE WRITTEN IN THIS BOOK.”

Rev. 22:18-19

Here are two if's capable of sinking that popular Titanic view of "once saved, always saved," and "unconditional eternal security." Just take away from what is written in this prophetic book and God will take away that person's name from the Book of Life as well as his or her access into the New Jerusalem in eternity (see the additional warning in Rev. 21:24-27). Does God ever blot out names from the Book of Life once they are written in through the new birth? Read Jesus' letter written to His church in Sardis (Rev. 3:1-6).

Even an unsaved English teacher could confirm that the contents state clearly that God does not blot out the names of those who have NOT defiled their garments, but

He does blot out those who do! "Take away" from these kinds of sober warnings with glib teachings such as "once saved, always saved" and "unconditional eternal security", and such teachers may personally inherit the consequences of these two sober if's!

12 Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!

13 For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry,

14 if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them.

15 For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

16 For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy, and if the root is holy, so are the branches.

17 And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree,

18 do not boast against the branches. But if you boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.

19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." 20 Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear.

21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.

22 Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell severity; but toward you, goodness if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.

23 And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.

24 For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree, how much more will these, who are the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

Romans 11:12-24

In considering our next two if's of the Bible, I printed out a large segment of Romans Chapter 11 in order to show you how frequently this biggest little word in the Bible appears. Paul uses it ten times in just 12 verses! By circling the if's, I believe we can visually dramatize how easy it is to overlook them in reading God's Word.

The two if's I singled out below, written to the Gentile church at Rome, should be very sobering to us as followers of Christ. These Gentile believers (like you and me) were becoming high-minded with an elitist attitude toward the unbelieving Jews. It is the very core problem of the elitist "replacement theology" that exists in the church today.

Here is Paul's warning to New Testament, blood-washed believers who held a superior attitude toward the Jewish people who had been cut off from their relationship to God due to their unbelief:

"...BECAUSE OF UNBELIEF THEY WERE BROKEN OFF, AND YOU STAND BY FAITH. DO NOT BE HAUGHTY, BUT FEAR.

FOR

IF

GOD DID NOT SPARE THE NATURAL BRANCHES, HE MAY NOT SPARE YOU EITHER. THEREFORE CONSIDER THE GOODNESS AND THE SEVERITY OF GOD: ON THOSE WHO FELL, SEVERITY; BUT TOWARD YOU, GOODNESS,

IF

YOU CONTINUE IN HIS GOODNESS. OTHERWISE YOU ALSO WILL BE CUT OFF."

Rom. 11:20-22

Were the Jews cut off from inheriting eternal life by their unbelief in Jesus Christ? You know the answer is yes, for Paul has already stated clearly that they need to be saved (Rom.10:1-4). If they can be cut off then so can we! Is that not what Paul says?

Are we "unconditionally eternally secure" or does the above "if" state that to prevent being cut off as New Testament believers in the same manner as were the Jews, we must continue in His goodness (which the Jews did not). They remained in unbelief, true? Note what does Paul warn believers:

"BEWARE BRETHREN, LEST THERE BE IN ANY OF YOU AN EVIL HEART OF UNBELIEF

IN DEPARTING FROM THE LIVING GOD...

LEST ANY OF YOU BE HARDENED THROUGH THE DECEITFULNESS OF SIN.

FOR WE HAVE BECOME PARTAKERS OF CHRIST

IF WE HOLD THE BEGINNING OF OUR CONFIDENCE STEADFAST TO THE END."

Heb. 3:12-14

(CONTINUING
IN HIS
GOODNESS)

IF

IF

"BUT CHRIST AS A SON OVER HIS OWN HOUSE, WHOSE HOUSE WE ARE IF WE HOLD FAST THE CONFIDENCE AND REJOICING OF THE HOPE FIRM TO THE END..."

Heb. 3:6

This last set of if's will also help qualify what it means to "continue in His goodness":

"IF YOU ARE WILLING AND OBEDIENT, YOU SHALL EAT OF THE GOOD OF THE LAND;

BUT

IF

YOU REFUSE AND REBEL, YOU SHALL BE DEVoured BY THE SWORD; FOR THE MOUTH OF THE LORD HAS SPOKEN."

Isa. 1:19-20

We have only examined a handful of the 1,522 if's found in the Bible. I pray that what we have considered will quicken you to begin to circle the biggest little word in the Bible!

Pastor Randy Shupe

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Pastor Randy Shupe

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