

2 Peter 1:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Analysis

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. Through knowing God, believers receive "exceeding great and precious promises" (megista kai timia epangelmat, μέγιστα καὶ τίμια ἐπαγγέλματα)—superlative language emphasizing the incomparable value of God's covenant commitments. These promises enable believers to become "partakers of the divine nature" (theias koinōnoi physeōs, θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως).

This phrase requires careful interpretation. Peter is not teaching deification (becoming God) or pantheism (merging with divine essence), doctrines alien to biblical theology. Rather, "partakers" (koinōnoi, κοινωνοί) means "sharers" or "participants"—believers share in divine qualities like holiness, righteousness, love, and immortality without becoming ontologically divine. This is the biblical doctrine of sanctification and glorification: progressive transformation into Christlikeness (2 Cor 3:18) culminating in resurrection bodies (1 John 3:2).

This participation involves "having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (apophygentes tēs en kosmō en epithymia phthoras). The escape is ongoing (apophygentes, aorist participle), achieved through regeneration and maintained through sanctification. "Corruption" (phthora, φθορά) denotes moral

and physical decay resulting from the Fall. "Lust" (epithymia, ἐπιθυμία) encompasses all sinful desires, not just sexual. False teachers promoting moral license (chapter 2) demonstrate they have not truly escaped worldly corruption, proving their claims to special knowledge are fraudulent.

Historical Context

The concept of participation in divine nature would resonate with Greek philosophical thought (particularly Platonism and Stoicism) that discussed humans sharing in the divine logos or divine spark. However, Peter radically redefines this concept in Christian terms. Unlike Greek philosophy's innate divine nature requiring liberation or cultivation, Peter teaches that sharing divine nature is a gift received through God's promises, requiring both initial escape from worldly corruption and ongoing transformation.

Eastern Orthodox theology has historically emphasized 2 Peter 1:4 in developing the doctrine of theōsis (deification), understood as participation in God's energies (not essence). Western theology has been more cautious, emphasizing sanctification and glorification without using deification language. Both traditions agree that believers are transformed to reflect God's character without becoming God in essence. Against Gnostic devaluation of the body and material creation, Peter affirms that the divine nature we share includes moral transformation affecting embodied existence, not escape from physicality.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. What specific promises of God's Word do you need to claim more fully to experience transformation in areas of ongoing struggle?

2. How does understanding sanctification as 'partaking of divine nature' change your view of sin's seriousness and holiness' possibility?
3. In what ways does contemporary Christianity compromise the call to escape worldly corruption, and how should we respond?

Interlinear Text

διὰ	ὧν	τὰ	μέγιστα	ἡμῖν	καὶ	τίμια	ἐπαγγέλματα
Whereby	G3739	G3588	exceeding great	unto us	and	precious	promises
G1223			G3176	G2254	G2532	G5093	G1862
δεδώρηται	ἴνα	διὰ	τούτων	γένησθε	θείας	κοινωνοὶ	
are given	that	Whereby	these	ye might be	of the divine	partakers	
G1433	G2443	G1223	G5130	G1096	G2304	G2844	
φύσεως	ἀποφυγόντες	τῆς	ἐν	κόσμῳ	ἐν	ἐπιθυμίᾳ	
nature	having escaped	G3588	that is in	the world	that is in	lust	
G5449	G668		G1722	G2889	G1722	G1939	
φθορᾶς							
the corruption							
G5356							

Additional Cross-References

2 Corinthians 3:18 (Parallel theme): But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Colossians 3:10 (Parallel theme): And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:

Hebrews 12:10 (Parallel theme): For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

1 John 3:2 (Parallel theme): Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

Galatians 6:8 (Parallel theme): For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

1 John 2:25 (Covenant): And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.

2 Peter 1:1 (Parallel theme): Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ:

Hebrews 9:15 (Covenant): And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

2 Corinthians 1:20 (Covenant): For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.

Galatians 3:16 (Covenant): Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.