

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

### "GRACE" AND GOOD WORKS.

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"This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works."—Titus iii. 8.

From an early period there have been advocated in the Christian world two opposing systems of doctrine in reference to the way of salvation. The one, starting from the fact of man's total depravity and hopeless ruin, ascribes salvation in all its parts to the mere grace of God, and regards man as working in the matter only as God works in him to will and to do of his good pleasure. The other, setting out with the denial, or with defective views, of human depravity, regards God as giving men an opportunity of saving themselves, while it depends entirely on their free will whether any or all of them embrace the opportunity given. This second system branches out into many subordinate systems, and its adherents differ widely among themselves as to that wherein an opportunity of salvation consists, but they all concur in maintaining that it is man's will and not God's will on which the salvation of the individual sinner hinges.

The doctrines of grace in which the first view of the way of man's salvation is embodied, have found no more cordial reception than in the Presbyterian Church, and no more worthy expression than in our Westminster Confession of Faith. But this system of truth whether known as Pauline, Augustinian, or Calvinistic, is largely the heritage of all evangelical Christians. It has been well said that "true believers agree more nearly in their inward faith than in their written creeds." And there are many who by their creeds would be ranked with those who regard God as giving men only a chance of saving themselves, who when they utter, in their devotions, the deep convictions of their hearts, ascribe the whole work of man's salvation to sovereign grace. This system of doctrine, which is so closely intertwined with the religious life of God's people of every name, has been constantly exposed to bitter opposition. Almost every kind of charge has, in turn, been hurled against the doctrine and those who embrace it. None, perhaps, has been urged with greater persistency than the supposed immoral tendency of the doctrines of grace. It has been loudly proclaimed that they sap the foundations of morality, destroy man's responsibility for his conduct, take away the motives to virtue, and open the flood-gates of vice. So constantly have these assertions been made that some timid Christians, who see clearly that these doctrines are taught in the Holy Scriptures, are almost afraid to hear them proclaimed from the pulpit.

The Master has taught us that "a tree is known by its fruit." And, could it be shewn that the doctrines of grace bear such fruits, it would be hard indeed to convince thoughtful Christians that they are of God, but if on the other hand, it can be shewn that instead of being hostile to morality, they are a most effective means of promoting it, then we need not hesitate to apply the maxim that "a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit."

If we examine this verse in its relation to the context, we shall find that it casts much light on the practical bearing of the doctrines of grace upon morality. The apostle, you will observe, speaks of certain things which he will have Titus and the ministers of the Word affirm constantly, *in order that*—for this is the real force of the original here—"they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works."

In dwelling on this text, we may notice two points: (I.) What the apostle would have ministers teach constantly. (II.) The practical influence which such teaching is fitted and designed to exert: "In order that they," etc.

I. What the apostle would have ministers teach constantly.

There can be no reasonable doubt that the entire circle of revealed truth should find its place in the ministrations of the sanctuary. Paul's own example is sufficient evidence of this. He could say to his Ephesian converts, "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." But while no truth may be concealed, all have not equal importance. In the human body, every member serves some useful

end, but all are not as essential to life and health as the heart or the brain. So, while every revealed truth should receive its due place in our ministrations, there are some so central to the entire system, and so essential to spiritual life, that they should pervade and colour our entire teaching. To such truths the apostle manifestly refers in our text.

What then are these vital truths which Paul characterizes as a faithful saying, and which he will have ministers affirm constantly? Evidently those things of which he has just been speaking. Turn then, and read carefully from the third verse of this chapter to the end of the seventh, and we are much mistaken, if you do not discover that the much vilified doctrines of grace which, we are told, sap the foundations of morality and open the flood-gates of vice, are the things which Paul would have ministers affirm constantly, in order that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works.

This system of doctrine starts with the recognition of man's total depravity, and then ascribes salvation in all its parts to the grace of God. Man's state, as guilty and polluted, demands the accomplishment for his salvation of a two-fold work,—a work of merit by which his guilt is removed and he is reinstated in the Divine favour, and a work of gracious power by which he is quickened spiritually and renewed in heart and life. The ascription of this two-fold work to the grace of God, along with the assertion of man's depravity, includes all that is fundamental to that system of doctrine which our standards, following the Word of God, teach in reference to the way of salvation. It may be summed up in three statements: (1) Men are by nature totally depraved, the slaves of sin; (2) those who are saved are renewed and sanctified by the grace of God, and not by any self-determining power in the will, and (3) sinners are justified freely by grace.

If we are asked where we can find a compendious statement which brings out all these points, I know of none more apposite than the verses which immediately precede our text.

There we find:

1. An impressive statement of man's natural depravity. It is not presented in the set phrases of the schools, but it is expressed in language which brings home the fact to our hearts: "For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving [literally slaves to] divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating, one another" (vers. 3). What could be added to this description of our natural bondage to sin? Can anyone doubt that such beings are justly exposed to the Divine displeasure, and that, if left to themselves, they will go on in sin as certainly as a river flows towards the ocean? It is this condition of fallen man, as depraved and ruined, which calls for salvation by grace. This makes the intervention of grace a necessity. And this constitutes the dark back-ground on which the bright colours of sovereign grace are displayed.

In these verses we are taught:

2. That the renewal of the human heart is due to the special grace of God and not to the will of man.

We do not affirm that we are taught either here or elsewhere that men are renewed either apart from their will, or against their will. What we mean is that in effecting the great vital change, God's will precedes man's will, and He makes us willing in the day of his power.

It cannot be disputed that the entire work of renewal through which a fallen man must pass to fit him for the presence of God, is here included in "the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost." And from its initial stage to its completion, you will observe that it is here ascribed, not to the will of man, but to the power of the Holy Ghost.

Some indeed have held that the renewing of the Holy Ghost is nothing more than the influence which inspired truth exerts—an influence which is not special, but common to all who have the Holy Scriptures. But it is obvious that if this is what is meant, (1) the language in which it is expressed has been most unfortunately chosen. For according to the view in question, the Spirit was not shed on those who believe, but only those who were inspired to write the sacred Books. (2) It is manifest also that the apostle regards the Spirit as so given to believers that their justification is inseparably linked with it. But surely no one can imagine that all who have a Bible and read it are justified, and made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." It is evident the

apostle speaks of the Spirit as being given in such a special and efficacious manner as secures the renewal and justification of those to whom He is given. (3) Indeed if the Spirit is given only in the Word, and the renovation of our hearts turns on the self-determination of our wills, it is quite incorrect to say that God saved us, "according to his mercy." For in that case the rule of the Divine procedure, in dispensing salvation, is not sovereign mercy, but human volitions. The entire passage would require to be remodelled to make it square with the notion that the Spirit is given only in the Word, and that man's will is the self-determining cause of his personal salvation. It would require to read, "According to our self-determined choice He saved us by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, given to us in an inspired Bible."

In these verses we are taught:

3. That sinners are justified freely by grace.

Were we justified on account of our good deeds, it would be of works, not of grace. But the apostle is careful to shew that our own worthiness does not enter into the ground of our justification. Grace reigns in our justification. Paul's words are quite definite: "Not by works of righteousness which we had done, but according to his mercy He saved us." And again, "That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." That we owe our justification entirely to the mere grace of God is a fact which lies clearly on the surface of these words. And it is one which the apostle everywhere insists upon as of vital importance: "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."

Such then are the doctrines which the Apostle will have ministers affirm constantly. They are the very central articles of the doctrines of grace which imply the whole system. For all the other doctrines of that system are implied in and bound up with these radical affirmations. Ever God's eternal electing purpose which some who do not understand the subject may regard as something higher and more terrible than what is here laid down, is only God's eternal purpose to do what the apostle would have affirmed constantly that He does. His unchanging purpose to renew and justify sinners through Jesus Christ is election. And surely no one need shrink from believing that God always intended to do what He does. It might also be shewn that by the same grace which constrained sinners to embrace Christ and enter on the new life, they are enabled to *persevere* unto the end, being "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." The whole system is bound up with the elemental facts here recognized, ruin by the fall, regeneration by the Spirit, and a gratuitous justification through Jesus Christ.

II. The practical influence which such teaching is fitted and designed to exert: "In order that they," etc.

It is quite possible that such teaching in many ways exerts an influence in favour of good works which we cannot fully explain. It should be sufficient for us that an inspired apostle has instructed us to affirm these things constantly in order that "they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works." But without pretending to point out all the ways in which the doctrines of grace touch the springs of activity for good within us, we may mention some things which make it evident that these truths must be proclaimed where good works are to flourish.

1. In the knowledge of these truths is life.

Good works, in the Bible sense, are the manifestation of spiritual life. The unrenewed man may perform dead works, but he is impotent to do what is morally and spiritually good. We must make the tree good, if we would have the fruit good. It is only those who have experienced the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost who put forth that spiritual activity which the Scriptures call good works.

How then do we become consciously partakers of the new life? It is, doubtless, by the quickening grace of the Holy Spirit who is shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Lord, but not apart from the instrumentality of the truth, do we ever consciously realize the great change. "Of his will begat He us with the word of truth" (James i. 18). And while God may employ almost any part of his Word for this purpose, He always does bring home to the hearts of those