

“THE TRUE GRACE OF GOD WHEREIN YE STAND.”

God is made known to us as the “*God of all grace*,” and the position in which we are set is that of “tasting that He is *gracious*.” How hard it is for us to believe this, that the Lord is *gracious*. The natural feeling of our hearts is “I know that Thou art an austere man;” there is the want in all of us naturally of the understanding of the *Grace of God*.

There is sometimes the thought that grace implies God’s *passing over sin*, but no, grace supposes sin to be so horribly bad a thing that God cannot tolerate it; were it in the power of man, after being unrighteous and evil, to patch up his ways, and mend himself so as to stand before God there would be no need of *grace*. The very fact of the Lord’s being gracious shews sin to be so evil a thing, that, man being a sinner, his state is utterly ruined and hopeless, and nothing but *free grace* will do for him—can meet his need.

We must learn what God is to us, not by our own thoughts, but by what He has revealed Himself to be, and that is, “*the God of all grace*.” The moment I understand that I am a sinful man, and yet that it was because the Lord knew the full extent of my sin, and what its hatefulness was, that He came to me, I understand what *grace* is. Faith makes me see that God is greater than my sin, and not my sin is greater than God. . . . The Lord that

I have known as laying down His life for me, is the same Lord I have to do with every day of my life, and all His dealings with me are on the same principles of *grace*. The great secret of growth is, the looking up to the Lord as *gracious*. How precious, how strengthening it is to know that Jesus is at this moment feeling and exercising the same love towards me as when He died on the Cross for me.

This is a truth that should be used by us in the most common every-day circumstances of life. Suppose, for instance I find an evil temper in myself, which I feel it difficult to overcome; let me bring it to Jesus as my friend, virtue goes out of Him for my need. *Faith* should be ever thus in exercise against temptations, and not simply my own effort; my own effort against it will never be sufficient. The source of real strength is in the sense of the Lord's being *gracious*. The natural man in us always disbelieves Christ as the only source of strength and of every blessing. Suppose my soul is out of communion, the natural heart says, "I must correct the cause of this before I can come to Christ;" but *He is gracious*; and knowing this, the way is to return to Him *at once, just as we are*, and then humble ourselves deeply before Him. It is only in *Him* and from *Him*, that we shall find that which will restore our souls. Humbleness in His presence is the only real humbleness. If we own ourselves in His presence to be *just what we are*, we shall find that He will shew us nothing but *grace*. . . .

It is Jesus who gives abiding rest to our souls,

and not what our thoughts about ourselves may be. Faith never thinks about that which is in ourselves as its ground of rest : it receives, loves and apprehends what God has revealed, and what are God's thoughts about Jesus, in whom is *His rest*. As knowing Jesus to be precious to our souls, our eyes and our hearts being occupied with Him, they will be effectually prevented from being taken up with the vanity and sin around ; and this too will be our strength against the sin and corruption of our own hearts. Whatever I see in myself that is not in Him is sin, but then it is not thinking of my own sins, and my own vileness, and being occupied with them, that will humble me, but thinking of the Lord Jesus, dwelling upon the excellency in Him. It is well to be done with ourselves, and to be taken up with Jesus. We are entitled to forget ourselves, we are entitled to forget our sins, we are entitled to forget all but Jesus.

There is nothing so hard for our hearts as to abide in the sense of *grace*, to continue practically conscious that we are not under law but under *grace*, it is by *grace* that the heart is "established," but then there is nothing more difficult for us really to comprehend than the fulness of *grace*, that "*Grace of God wherein we stand*," and to walk in the power and consciousness of it. . . . It is only in the presence of God, there we can know it, and *there* it is our privilege to be. The moment we get away from the presence of God, there will always be certain workings of *our own* thoughts within us, and

our own thoughts can never reach up to the thoughts of God about us, to the "*grace of God.*" . . .

Anything that I had the smallest possible right to expect could not be pure, free *grace*—could not be the "*grace of God.*" . . . It is alone when in communion with Him that we are able to measure *everything* according to *His grace.* It is impossible, when we are abiding in the sense of God's presence, for anything, be it what it may—even the state of the Church, to shake us, for we count on God, and then all things become a sphere, and scene for the operation of *His grace.*

The having very simple thoughts of *grace* is the true source of our strength as Christians; and the abiding in the sense of *grace* in the presence of God, is all the secret of holiness, peace, and quietness of spirit.

The "*Grace of God*" is so unlimited, so full, so perfect, that if we get for a moment out of the presence of God, we cannot have the true consciousness of it, we have no strength to apprehend it; and if we attempt to know it out of His presence we shall only turn it to licentiousness. If we look at the simple fact of what *grace* is, it has no limits, no bounds. Be we what we may (and we cannot be worse than we are), in spite of all that, what God is towards us is LOVE. Neither our joy nor our peace is dependent on what we are to God, but on what *He is to us*, and this is *grace.*

Grace supposes all the sin and evil that is in us, and is the blessed revelation, that through Jesus, that

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all the sin and evil has been put away. A single sin is more horrible to God than a thousand sins,—nay, than all the sins in the world are to us: and yet, with the fullest consciousness of what *we* are, all that God is pleased to be towards us is LOVE.

In Rom. vii. the state described is that of a person quickened but whose whole set of reasonings centre in *himself*. . . . he stops short of *grace*, of the simple fact that, whatever be his state, let him be as bad as he may, GOD IS LOVE, and only love towards him. Instead of looking at God, it is all "I," "I," "I." Faith looks at God, as He has revealed Himself in Grace. . . . Let me ask you "Am I—or is my state the object of faith?" No, faith never makes what is in *my heart* its object, but *God's revelation of Himself in grace*.

Grace has reference to what GOD is, and not to what we are, except indeed that the very greatness of our sins does but magnify the extent of the "*Grace of God*." At the same time we must remember, that the object and necessary effect of grace is to bring our souls into communion with God, to sanctify us, by bringing the soul to know God, and to love Him; therefore the knowledge of grace is the true source of sanctification.

The triumph of grace is seen in this, that when man's enmity had cast out Jesus from the earth, God's love had brought in salvation by that very act—came in to atone for the sins of those who had rejected Him. In the view of the fullest development of man's sin, faith sees the fullest de-

velopment of God's grace. . . . I have got away from grace if I have the slightest doubt or hesitation about God's love. I shall then be saying, "I am unhappy because I am not what I should like to be:" *that* is not the question. The real question is, whether *God* is what we should like Him to be, whether Jesus is all we could wish. If the consciousness of what we are—of what we find in ourselves, have any other effect, than, while it humbles us, to increase our adoration of what God is, we are off the ground of pure grace. . . . Is there distress and distrust in your minds: see if it be not because you are still saying, "I," "I," and losing sight of God's grace.

It is better to be thinking of what God is than of what we are. This looking at ourselves, at the bottom is really pride, a want of the thorough consciousness that we are *good for nothing*. Till we see this we never look quite away from self to God. . . . In looking to Christ, it is our privilege to forget ourselves. *True humility does not so much consist in thinking badly of ourselves, as in not thinking of ourselves at all. I am too bad to be worth thinking about.* What I want is, to forget myself and to look to God, who is indeed worth all my thoughts. Is there need of being humbled about ourselves? We may be quite sure that will do it.

Beloved, if we can say as in Romans vii., "In me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no *good thing*," we have thought quite long enough about ourselves; let us then think about Him who thought about us with

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thoughts of good and not of evil, long before we had thought of ourselves at all. Let us see what His thoughts of grace about us are, and take up the words of faith. "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

GOD IN CIRCUMSTANCES.

NOTHING so helps a Christian to endure the trials of his path, as the habit of seeing *God in every thing*. There is no circumstance, be it ever so trivial, or ever so common-place, which may not be regarded as a messenger from God, if only the ear be circumcised to hear, and the mind spiritual, to understand the message. If we lose sight of this valuable truth, life, in many instances at least, will be but a dull monotony, presenting nothing beyond the most ordinary circumstances. On the other hand, if we could but remember, as we start each day on our course, that the hand of our Father can be traced in every scene—if we could see in the smallest, as well as in the most weighty circumstances, traces of the Divine presence how full of deep interest would each day's history be found!

The book of Jonah illustrates this truth in a very marked way. There we learn, what we need so much to remember, that *there is nothing ordinary to the Christian*; every thing is extraordinary. The most common-place things, the simplest circumstances, exhibit, in the history of Jonah, the

evidences of special interference. To see this instructive feature, it is not needful to enter upon the detailed exposition of the book of Jonah, we only require to notice one expression, which occurs in it again and again: viz., "THE LORD PREPARED."

In chapter i. the Lord sends out a great wind into the sea, and this wind had in it a solemn voice for the prophet's ear, had he been wakeful to hear it. Jonah was the one who needed to be taught; for him the messenger was sent forth. The poor pagan mariners, no doubt, had often encountered a storm; to them it was nothing new, nothing special, nothing but what fell to the common lot of seamen; yet, it was special and extraordinary for one individual on board, though that one was asleep in the sides of the ship. In vain did the sailors seek to counteract the storm; nothing would avail until the Lord's message had reached the ears of him to whom it was sent.

Following Jonah a little further, we perceive another instance of what we may term, GOD IN EVERY THING. He is brought into new circumstances, yet he is not beyond the reach of the messengers of God. The Christian can never find himself in a position in which his Father's voice cannot reach his ear, or his Father's hand meet his view; for His voice can be heard, His hand seen, in every thing. Thus when Jonah had been cast forth into the sea, "*the Lord prepared a great fish.*" Here, too, we see that there is nothing ordinary to the child of God. A great fish was nothing un-

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common ; there are many such in the sea ; yet did the Lord *prepare* one for Jonah, in order that it might be the messenger of God to his soul.

Again in chapter iv. we find the prophet sitting on the east side of the city of Nineveh, in sullenness and impatience, grieved because the city had not been overthrown, and entreating the Lord to take away his life. He would seem to have forgotten the lesson learnt during the three days' sojourn in the deep, and he therefore needed a fresh message from God : "And *the Lord prepared a gourd.*" This is very instructive. There was surely nothing uncommon in the mere circumstance of a gourd ; other men might see a thousand gourds, and moreover, might sit beneath their shade, and yet see nothing extraordinary in them. But Jonah's gourd exhibited traces of the hand of God, and forms a link, an important link, in the train of circumstances through which, according to the design of God, the prophet was passing. The gourd now, like the great fish before, though very different in its kind, was the messenger of God to his soul. "So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd." He had before longed to depart, but his longing was more the result of impatience and chagrin, than of holy desire to depart and be at rest for ever. It was the painfulness of the present, rather than the happiness of the future, that made him long to be gone. This is often the case. We are frequently anxious to get away from present pressure ; but if the pressure were removed, the

longing would cease. If we longed for the coming of Jesus, and the glory of His blessed presence, circumstances would make no difference; we should then long as ardently to get away from circumstances of ease and sunshine, as from those of pressure and sorrow. Jonah, while he sat beneath the shadow of the gourd, thought not of departing, and the very fact of his being "exceeding glad of the gourd," proved how much he needed that special messenger from the Lord; it served to make manifest the true condition of his soul, when he uttered the words, "Take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live." The Lord can make even a gourd the instrument for developing the secrets of the human heart. Truly the Christian can say, *God is in every thing*. The tempest roars, and the voice of God is heard; a gourd springs up in silence, and the hand of God is seen.

Yet the gourd was but a link in the chain; for "*the Lord prepared a worm,*" and this worm, trifling as it was when viewed in the sight of an instrument, was, nevertheless, as much the divine agent as was the "great wind," or the "great fish." A worm, when used by God, can do wonders; it withered Jonah's gourd, and taught him, as it teaches us, a solemn lesson. True, it was an insignificant agent, the efficacy of which depended upon its conjunction with others; but this only illustrates the more strikingly the greatness of our Father's mind. He can prepare a worm, and He

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can prepare a vehement east wind, and make them both, though so unlike, conducive to His great designs. In a word, the spiritual mind sees *God in every thing*. The worm, the whale, and the tempest, all are instruments in His hand. The most insignificant, as well as the most splendid agents, further His ends. The east wind would not have proved effectual, though it had been ever so vehement, had the worm not first done its appointed work. How striking is all this! Who would have thought that a worm and an east wind could have been joint agents in doing a work of God? Yet so it was. Great and small are only terms used among men, and cannot apply to Him "who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven," as well as "the things that are on earth." They are all alike to Him "who sitteth on the circle of the earth." Jehovah can tell the number of the stars, and, while He does so, he can take knowledge of a falling sparrow—He can make the whirlwind His chariot, and a broken heart His dwelling-place. Nothing is great or small with God.

The believer, therefore, must not look upon any thing as ordinary, for God is in every thing. True, he may have to pass through the same circumstances—to meet the same trials—to encounter the same reverses as other men; but he must not meet them in the same way, nor interpret them on the same principle; nor do they convey the same report to his ear. He should hear the voice of God, and heed His message in the most trifling, as well

as in the most momentous occurrences of the day. The disobedience of a child, or the loss of an estate, the obliquity of a servant, or the death of a friend, should all be regarded as divine messengers to his soul.

So also, when we look around us in the world, God is in every thing. The overturning of thrones, the crashing of empires, the famine, the pestilence, and every event that occurs amongst the nations, exhibit traces of the hand of God, and utters a voice for the ear of man. The devil will seek to rob the Christian of the real sweetness of this thought; he will tempt him to think that, at least, the common-place circumstances of every-day life exhibit nothing extraordinary, but only such as happen to other men. But we must not yield to him in this. We must start on our course, every morning, with this truth vividly impressed on our mind, *God is in every thing*. The sun that rolls along the heavens in splendid brilliancy, and the worm that crawls along the path, have both alike been prepared of God, and, moreover, could both alike co-operate in the development of His unsearchable designs.

I would observe, in conclusion, that the only one who walked in the abiding remembrance of the above precious and important truth was our blessed Master. He saw the Father's hand, and heard the Father's voice, in every thing. This appears pre-eminently in the season of the deepest sorrow. He came forth from the garden of Gethsemane

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with those memorable words, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" thus recognising in the fullest manner, that GOD IS IN EVERY THING.

Our times are in Thy hand,
Father, we wish them there;
Our life, our soul, our all we leave
Entirely to Thy care.

Our times are in Thy hand,
What ever they may be,
Pleasing or painful, dark or bright,
As best may seem to Thee.

Our times are in Thy hand,
Why should we doubt or fear?
A Father's hand will never cause
His child a needless tear.

"HAVE SALT IN YOURSELVES."

MARK ix. 49, 50.

Those who were consecrated to God, whose life was an offering to Him, should not lack the power of holy grace, which binds the soul to God, and *inwardly* preserves it from evil. Salt is not the gentleness that pleases (which grace produces without doubt), but that energy of God *within us* which connects everything *in us* with God, and dedicates *the heart* to Him, binding it to Him in the sense of obligation and of desire, rejecting all *in oneself* that is contrary to Him, (obligation that flows from grace, but which acts all the more powerfully on that account). Thus practically, it was distinctive grace, the energy of holiness, which separates from all evil; but by setting apart for God. . . . Now this sense of obligation to God which separates from evil, *this judgment of all evil in the heart* must be *in oneself*. It is not a question of judging others, but of placing *oneself* before God,

thus becoming the salt, having it *in oneself*. With regard to others, we must seek peace; and real separation from all evil is that which enables us to walk in peace together.

In a word, Christians were to keep themselves separate from evil and near to God in themselves, and to walk with God in peace one with another.

The believer may be called to deny himself for the precious service of his Saviour, in things that are not bad in themselves, but this act is accomplished *inwardly*.

Devotedness is inward. It is a secret between His servant and Himself, though the external effects are seen by others.

Let us beware in ordinary things, of the first step that would separate us from *inward holiness*. Let us keep ourselves from any lack of obedience to the word of the Cross, whereby we are crucified to the world, sin, and the law.

Moral nearness to God, separates from the world, and gives that quietness of spirit, which finding its strength in God can overcome, and drive away the enemy when God leads into conflict by the plain revelation of His will.

Nothing is more perilous than the service of God when the conscience is not pure; however let us ever recollect *that we are under grace*.

“THE VISION OF THE ALMIGHTY.”

NUMBERS xxiv. 4-6.

WOULD we have happy thoughts about the saints, we must rise up to what the Church of God really is to God. We must get “the vision of the Almighty” (the knowledge of the beauty and comeliness of the Church in all Christ’s per-

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fectness) in order to have our souls soft and tender and humble about what passes around. If we do not see this, we shall not be able to maintain the sense of Christ's love. And further, unless by the power of the Spirit we get away from circumstances, so as to see the Church, and the saints individually, as Christ sees them, instead of seeking to nourish and cherish them as Christ does, we shall be disappointed. This often makes us angry; it should not, but it does. We shall either lower our standard, and be content with conformity to the world in the saints, or become discontented and judicial, angry and bitter against them, the flesh being disappointed and vexed. Faith assumes the acceptance of the saints in Christ, while it seeks in the exercise of godly and gracious discipline that they should be maintained and bloom in the fragrance of Christ's grace. "As the valleys are they spread forth, as the trees of lign-aloes which Jehovah has planted, and as cedar-trees beside the waters!" What a most blessed picture! And could we be happy in seeing them stunted, dishonouring the Lord? The glory of Christ is concerned; He gets His character from us. Paul says to the saints at Corinth, not "ye ought to be," but, "*ye are* the epistle of Christ, written with the Spirit of the living God." No, I must grieve when I find in them that which is contrary to their beauty in Christ. They are "as trees of lign-aloes, and as cedar-trees." It is not merely that God has not seen iniquity in them—He has seen beauty. Oh! beloved, our souls need to see the Church, and the saints individually, thus in God's vision, with our eyes open, in the Spirit; otherwise we shall not get into the power of God's thoughts. We do not want "the vision of the Almighty" in order to see that a saint is a saint; neither do we want "open eyes" to dis-

cover inconsistencies in the walk of our brethren. We do want to rise up, and have our eyes open to see, as God sees, this beauty and glory of the Church. God is in possession of us.

And remember this was said in the very presence of Balak. It is blessed we should have the certainty of these things in the midst of Satan's power. What does David say? "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." The enemies can only look on and see how blest I am, while I feast on what God has provided. "Thou anointest my head with oil : my cup runneth over," not only have I got mercy and peace, but I have understood its fulness—an overrunning cup. He can both dwell upon the proved faithfulness of God, and count upon it for the future also, as he goes on to say, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life," and finishes with "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." "How goodly are thy tents O Jacob! and thy tabernacles O Israel!" We have the strength of God's love to think of for present comfort, and where there is a right view of the beauty and comeliness of the Church, and yet of her failure, there will be great humbleness and tenderness of spirit towards the Lord, and towards one another. The Lord grant we may not sit down content in wretched coldness of heart, with evil in ourselves or in our brethren. The waters of God are at the root of the plant, however miserable the pruning. How precious is this! May we rise in the sense of the beauty we have in God's mind, to delight ourselves in Him who is our comeliness, to glory in Him who is God's delight, and our joy and glory.

Something to learn from God Himself. "I am nothing." "Christ is all." "He must increase, I must decrease."