

THE UPRIGHT LIFE

Psalms 84:11

"For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." Psalm 84:11.

The characters referred to in this verse are the upright. They walk uprightly. We know the meaning of upright in the physical sense. In its spiritual sense it means conformity to the standard of moral rectitude. This standard is the Word of God, and conformity to it has reference both to the heart and the life. The text refers also to uprightness of life. To walk uprightly is to live uprightly. To "walk," as the word is often used in the Bible, denotes the deportment, the conduct. The life must be upright. An upright man would rather suffer wrong than do wrong. He lives and acts with the thought of obtaining the approval of God.

I. What God Is To Those Who Walk Uprightly.

1. God is a sun.

Just as the sun represents light, heat, and life, so God represents life, which is the sum of all being; light, which is the sum of all intellectual excellence; and love, which is the sum of all moral excellence.

In nature the sun is the source of light, life, warmth, beauty and fruitfulness. The sun dispenses light, imparts life, radiates warmth, gives beauty and produces fruitfulness. The light, heat, and influence of the sun are beyond human conception.

This is the only time in the Bible when God is directly called a sun. As the sun dispenses light throughout the universe, so "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." As the sun opens the gates of day, floods the world with light, gives it without stint to palace or cottage, to peasant or prince, and enables us to discern a thousand objects, so God shines into our lives and gives us power to see numerous moral glories. Were we deprived of His illuminations there would be nothing but moral gloom and uncertainty about us.

The sun imparts life. During the winter months when its rays strike the earth obliquely, barrenness and sterility are observable on every hand. But in the springtime, when the sun begins to exert increasing influence, there is a remarkable change and vegetation is revived and renewed. Likewise, the warmth and energy of God's beams transmit life to the spiritually dead and produce signs of fruitfulness that pleases one.

As the sun is the center of power in the planetary system and all other planets owe their allegiance to it, so God should be the center of our system of living. Until He becomes that center, darkness surrounds us and many problems baffle our inquiry. Although the sun is ninety million miles away, yet we rarely think of the distance because of its ability to cast its influence so near us. Its rays can fall with such power as to heat a continent, with such nicety as to make the rosebud redden, and with such effectiveness as to cheer us. God possesses the same powers of diffusiveness. Although distant in the heavens, He scatters His warm rays

of love upon us so gently and surely that we feel that "He is not far from any one of us." From Him His people derive their light, and life, and strength, and joy. He is forever communicating His light and heat and excellence to all who are about Him. As the sun's rays reach the earth through a favorable medium, so the goodness and blessings of God descend upon us through Jesus Christ, God's favorable medium for transmitting Himself to us. We who experience the warmth of God's love do so through His intermediary, Jesus Christ.

2. God is a shield.

A sun is for happy days and a shield is for dangerous ones. A sun is to show the way and a shield is to ward off its perils. To the Psalmist God was not only a sun radiating good, but also a shield protecting from evil -- a source not only of life and joy, but also of security. The ancient shield was an implement of protection in warfare. Strapped on the left arm, the warrior went into the fight shielding himself from death.

The Lord is to us, first, a sun and, then, a shield. Even as the scripture says, "The Lord is my light and my salvation" -- light first, and salvation next. God does not save us in the dark, neither does He shield us in the dark; He gives us enough light to let us see the danger so that we may appreciate the defense. Some visualize God as a sun only. When all is bright and cloudless they can believe, but when it storms the universe seems to be without a God. We must never forget to think of God as a shield as well as a sun, as the One who stands between us and the storm. From Him we derive protection in time of peril.

The idea here is that of protection and defense. Those who walk uprightly should expect Satan's fiery darts to fly around them. He is ever watching to find unguarded points. He delights to annoy and injure those who love God. But the upright have a shield. God protects them. He intercepts and wards off the fiery darts of the adversary. The Christian rejoices that God is his shield, and that he is guarded and fortified by the divine protection.

II. What God Does For Those Who Walk Uprightly.

"The Lord will give grace and glory: no good will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." These precious words are sweeter than honey, more animating than music, and more refreshing than wine. They have often cheered the disconsolate, given courage to the faint and set on fire the hearts of good men. Let us weigh their import.

The Lord -- Jehovah, self-existent, independent, infinite, eternal, unchangeable, merciful, and gracious, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin. He is almighty, and so cannot be resisted; knows all things, and so cannot be deceived; is love, and so cannot be unkind; is just, and so cannot do wrong; is truth, and so cannot lie. He made, supports, guides, and governs all things.

The Lord will -- He has said so. He has sworn so. His word and his oath are immutable. He has covenanted with His Son and His people to do these things. He never breaks covenant. "Thy faithfulness is unto all generations." His honor is engaged and His truth pledged.

The Lord will give. He will not bargain and sell, but He will give. Nothing on earth could buy what He is willing to give. All things on earth are of no value compared with what He will give. His blessings are not for sale, but for gift. Purchase them you never can, but you may have and hold them as gratuities. It is very kind and gracious of God to say that He will give His blessings. But what will He give?

1. God gives grace.

Grace is the very thing we need. We need nothing half so much as we need grace. Men and angels cannot bestow that. If we can but have grace, we shall have food and raiment and health and comforts and friends as long and as plentiful as God sees it to be best for us. He who has grace shall have whatever else will do him real good. Christ said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

But what is grace? It is kindness to the undeserving. It is favor to the guilty. It is love to those who merited wrath. It is pity to men perishing in sin. It is mercy to the lost. This, all this, is what we greatly need. Without it, there is no help nor hope for us. This grace is free "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." It is the grace of God. It is bestowed by Him alone.

This grace is rich in its storehouse. The bosom of God is an ocean of love. This grace is rich in its fruits. Among these fruits are pardon of sin, acceptance with God, adoption into His family, faith, hope, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance, humility, courage, contentment, victory; "An inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." God's grace is all we need for any trial. "My grace is sufficient for thee." It sustains, it restrains, it cheers, it defends and makes the triumph sure.

Grace is praised by prophets and apostles. One cried, "By the grace of God, I am what I am." Another, speaking for all his brethren, says, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy and thy truth's sake." This grace is much extolled by good, though uninspired men. One says, "Nothing but free grace makes any difference between me and the vilest of sinners." Another says, "There is not a round in the ladder to heaven, which doth not give to every one that steppeth upon it, just occasion to sing of grace." Another says, "I know no sweeter way to heaven than through free grace and hard trials together. And where grace is hard trials are seldom wanting." Another says, "Two things I chiefly know: one is, that I am a great sinner; the other is, that Jesus Christ is a great Saviour. O the riches of divine grace." Another, who was dying, said, "I have altered my mind about many things, but I am now of the same mind I was as to grace and salvation through Christ." Another says, "Grace is the silver link that draws the golden chain of glory after it."

The Lord will give grace to all those who feel that they need it and confess their need. He will give grace to those who believe in His Son. He will give grace in the form in which it is needed, and when it is needed. He will give grace until it melts in glory.

The upright are the beneficiaries of divine grace. They are indebted to grace for what they are. Every one of them can say with a pious man, "I am not what I once was -- I am not what I hope to be -- but by the grace of God I am what I am." Grace includes all those spiritual blessings which God bestows on His people during their earthly pilgrimage. Every day they need grace. They need it in the day of prosperity to prevent extravagant elation. They need it in the day of adversity to prevent unreasonable depression. They need it in their spiritual joys and in their spiritual sorrows. They need it when disease wastes away their mortal frames. They need it in the hour of death. What God's people need, He gives. He gives grace. They do not merit it. He gives it, and in proportion to their needs. Its communication is a demonstration of His love.

2. God gives glory.

The term grace indicates what God does for His people on this side of heaven, and the term glory denotes what He will do for them when they reach that bright world. Grace is glory in the bud. Glory is the fullblown flower. We cannot imagine all that is implied in the statement God will give glory.

Surely, if God gives grace and glory, He will not withhold any good thing from those who walk uprightly. He will not withhold anything that will really contribute to our wellbeing. Some things we fail to get from Him because in His omniscience He sees they are not for our welfare. No other can decide what is good for us like the Lord can. He has infinite knowledge, wisdom and love. If He withholds health, wealth or His smiles from us, it is because they are not good for us at that particular time. If we walk uprightly he will not withhold anything that is for our well-being.

When George Matheson was only eighteen months old his mother made the melancholy discovery that his vision was seriously injured. Gradually his eyesight completely failed and he was practically blind before he was twenty. The remaining forty years of his life-time were spent in total darkness, but George Matheson knew this verse as his own experience, and no physical affliction could darken his mind or cloud his sense of God's goodness. He made his trouble a stepping-stone to spiritual triumphs. He preached sermons and wrote books that made men and women courageous and strong. His trouble drew him near to God, and made his ministry a joy and comfort to multiplied thousands. One day he wrote:

"O joy that seekest me thro' pain,
I cannot close my heart to Thee;
I trace the rainbow thro' the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain
That morn shall tearless be."

Gipsy Smith told of visiting a little girl who was a great sufferer. Through the open window came the laughter of other children at play. She seemed to be denied all the joys of childhood. When the Evangelist asked her what she wanted him to sing for her, she eagerly replied, "Please sing 'Count Your Blessings'". What a glorious spirit that little shut-in girl had! She understood the glorious statement of our text.