

GOD'S MARVELOUS GRACE

Titus 2:11-14

From God's Word we learn that man is a sinner by birth, by nature, by choice and by practice. The Bible says, "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Ecclesiastes 7:20). God says, "For there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (I John 1:8). "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (I John 1:10). Your own hearts corroborate these scriptural truths. Observation also verifies them. There are degrees of wickedness and guilt, but all come short of the standard. There are vast differences between men, such as culture and ignorance, riches and poverty, morality and immorality, respectability and reprobation, but there is this feature which is common to all--the awareness that there is a gap between what we are and what we ought to be. The best as well as the worst are conscious of this gap.

Man is part of a world system, and moves along with it. His thoughts and life are alienated from God. He yields his allegiance to Satan and does what he wants him to do. Living without Christ, without God and without hope, man fulfills the desires of the flesh and of the mind. His sin does not allow him to be what he could be and should be.

Inherent in man is the idea that he must do something in order to be saved. Man attempts to achieve salvation through his own merit or works, in spite of the fact that God's Word repeatedly states that it is an utter impossibility for him to do so. Man is unable to save himself because he is depraved. Sin has affected man's entire nature. It has warped his intelligence, tainted his affections, and perverted his will. The stains of sin are so deep that they cannot be removed by human effort. In the light of these facts, our text reminds us of:

I. The Fact Of God's Marvelous Grace.

Of all the great words in the Christian vocabulary, grace is perhaps the least understood. Some words preclude concise definitions, and grace is one of them. Grace is not defined; it is announced. Sufficient for our purpose is the description of grace which is current among us, namely, "Grace is the unmerited favor of God toward us," or "Grace is that which we did not at all deserve, but which we needed desperately." But grace is much more than that. Standing for all that God is, grace represents God's abiding love and abounding power flowing full and free to undeserving sinners who are in need of His great salvation. God's grace is His boundless love freely expressed toward those who are entirely undeserving.

Grace is God loving man with a love that does not have any limitations, causing Him to give His Son to die on the cross as an atonement for the sins of man, rescuing man from his fallen condition, lifting him out of his sinfulness, and giving him eternal life and a glorious liberty. As Dr. J. H. Jowett said, "Grace is the energy of the divine perfection rolling in plenteousness toward the shores of human need." The grace of God is the forth-putting of His power for the benefit of sinful men, the motive for which is mercy born of love.

During this life we shall never fully understand the complete meaning of grace. All of the goodness, love and mercy of God are crowded into that one little word. Not until we get to heaven shall we fully appreciate all that grace has done for us. But until then we can and should praise God for His marvelous and amazing grace.

Our text says: "For the grace of God which brings salvation for all men hath appeared." It is no longer a matter of speculation. This is the divine declaration, and henceforth we need not have any doubt about it.

God's infinite grace was revealed at many times and in various ways in the Old Testament era. As the Bible says: "God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom, also he made the worlds" (Hebrews 1:1-2). Grace always dwelt in the heart of God, but it was brought to light in the incarnation of Christ. Concerning this Paul wrote: "When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Galatians 4:4-5). God's grace was revealed in a special way by the coming of Jesus Christ into the world, to which coming our text refers specifically. It informs us that the grace of God hath appeared. It does not tell us that God's grace awoke or sprang into existence, but that it appeared or was made manifest in the person of Christ. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). When the Word, Who had existed from the beginning with the Father, became flesh, the grace of God appeared in the person of Christ. Regardless of how the grace of God may have been seen before Christ came, it had never been manifested as it was in the Lord Jesus. You cannot isolate the doctrine of grace from the person of Christ. Christianity is all of God's grace. Grace is its alpha and its omega, its root and its flower, its lowest foundation and its topmost pinnacle, its starting-point and its goal. Had it not been for the grace of God salvation never would have been available to men. No merit of ours has called it forth, and no works of ours will ever entitle us to receive it as a reward. In the ministry of Christ you see grace loving the unlovely, forgiving the undeserving, mending the bruised and broken, comforting and caring for the outcast and lonely, and dying for the guilty. His life was the outflow and outpouring of grace in an active ministry for men.

II. The Functions of God's Marvelous Grace.

1. To Save.

All are born in sin. Philosophize, analyze and psychologize about it all you please, but God's Word still declares it. All practice sin. All need salvation. Salvation means deliverance from the guilt of sin, the penalty of sin, the love of sin, the power of sin, and eventually the presence of sin. Man lacks the power to break the shackles of Satan and to save himself. Man neither merits salvation nor solicits it. Salvation is the result of divine grace. The doctrine of salvation by grace glorifies God and that is why egotistical people do not like to hear it preached or taught.

The principle of grace distinguishes Christianity from all other religious systems in the world. Other religions make demands, but Christianity offers a gift. Other religions insist on doing, but Christianity speaks of receiving. Other religions outline the works that man must do in order to be saved, but Christianity reveals a work which God has already done in order to make salvation available to men.

God's marvelous grace devised the astounding plan of salvation, provided salvation for sinners, sent the one and only Saviour into the world, through the children of God proclaimed the message of salvation, through the Holy

Spirit enlightened the understanding of man, persuaded him to repent toward God and to believe on Christ, and applied salvation to the soul and life of each believer. Salvation is entirely God's gift to man. "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

"Naught have I gotten but what I received;
Grace hath bestowed it since I have believed;
Boasting excluded, pride I abase;
I'm only a sinner saved by grace."

God's marvellous grace has provided salvation and made it available to all classes of men—rich and poor, educated and uneducated, moral and immoral, noble and ignoble—and men of all ages. The grace of God has appeared for the benefit of all men. It offers salvation to all who will believe on or receive Christ as Saviour. God does not make any exceptions, or exclude any. The only ones who are excluded are those who exclude themselves. While this grace brings salvation for all, there are some who will not receive the salvation which is brought to them. He does not describe salvation as an actuality, but as a potentiality. If the grace of God does not bring salvation to any man, who hears the gospel message, it is because he will not receive the gift which the grace of God brings to him.

With the exception of Christianity, all religions speak of salvation by character or by conduct. They hold out the hope of earning salvation by merit or by works of one kind or another. But salvation by conduct or by works is the doctrine of Satan no matter by whom nor where it is preached. Christ alone can save. Salvation is not a matter of merit on the part of the receiver, but it is entirely a matter of grace on the part of the Giver. Salvation is not partly of grace and partly of works, but it is all of grace and none of works. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Man must accept salvation as a gift from God; otherwise, he will never receive it.

Not long before Dr. Alexander Maclaren, the great preacher of Edinburgh, died, his associate minister, Brother Gustart, visited him and inquired, "What are you doing, brother?" Dr. Maclaren replied, "I'll tell you what I am doing, brother: I am gathering all my prayers, all my sermons, all my good deeds and all my evil deeds; and I am going to throw them overboard and swim to glory on the plank of free grace." Man's only hope of salvation is in the marvelous grace of our wonderful Lord Jesus Christ. Isn't it wonderful to know that He has done for us that which we never could have done for ourselves?

2. To School.

Not only does God's marvelous grace bring salvation, it also brings schooling. It brings life first and then knowledge. One must have life from God before he can receive instruction in the things of God. After we have been born into God's family, we must become learners or disciples of Christ. He said, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me." We must be disciples if we are to be doers. We are taught in order that we may do something. It is not enough to teach and to learn the things which our Lord has commanded. We have not really learned them until we have learned to observe them. Christ said, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Thus learning must be translated into living. God's grace schools us to live in a certain way. As His grace functions beyond salvation in the expanding experience of the Christian life, it teaches us two very important lessons.

(1) There are some things to deny.

These two things, which are to be denied or laid aside, are an epitome of all that is sinful and wrong in human life.

a. Ungodliness.

Grace teaches us to deny ungodliness, and not just in a theoretical way only. It is the practical atheism of the average man that cripples him so terribly. To affirm God in creed and to deny Him in conduct is practical atheism, and our churches are filled with members who do just that. God's grace has appeared to school or instruct us in avoiding the error of living without God in our thoughts, our words and our deeds. An ungodly man is one who simply thinks, speaks and acts without any reference to God; one who does not have the inclination or does not take the time to consult Him about anything. God's grace teaches us to lay aside that manner of life. When one is saved and schooled by grace, he will think much of God. Moreover, God's presence will be his joy, God's strength will be the basis of his confidence, and God's glory will be the chief end of his being.

b. Worldly lusts.

Worldly lusts include selfishness, pride, sensuality and the desires or longings which attach themselves to the fleeting things of the present life. When operating in the realm of conduct, God's grace leads one to avoid a life which is centered around the gratification of the natural instincts without regard to God and others. Children of God are to be different from those who are not, both in the motives which actuate their conduct and in the objectives which they seek. Paul appealed to the Christians at Corinth in these words: "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing" (II Corinthians 6:17). It is doubtful if there has ever been a time when the note of separation needed to be sounded more than today. Observing the inconsistencies of the life of one who was loud in his profession led Burns to say, "What you are sounds so loud I cannot hear what you say." What a tragedy that the lives of so many church members are so worldly that it is impossible to distinguish them from those who have never made any profession of faith in Christ! One can never atone for worldly conduct by going to church and taking part in the services on Sunday. Here is a call to be heeded—"Come ye out from among them." And here is a command to be obeyed—"And be ye separate." This command to live the separated and dedicated life comes from God and should be obeyed by every one of us. The closer we live to the Lord, and the more we do what He approves, the farther we shall be from the sinful practices of the world.

(2) There are some things to do.

After teaching us that there are some things that we are to deny or to cease connection with, God's marvelous grace instructs us that there are some things which we are to do.

a. With regard to self.

"We should live soberly." God's grace teaches us that the inner life is to be governed by the Holy Spirit. Each Christian is expected to exercise self-control in eating, drinking, thinking, speaking and acting.

In all of our pursuits we should resolutely endeavor to control our desires, and do our very best to resist the temptations of Satan. Reaping always follows sowing, and past years travel with one into the future. One cannot wipe out any part of his past as he would erase a blackboard. His past stays with him. What one has done contributed to making him what he is, and what he is will have much to do with determining what he shall become.

b. With regard to others.

"We should live righteously." As living soberly has to do with rightness on the inside, living righteously has reference to rightness in relationship to others. One must be correct in his character before he can be correct in his conduct. Righteousness of life, which is required of all believers, means exercising justice towards all others, or rendering to all men their dues. Our living righteously is simply the outliving of the inliving Christ. We do not have any right to set a bad example before any man, woman, or child. We should be just in our dealings, charitable in our judgments, blameless in our conduct, and active for the spiritual welfare of others.

c. With regard to God.

"We should live godly." Godliness has an internal and an external phase. The internal phase consists of a right knowledge of God, a complete trust in Him, a cheerful subjection of will to Him, a fervent love for Him, and a genuine longing for the full enjoyment of Him. The external phase consists of the adoration and worship of God, and faithful service for Him. Godliness is the nature of God, implanted at regeneration, outworking in the daily conduct of believers. Whatever we do should be done for the glory of God.

God's grace schools us to live soberly, righteously and godly here and now, "where cross the crowded ways of life," amid the troublesome brood of rebellious instincts, mutinous appetites and tempestuous cravings in this world.

III. The Fruit Of God's Marvelous Grace.

God has redeemed His people for a purpose and that purpose is expressed in the words "zealous of good works." We have not been saved and called into a new life just to sit down and enjoy ourselves. God has not made any provision for idleness. Not only were we "created in Christ Jesus unto good works," but God actually ordained that we should walk in them.

Christ has not saved us in order that we may do as we please, but to do what brings glory to Him. The Lord has not saved us in order that we may talk about our good works, but that we may actually do them. Doing is much better than boasting. We are not to do good works in order that we may be saved, but because we are saved. The Lord has saved us in order that we may do good works. Good works are the very end of our new creation.

Good works are not done by unsaved people, but they are the natural result of salvation. Good works are those which are done by a child of God, in obedience to the commands of God for the glory of God, and for the benefit of others. Children

of God are to perform good works because they have been saved. We are so anxious to emphasize that we are saved for good works.

Just as we plant trees in order that they may produce fruit, so our Lord expects all whom He has saved to be zealous, or on fire, to perform good works for Him. Such works are the dividends or fruits which the Lord gets from the salvation which He gives us. God actually ordained that we should habitually walk in the performance of good works. When we think of how much the believers and Christians martyrs of the early centuries did for Christ, and then think of how little we have done for Him, that should be a source of real regret and a great challenge to us to do much better. God's marvelous grace that saved you, and that schooled you to live soberly, righteously and godly, is the grace that makes you zealous of good works.

As the beneficiaries of God's marvelous grace, let us spend the remainder of our lives on earth in learning from Christ, living for Christ, laboring for Christ, and looking for Christ. As the text says: "Looking for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." There are two appearings of Christ, the one in grace and the other in glory. He is the means of making the grace visible, and He will be the means of making the glory visible. And these two appearances are connected in such a manner that His appearance in grace is evidently incomplete without His appearance in glory. Both grace and glory have their manifestation in one and the same person. Grace began to work at the first coming of Christ, and grace will complete its work at His second coming.

Our faith in the certainty of Christ's return is based on the Word of God. We have found the hope of the second coming of Christ to be a living hope, a glorious hope, a purifying hope, a blessed hope and a comforting hope. It is the greatest incentive to victorious living and active Christian service. I know that Christ came first to redeem me. I firmly believe that He will come again to receive me. By God's marvelous grace, I am ready for His return, and I am thrilled with anticipation as I earnestly and expectantly look for Him. While I am here between His advents of grace and glory, I want to learn from Him, to live for Him, to labor for Him and to look for Him. I earnestly ask you to join me in this challenging and heroic endeavor.