

The True Grace of God

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We have just been considering some of the main features of the house of God as it exists on the earth today. The previous speaker has been like an architect conducting us on a survey of a building and assisting us in our appreciation of its excellent points. I want, on the other hand, to be rather like a navvy who takes pick and shovel that he may uncover the foundations, and enable you to realize how great and solid they are, how well able to sustain the great superstructure that has been reared.

The Apostle Peter reminds the converted Jews to whom he wrote that they now stood in the grace of God. Formerly their relations with God had been upon the basis of the law, and upon that basis they did not stand at all; they fell. These converts were scattered all over the various provinces of Asia Minor, and though Peter was the apostle to the circumcision they had actually been evangelised by the Apostle Paul. Peter carried out his commission in regard to them by pen and ink, and wrote this letter to them, in which he corroborated the testimony that had reached them through Paul's lips, saying, "This is the true grace of God wherein ye stand."

Some of the strangers to whom Peter wrote were domiciled in Galatia, and turning to Paul's epistle to the Galatians we find that through receiving the gospel from his lips they had been called by God "into the grace of Christ" (Gal. 1: 6). Like the believers at Rome they had been justified by faith, and now had access by faith into "this grace [or, favour] wherein we stand" (Rom. 5: 1). It is a most wonderful thing that we should stand in the favour of God at all. It is a still more wonderful thing that the favour in which we stand should be the favour of Christ. We are accepted in *the Beloved*.

Now all this Peter confirms. You notice what he says, "I have written briefly, exhorting," — and you can see for yourselves how much exhortation there is in the latter part of the epistle — "and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand." His testimony to this grace is found in the earlier part of the epistle. Let us note a few details that are brought before us.

First of all, there is God's electing mercy, which is mentioned in 1 Peter 1: 2. This is followed in verses 3 and 4 by His abundant mercy which has begotten us again unto a living hope and to an incorruptible and undefiled inheritance by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead. The Jews had an inheritance which soon got corrupted; they had hopes, but there came a moment when those hopes died. What bright hopes burned in the hearts of the disciples when they accompanied their Master on the occasion of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem! It looked, indeed, as if the world were gone after Him. Surely the moment was now arrived when He would assert Himself, crush the Roman Empire and take His glorious throne. Then came the dramatic turn in events, the revulsion in popular feeling. His cause waned, to all appearance He fell a Victim, crushed between the upper and nether millstones of the religious machine existing in Judaism and the civil and military might of Rome. Hope died in the hearts of the disciples!

This is illustrated in Luke 24. Can you picture to yourself the two disciples going to Emmaus? I think I can see them. Utterly dispirited, hopelessly weary, they slowly stagger forward, hardly able to proceed in a straight line. Then Jesus joins them, and their steps are quickened, and then at last the little home over the hills is reached. Then Jesus enters, and there is the revelation of Himself as risen from the dead. Then and there they were like men born into a new world! A living hope as deathless as the

risen Christ took possession of their hearts, and there was a new spring in their footsteps on the return journey to Jerusalem, which made the threescore furlongs seem but a little way! As they burst into the upper room that night amongst their fellow disciples, they might well have joyfully cried, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

The mercy that chose us, and the mercy that has called us to such an inheritance, bring before us the grace of God the Father. Verses 18 to 20 of the chapter bring before us the grace of God the Son. In the due time He was manifested for us as the Lamb of God and shed His precious blood for our redemption. We have been redeemed as the fruit of His work done for us. Notice that the last two words of verse 20 are "for you."

The end of the chapter brings before us the grace bestowed in connection with the Spirit of God. It is through the Spirit that our souls have been purified, being born again by the living and abiding word of God. The new birth is a work wrought *in us* and not for us, the Spirit being the Operator and the word of God the agent which He uses; but all of it is the fruit of the grace of God.

The earlier part of 1 Peter 2 shows that we who formerly were not a people have now obtained mercy, and that mercy has constituted us a holy and a royal priesthood. Such is the *grace* in which we stand.

And in that grace we *stand*. We are there by an act of God. In that grace He has set us irrevocably and forever, since that which He does He does forever. Hence, in that connection there is no such thing as falling from grace.

Yet the Galatians were upbraided by Paul for not continuing in the grace of Christ; they were bidden to "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free," and they were told plainly that they were "fallen from grace" if they pursued the lines they were adopting. Though they were securely held by God in the place wherein He had set them yet they might fall in their own thoughts and inner consciousness from that place.

As an illustration of what I mean, take the parable of the prodigal son. When he returned to his father brokenhearted and repentant he was received in the fulness of grace. He deserved absolutely nothing, yet he was welcomed, robed, shod, treated not only as a son, but also feasted upon the fatted calf as an honoured guest. In such grace as that he was set. But suppose that on the following morning he had suddenly imagined that though his reception had been in this fashion, yet that if he expected to retain the favour of his father he must set to work to show that he deserved it. Why, he would probably have descended into the kitchen regions that he might undertake duties like a hired servant! And a very poor hired servant he would be, as must be any young man whose more recent occupations have been either the wasting of money in riotous living or the tending of a herd of filthy pigs.

But what would be the father's attitude in the matter? He would call his son up from the servant's quarters, and say to him, "My boy, however much you allow these unworthy thoughts of me, the effect of which is to make you fall from the grace in which I set you as far as your understanding of things is concerned, I intend to stand by my thoughts. Not your understanding of things but my understanding of things is going to prevail. I shall not adapt or conform the high thoughts of my grace to the poor low thoughts of your legal mind. Come up out of the kitchen and take up the place that is yours as a son in my house."

In the true grace of God we stand whatever may be the state of our minds. Some of us, perhaps, do not realize this. We may have fallen into the snares of imagining that what we are or what we

succeed in being or doing for God determines what He is and does for us. This is a great mistake. It is, of course, the root principle of law that man has to obey and that what God does for him depends upon his obedience. But grace works just the other way round. God acts on our behalf, and out of that flows what we may be or do for Him. God is what God is whatever we may be. Let us firmly lay hold of that!

To lay firmly hold of it will be the greatest possible help to us, for nothing is easier for us than to slip away from it in our thoughts. As believers in Jesus we stand before God in His favour whatever the state of our thoughts and feelings. A well-known servant of Christ once quoted the words by a Christian poetess,-

"They that trust Him wholly

Find Him wholly true."

And added, "that is wonderful, is it not? Yet I know something much more wonderful than that." He paused as the folk sat up and looked at him with astonishment. Then he resumed, by quietly saying, "I know something much more wonderful than that, and it is this; that they who do NOT trust Him wholly also find Him wholly true!"

Is this to put a premium upon a small and defective faith? By no means: it is rather the knowledge of the full and unalterable grace of God which will increase our faith. It is to put a premium upon the fulness of the grace of God. The God of all grace has called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, and we stand in that true grace of God while we await the appearing of the glory. It is just the firm maintenance of this which will perfect, stablish, strengthen, and settle us in our souls to the glory of God.