

The Work of Grace

from **Short Papers**

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THE WORK OF GRACE FOR, AND THE WORK OF GRACE IN, MAN.

"Then were there two thieves crucified with Him, one on the right hand, and another on the left. And they that passed by reviled Him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking Him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He be the king of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him; for He said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with Him, cast the same in His teeth" (Matt. 27: 38-44).

"And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on Him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23: 39 - 43).

THE SAVIOUR, the Son of Man, was dying: the just One in place of the many unjust; bearing our sins in His own body on the tree. This was His great work *for* us. But of the two malefactors, between whom He was crucified, both of whom had reviled Him — one became converted, and showed a work of grace wrought in him.

The work of grace *for* us, and the work of grace in us, are not one and the same thing, any more than the death of Christ *for* the thief, and the change *inside* the thief (by the means of which he ceased to be a blasphemer and owned Jesus), were one and the selfsame thing. The former is outside of us, and was *in* and *by* CHRIST; the second is *in ourselves*, though wrought there by grace.

I desire to present a few thoughts which are connected with this most important subject.

And first: what is it which hinders God and a sinner meeting and being together. True: the sinner's will is opposed to God; his heart's affections, too, are alienated from God; and, doubtless, if he, as a sinner, were in the light of God's presence, he would find, soon enough, that the light of God's presence discovers all the sin of the creature. But *the* difficulty was not in the creature, however sunk, alienated, and deluded he may be, and however unsuited for such a one the holiness and majesty of God's presence may be. There was another question, one of far higher and deeper import, viz., How could God, in His holiness and righteousness, meet a sinner who has, by sin, done dishonour to God? Sin is an insult to God — to God in His majesty and being - and the soul that gets into light knows this to be so.

So far as God is concerned, the work of grace *in us* is never separated from the work of grace *for* us. From the day of the fall and of man's exclusion, from Eden, God wrought *in* man, but always upon the ground of the work which He meant to do *for* man. And in working thus in man he has constantly presented some object to the mind, in which the work *for* man was shadowed forth. The sacrifice

offered by Abel; the victims of the patriarchal worship; the sacrifices of the sanctuary, etc., all pointed onward to the work which Christ was to do for man, work by which alone God could be just while justifying a sinner, work which alone can ever satisfy the conscience of a sinner in the presence of God about sin. But the work *in* man preceded the work *for* man in all these cases. At Calvary, the Son of Man gave Himself a ransom for us. From that day onward, the work of grace for man has had nothing added to it, nothing new from the time that by one sacrifice He perfected for ever them that are sanctified. But though the work *for* man is finished, yet is the work of grace *in* man quite as needful now as ever. That it is wrought *in* man by the Holy Ghost, through faith in the work accomplished *for* man, is true; but it must be wrought *in* man or man is lost.

The peculiarity of the conversion of the thief upon the cross is, that it is a case in which grace was working *in* a man to open his heart to Christ, *at the very moment* that Christ was doing *for* man that work without which no way was opened for God to bless, nor open for man to come for blessing.

On this account the distinctness of the two things is the more easily seen, and this may help some to see how they should not confound them together, and how impossible it would be for the one to be exchanged so as to be made to take the place of the other.

Justice had brought the two thieves, for their misdeeds, to the violent death of the cross. There, they were surrounded by a mass, who (cared not for them, but who) were gathered to the spot to revile and blaspheme the dying Saviour.

The thieves heard the revilings, and adopted them, for they cast the same in his teeth. But an entire change came over one of them. Light broke in upon his soul, and in its case it was the light of life — eternal life.

God had taken His rightful place in the man's soul. The effect is immediate; and, remark — he rebukes his fellow-malefactor: "Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? and we, indeed, justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss." When the candle of the Lord searches a man, it is sure to discover sin in him to himself. It must be so; for righteousness and holiness are inseparable from the light of God; and man is unholy. The light detects and shows the unholiness. Yet is there in this experience of the thief also another feeling expressed. He knew sin to be inseparable from himself — he knew it, and yet he sought to put it down with an unhesitating mind. He rebukes his fellow-malefactor for doing the very thing which himself had done just before, and the which he had but just ceased to do.

This was, as man would count it, practically inconsistent. Quite so. Conscience, when it gets into God's presence, and has the light of life, acts in a way which is very inconsistent with human thoughts of consistency and propriety. He was inconsistent as a man, but consistent as a saint. 'Tis strange, that first-dread and hatred of sin which leads us to put our mouths in the dust and to condemn sin in ourselves — part of our being as it may have been. But it is a blessed instinct of the new life, of life divine in a soul: that sin must be condemned, for it is hateful. This true taste of what sin is, is a very different thing from the dread of the consequences of sins. Dread of the consequences of sin and sins may alarm and terrify the soul, and drive it to seek a Saviour. But the light of life shining, in quickening power, into a soul, separates between it and the sin itself: gives it an altogether new estimate of what sin is. "Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? and we indeed, justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss." How full — both in the general statement and in the particular detail in his confession of sin: what an abandoning and disclaimer of all human righteousness.

"We indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds." And it was light, not vague and

ill-defined, that shone in upon his soul, but clear and distinct; for it was the light of a contrast between the Christ of God and himself: "But this man hath done nothing amiss." Himself and the Christ were in his conscience, contrasted the one with the other. His language was that of faith; and, little as he knew it, he was, in the hour of the Lord's being forsaken by all, giving the description of Him which will be owned of God to be true of Christ alone. "This man hath done nothing amiss" will be loudly proclaimed as true of Christ alone in the glory; and all of us that will be there will know and own the perfectly graphic, distinctive description, as being His alone. Of Adam's race, not one, from Eden down to the placing of the great white throne, not one, save the seed of the woman, of whom it could be said in truth, This man hath done nothing amiss."

God; sin; himself; the man that is Jehovah's fellow — these were not only new experiences of his soul, but they marked that he had a new life — and had got into a world of light, where things are seen just as they are. But his faith went further, and he sees not only the personal peculiarity of the sinless One at his side, but, also, that there was in him a heart on which, spite of all the contrast between the Christ and himself, he might cast his every care. "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." The glories, and the kingdom, and the majesty of the Lord brake in upon his soul — sinner as he was — and yet he saw that in that One there was the only rest, the alone hope for him. This, also, is an instinct of the new nature. It will see and own the contrasts between the Christ and what we are, but it will cleave to Him in spite of our misery and His gloriousness — it will cleave to Him as being all our salvation.

If we are to be vessels filled with grace, we may be assured that there has been a somewhat similar work wrought *in* us — and we shall be able to record it as a work of the Lord in us — a work which puts us just where the Lord's work in the thief put him, viz., into the position of expecting from the Lord, into a position in which the Lord could show some of the exceeding riches of His grace as He did in His answer to the thief. The thief asked to be remembered in the kingdom: Jesus answered, "Verily, I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

Christ had His rightful place in this poor sinner's soul, and no mistake about it, and this place was His from the time that the rocky heart was riven open. But what the thief experienced in his own soul — the blessed work which God was doing in the soul of the poor thief, while it fitted him to receive the grace, could not appear in heaven in place of the blood of the Lamb of God: there it could neither justify God in justifying a thief, nor discover to the thief that which, in the light, is his justification before God. Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. Christ was then and there shedding His blood, giving His life, the just One in place of the unjust. And whether that poor thief, or any other sinner, were ever saved or not — He, risen from the dead and gone into heaven, the way is plainly set forth, in which God declares that He is free to bless the vilest of the vile; — the way, too, in which the vilest of the vile that comes by it finds a way of peaceful access to God. If no one upon earth cared for that new and living way, yet *it is a new and living way*, and it is open: open for God the Holy Ghost to come down by, and open for man to draw nigh to God, even into the holiest of all in the heavens. The work of grace *in* us cannot be substituted for, cannot be put in the place of, this the work of grace *for* us; the work of grace *in* me cannot vindicate God's holiness so as to justify Him in moving in favour of me, a sinner. And, clearly, so far as it is a work of grace wrought *in* me by God, God has moved in my favour to work it ere it over was wrought.* And, moreover, it contains in it, for just the self-same reason, no answer to my conscience if it is in the presence of God — nothing that can make for me a perfect conscience.

*People may look at the incorruptible seed in the Christian, and say, that it is a reason for God to act, viz., because it is of God. But then how came God to put it into me? How was His holiness, His

justice, vindicated in this standing up for me at all? The blood of Jesus Christ is the alone answer.

God has a right to act without man's leave, and in spite of man. None can say unto Him, "What doest thou?" But then He has a character of His own, which He will not deny. And if He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and will have compassion on whom He will have compassion, He does so in a way which thoroughly vindicates His holiness and His justice, in a way which elevates conscience in man, while it gives to it perfect liberty and boldness of approach unto God in the light.

People may argue against justification. by faith alone; but they may depend upon it, that if they ever find themselves in the same light of life in which the poor thief found himself, they will find that they themselves appear very miserable, and that there is an attractive beauty about the Christ, who is all the salvation of the soul.

Many may turn faith into a work for themselves to work; but they will find that the Spirit convicts of *unbelief*; and that all their rest is in the Lord Himself, and in the work He has wrought *for* poor sinners.

From the fall until Christ died, God renewed souls, and this was at once His instrument of doing it; and the reception of it was the only warrant before Him. the reception of the testimony He might be pleased to give about the seed of the woman that was to come. All His actions supposed that work to be sure and certain. From the day of Pentecost the testimony of God has been about that work itself, and how heaven was opened thereby for the Holy Ghost to come down, and for man to draw near by faith.

Where the testimony of God is received, as, for instance, about Christ as a new and living way (see Heb. 10), the soul that receives it finds its assurance to be in the work itself so presented to it: not in its own feelings, thoughts, or experiences about it, but in the work ITSELF. For so has God been pleased to settle it. The light shining in brings with it its own testimony. It places me in the sight of God upon His throne in heaven, where He has placed Christ, who bare sin in His own body on the tree, that He might become the new and living way of blessing from God to man, and of approach by man to God.

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is revealed as the God who has provided Himself a lamb, that His mercy and His compassion might be evident before all — heaven opened upon them.

That the heart of man is so wicked and so deluded, that it cannot, will not, believe such things of God is true. and in this is seen the awfulness of man's condition. It must meet God, and it hates Him, and loves to nourish hard thoughts of Him. But when the light of life does break in, it is its own evidence. Its entrance may not be understood at first; but the light will be found to be evidence of the subject whence it comes, and will be found to be the light of life.