

## "Glory and virtue."

2 Peter 1: 3.

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(B.T. Vol. 13, p. 12-14.)

There is an expression of the Spirit of God here that brings out our true blessedness now in contrast even with man before the fall. We are often in the habit, and rightly so, as it is with profit to our souls, of contrasting our place with man fallen; but it is also certain that the grace of God has given us a wholly different place from man unfallen. And there is an expression at the close of this verse that brings out the difference in a way that I think the Lord may use to help our souls and strengthen our faith. The whole runs thus: "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to (by) glory and virtue." Now such was not at all the case with Adam in the garden. There he was made the head of creation, and everything around him was very good. God looked upon it, and pronounced it good, and Adam's place was simply to enjoy with thanksgiving. He was tested in one small particular, but still he was tested, adequately and wisely, by this point whether he would obey, as in the place of subjection to Him. To abstain from the fruit of one forbidden tree was no hardship, but a real acknowledgement of God's authority, in itself small indeed, so to speak, compared with what was left entirely and thoroughly at his disposal. Just as among men: it may be a person has a vast estate, and all he pays to the sovereign is a peppercorn — that is, it is a pure and simple acknowledgement that he is not independent. Certainly in divine relationships there is sought to be on man's part subjection to One above him, because without this man would be altogether wrong. This accordingly had to be remembered by man, and was maintained by God, who put him to the proof in this particular point. But for man otherwise it was a question simply of enjoying what God had given, and the only spiritual exercise that Adam or Eve could have known in such a state of things was thankfulness of heart in owning the gifts of God's bounty and goodness.

But there was no setting forth at all at that time of heaven or hell. God at first never said anything about either. He warned of death, but not a word more. There was no revelation about another world for man. Consequently their way of looking at God and "the things of God was wholly different from ours in every respect. The only point of contact between Adam in that state and a Christian now is this: God to be acknowledged with thanksgiving, God to be obeyed absolutely. In itself the test might be a very small point, and so it was. It was not all the giving oneself up to God in the way we are now called on to do, as dead to sin and alive to God in Christ. Obedience is now of a far more absolute nature than it could be then because it is tested at every point, instead of being only tested at one. There is not a single thing that we are called upon to do in the course of the day, but what is intended of God to exercise our hearts, not merely that the end should be to Him, but that the way of it should be always according to God too. And Christ is both the only means of knowing the end and the only one by whom we can see the way. He is the way, the truth, and the life. Now Christ was not unveiled to Adam at all; he, unfallen, had no knowledge of Christ whatsoever. He knew God above him, enjoyed the fruits of God's mighty hand, and his heart was to return in thankfulness to God for the enjoyment of all that was his, abstaining from that one tree in the middle of the garden which God had prohibited from his use.

But our place is wholly different. Now we find "his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness." There is no restriction whatever in what God gives us. He rises up in His own majesty, and in His divine power gives us all things that pertain unto life and godliness. We

have not so much creature gifts for this life — indeed these seem hardly included in what is here said to be given with a spiritual end in view. Outward mercies are around us; and we have whatever share of them God is pleased in His providence to give. We confide in His wisdom, and are sure that He knows what is the very best thing for us, and He never fails. He puts us exactly in that place which is the best for us, as well as for Him. Confidence in Him is what makes the heart perfectly happy, because, whatever comes, whether trial, or difficulty, or sorrow, we can never as believers suppose that it is haphazard. It comes from Himself, and there is not a single form of trial or grief but what God can turn, as He means that we by grace should turn it, to His own glory. This is a part of what He calls "all things that pertain unto life and godliness:" because the dispensation of trial and difficulty is the path in which that life has to be exercised, and that godliness to be maintained.

Here, too, we have the manner of it — "through the knowledge of him that hath called us by glory and virtue." It is not merely certain things around us. When the various animals came before him, Adam knew and gave the appropriate name for each animal that was put under his dominion. He discerned their nature, and assigned to them designations, according to the wisdom with which God endowed him. But our privilege is to know Him who has called us. It is the knowledge of God Himself, and of God Himself, not merely as a Creator, but as the God of all grace. "Through the knowledge of him that hath called us by glory and virtue." What did Adam know then about these things? There was not even a question of a "call" of God in Adam's case at that time. There could not be the call of a man unfallen. Calling does not apply to an innocent, but necessarily to a fallen, creature. because calling means that God speaks to take that creature out of the condition in which he then is, and put him into a better. Adam was to magnify God by honouring Him where he was, and by enjoying what was given around him, not by seeking something unseen or greater, and that was why Adam, seeking in disobedience to be greater, lost everything he had so bountifully. Listening to Eve, and really to the devil, he sought to be as God; but in this vain search after becoming as God, he became a sinner. In a certain sense he did become as God, namely, as knowing good and evil; but this is what the creature, as such, could not bear. Only God can have in Himself the knowledge of good and evil, without leaving the good and falling under the power of the evil. If the creature, left to itself, have the knowledge of good and evil, the result is that the evil overpowers and carries him away: he gives up the good, and falls a prey to the evil. The intuitive knowledge of good and evil, apart from law, was what Adam gained by sin. This is not lost to the Christian.

The believer is met by God in the midst of his ruined estate, and the grace of God sends a call to him. This is what God does in the gospel. He calls us, and we hear His voice, and come forth from the grave of our sins at His call, and we are thus the fruit of the resurrection-power of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are thus called out of that misery, and distance, and death before God into which our sins have plunged us. This does not apply to Adam unfallen. He, while innocent in the garden, was not at all in that state: and consequently there was no call to him. Afterwards there was a call. After he had sinned God did call to Adam, who trembled at the sound, and hid himself. There is where the call comes in; but the call of God is not to the conscience only, it is the revelation of His grace and as a deliverer. God's grace accordingly always wrought by the revelation of this coming Deliverer. But now He is fully revealed as well as come; and our chapter supposes this, but still brings in the great principle that is true ever since the fall, though brought out incomparably more fully since the Lord Jesus Christ and redemption have been revealed. We are now called to (or, rather, by His own) glory and virtue; Adam was not. He was simply to enjoy what he had, and what God had given him: but we are called out of everything here, and the force of Christianity, as a practical thing, depends upon our souls entering into this. A man of the world is one that sets himself down to enjoy present things. He has got his good clothing, and his good food, and his good retinue, and everything good around him, or at least

what he calls good. But he has not a thought or feeling that all has passed under sin; and it is in his case sanctified in no respect by the word of God and prayer.

All this is a denial of the fall, and this is the whole character of man's course here below. When fallen, he denies the fall. He acts in a way that would have been suitable if he were not a fallen creature. It was Adam's place to enjoy what was around him, and to own God in it, and the worldly man now has his own way of owning God's hand. He perhaps says grace before a meal, or gets another to do it for him, for he generally likes to do religion by deputy. Such is fallen man. There is no real knowledge of God, no knowledge of Him that calls, because, in point of fact, he is not called, he has never heard the voice of God — never met Him in his conscience to own his sins to God, or God's grace to him — and so he is entirely outside the grace of God; having heard with his ears, he has not heard. It has not entered mind, heart, or conscience — nothing but the outward ear. Now the Christian has heard, and he is called through the knowledge of Him that has called him by His glory and virtue. He is called not to repair the world, not to improve man, not to make a better state of present things; this is not the place of a Christian, but the very reverse. It is just what infidelity attempts to do, because it does not believe in the ruin that sin has brought in, or in God's judgment, any more than His grace in Christ. And wherever a Christian is carried away by the world, he always slips into this.

If any of us who are in this place were to tamper with such thoughts and efforts, we should become worse than anyone else. We should be doing so in the face of truth that condemns it all, and with better knowledge of what God's mind is; and therefore should go back from all we have heard and confessed as the testimony of God. There are none that would so completely bring shame on the truth, and who would lose all conscience, so much as those who are familiar with truth without obedience. The persons who dishonour the Lord most are those who know the truth, but are not subject to it. We find this in the case of the Corinthians. They were true saints of God, and yet there was evil amongst them, such as was not even named among the Gentiles. This did not at all surprise the apostle. It horrified him, but did not take him at unawares. The greater the truth you know, if you deal lightly with it, the worse will be your conduct; and therefore no persons require so earnestly and perseveringly to watch against sin, and to use every means, whether of prayer or of the word of God, for the purpose of our souls being kept pure, simple, and uncompromising. Adam was simply to enjoy what he had in his unfallen state. Man, now fallen, attempts to do the same, which is contempt of God in every way. The character and full picture of this we see in the rich man with Lazarus: "Thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things." There we have the selfishness of the heart blotting out God and man, and only living to gratify self. Is it not an awful, but a common, spectacle in a ruined world?

But the Christian is called to another thing altogether, perhaps to be as Lazarus; but, whether he have evil things or not, he is called by God's glory and by virtue. And, oh, may we think of this, and lay it to heart, that this is what we are called to, every day of our lives! God has, by and in Christ, unveiled heaven to us; His own presence there is our hope. He does not give present enjoyment of things around us. And there is what the grace of God brings out of the fall, or rather from the fall out of Jesus Christ the Lord. Thus has God, so to speak, taken advantage, in His own unbounded grace, of the fact that sin has spoilt the first creation, to bring in a better one. There is no good around us now to act on our souls, nothing but vanity and vexation of spirit; but God has unveiled to our hearts in Christ above a scene where vanity will never enter, and where vexation of spirit cannot be known. And therefore, instead of this being something that will bring praise to ourselves, it is entirely His grace and His calling — "by the knowledge of him that hath called us by his own glory and virtue." Thus does He put His own presence in glory before us, and calls us out by faith thereby. This is why it is said in Romans 3, "All

have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" — an expression that has perplexed many. Before there was sin, no such thing as the glory of God was set out in any way before man; but when sin came in, this is the standard and measure; and for this Christ's work fits us. It is not a question of whether I am fit to stand on the earth — sin has spoilt that; but am I fit to stand in the glory of God? The answer is, that only the man who has received Christ, with faith in His blood, is fit for that glory. We are called out of all that we see and are in; we regard and love Christ, who first loved us, as our only Saviour and Deliverer. He is in the glory of God, and we rejoice in hope of it.

Following, but along with this, comes the "virtue," or moral courage, which does not allow the gratification of self, which does not turn the grace and the promises of God to a selfish account. Does faith ever say, Now that I have in hope the world of glory, I must try and enjoy the present world of self? He has called us by His own glory and by virtue. If saved by hope, we have, as the treasure of our hearts, Christ and the glory before us, it is incompatible with Him to seek this world also. The best of this world is a thing to be slighted for Christ, even if we could command all its treasures. And I pray God that we may live upon that which is unseen, assured that, having Christ, we can well afford to be forgotten and cast off, because we cleave to the name of the Crucified in the glory of God.