Titus - Commentaries by Charles Henry Mackintosh

Handfuls of Pasture: Volume 2, Grace of God, The

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(Read Titus 2:11-14.)

THIS lovely and familiar passage of holy scripture occurs in the midst of a number of exhortations adapted to various classes of people, in reference to their conduct and character. Aged men, aged women, young men, young women, and servants are to be exhorted as to their proper deportment in their respective conditions.

But lest, by any means, our hearts should be tempted to place these exhortations upon a legal basis, the inspired apostle breaks forth in one of the most magnificent, and comprehensive statements of the gospel which is anywhere to be found in the sacred volume. " The grace of God," and that alone, must be the foundation of all christian conduct and character. Legality in all its forms, and in all its workings, is most hateful to the Spirit of God. The robe of self-righteousness with which man attempts to cover his sins, is more unsightly in God's view, than the very blackest sin that could be committed. Nothing can be accepted of God but that which flows from His own grace in our hearts.

Now, in the scripture before us, the reader will find three distinct points, namely, The salvation which grace brings; the lessons which grace teaches; and the hope which grace presents. And, first, then, as to THE SALVATION WHICH GRACE BRINGS.

This is a grand cardinal point. To be uncertain or obscure as to this, must, assuredly, involve uncertainty and obscurity in everything. " The grace of God that bringeth salvation unto all men hath appeared." (See the marginal reading.) This is clear and conclusive enough. The very first thing that grace does for the lost sinner is to save him—save him unconditionally, save him perfectly -save him eternally. It does not ask him to be anything but what he is. It does not ask him to give anything. It brings him salvation, or the ground of his being lost. It is only as a lost one that I need salvation; and the more I feel myself to be lost, the more clearly I see my title to that full and free salvation which the grace of God brings. Salvation is intended for the lost; if, therefore, I am lost, salvation applies itself to me, just as distinctly as though I were the only lost sinner in the whole world.

And observe the immense breadth of this word " lost," It takes in all. High and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, savage and civilized, moral and immoral, religious and irreligious—all are comprehended under this one title, " lost:' It is well to see this clearly. Men make distinctions, and necessarily so. Social life has its distinctions. Law and equity maintain their distinctions which must be duly recognized by every well regulated mind. Society awards to the chaste, the sober, and the moral, a respect which it justly withholds from the profligate, the drunkard, and the unprincipled. But, directly we get into the presence of the grace of God, all these distinctions are swept away, and all are looked at on one common ground as lost. The most respectable member of society and the vilest outcast are both in the same condition, as regards themselves; they are both lost, they both need salvation; and the grace of God brings salvation to the one as well as the other; and be it well remembered that the poor broken-hearted outcast is nearer, by far, to the salvation which grace brings, than is the cold hearted self-sufficient moralist. (See Matt. 21:31.) If the law of God could bring salvation, then the case would be quite the reverse. But the law never brought salvation to any one because no one could keep it; whereas grace brings salvation to all because all need it. It is no longer confined to the Jews. The Sun has risen far above the Jewish horizon, and poured his blessed beams over " all the world," so that " every creature under heaven" may bask in the light thereof. Such is the wide aspect of " the grape of God," which, let me say, leaves wholly untouched the grand question of God's eternal counsels and God's moral government. God has His counsels; and God displays His mysterious wisdom in government. This must never be forgotten, nor does it interfere, in the smallest degree, with the precious truth that " the grace of God bringeth salvation unto all," and " the righteousness of God is unto all." The inspired apostle is speaking of the aspect of these things, not of their final result—a grave and important distinction.

Now, it must be obvious to my reader that the term "all" necessarily includes him. It could not possibly be otherwise. If he be not included, then it follows that there is some one for whom the grace of God has not brought salvation; but the Holy Ghost expressly declares that it bringeth salvation unto all. This must satisfy the most anxious soul as to the question so often raised, namely, " How am I to know that salvation is intended for me?" Is any one excluded? Is not salvation brought to all? Does not this term comprehend every anxious inquirer? Unquestionably. The declaration of the inspired writer is that " The grace of God, which bringeth salvation unto all men hath appeared." This is as plain as a sunbeam. Men may reject this salvation. Alas' they do reject it; but that can never touch the question of the wide aspect of that grace which shines with undimmed luster in the gospel, and brings a full and free salvation unto all. Their guilt in rejecting it flows from the fact that it is freely offered. If they could not get it, whence their guilt in not having it? Where the righteous judgment in punishing men for not receiving what was never intended for them? (2 Thess. 1:6-10.) True, it is-divinely true, that God is sovereign; but it is equally true that man is responsible. Are we called to reconcile these things? Nay, they are reconciled already, inasmuch as both are taught in the word. All we nave t do is to believe them.

But let us inquire what is included in the salvation which the grace of God brings? The answer is, Everything. Salvation is a precious casket containing all I want for time and eternity. It includes salvation from the future consequences of sin, and from its present power. To be a divinely-saved person—a person saved by the grace of God saved by the blood of Christ, as every believer is, involves entire deliverance from wrath, from hell, from Satan, from everything that could possibly be against me. A man whom God hath saved is surely safe from all. There is nothing doubtful about God's salvation; it is all settled. There is no delay; it is all finished. We have neither to wait for it nor to add to it, but to receive it now, and enjoy it forever. The mighty tide of grace rolls down from the very throne of God, and bears upon its bosom a full salvation -salvation for me. I receive it as a free gift; I bow my head and worship, and go on my way rejoicing.

We shall now proceed, in the second place, to consider

THE LESSONS WHICH GRACE TEACHES.

Grace is a teacher as well as a Savior; but it never begins to teach me until it has saved me. It is well to see this. Before ever it asks me to hearken to its pure and holy lessons, it brings me a salvation as free as the air we breathe. It is as a divinely-saved person I enter the precincts of the school of grace, and take my place upon the form. Grace teaches only the saved. All its pupils are saved. Grace, as a Savior, seeks only the lost. Grace, as a teacher, instructs only the saved. This makes all plain, and puts everything in its right place. We must never place unsaved persons on the forms of the school of grace. Such have no capacity to learn its holy lessons. There must be a proper material—a proper capacity. This capacity is included in the salvation which grace brings me. I am a debtor to grace both for the lesson which I learn, and the capacity to learn it. I owe all to grace. Grace seeks me, and finds me in my lost estate; it saves me with an everlasting salvation, and introduces me as a saved person to the sphere in which its hallowed instructions are imparted. Grace does not teach those who are dead, it quickens them; it does not teach those who are guilty, it cleanses them; it does not teach those who are condemned, it justifies them. It is as quickened, cleansed, and justified that I become the pupil of grace. The very first thing that grace does for the lost sinner is to bring him salvation, and when he receives this salvation, it teaches him to "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world."

I desire that my reader should be clear as to this. If he be, as yet, in an unsaved state, let him understand that the grace of God brings him salvation as a present thing; and, moreover, until he has accepted this free gift, he is wholly unable to understand or take in the lessons which grace teaches. If grace is to be his teacher, he must be saved in order to be a pupil. This simple fact gives the death-blow to all legality, to all human righteousness, to all man's pretensions. If none can comprehend the lessons which grace teaches save those which have accepted the salvation which grace brings, then, assuredly, our language must ever be, " Not unto us, Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory."

But, let us look particularly at the lessons which grace teaches. It teaches us to deny everything unlike God, and all desires after this present world; and not only 80, but it teaches us how we are to live. The law could never do this. It tells us how we ought to live, but it does not teach us. It neither gives us the lesson to learn nor the capacity to learn it. It does not bring us salvation. The law could never have any saved pupils, because it does not save the lost, but condemns them for being lost. No doubt men ought to keep the law, and if they were right they would; but they are not right, quite the opposite, they are wrong, totally, irremediably wrong, hopelessly lost; and in this condition grace brings them salvation. Christ the Savior is our Teacher, not Moses the lawgiver. May we learn His lessons! May we sit at His feet in all docility, and drink in His hallowed instructions!

These instructions range themselves under three distinct heads, as suggested by the words, " Soberly, righteously, and godly."

I. Soberly. This refers to the inner circle of one's own heart. It simply means, with inward self-government—a most comprehensive expression. The grace that saves me teaches me to exercise a holy government over self. I am to govern my thoughts, govern my tongue, govern my temper—govern them, not in order to be saved, but because I am. The One who teaches me to exercise this government has saved me before ever He commenced His course of instruction. It is as a saved person that I submit my whole moral being to the wholesome control of my heavenly Teacher. The law could not teach me to govern my nature. It condemns me, root and branch, throws me overboard, and leaves me there. Grace follows me, saves me, and endows me with a new nature, seals me with the Holy Ghost, so that I can exercise myself in self-government.

And be it observed that this self-government is totally different from anything that human philosophy or the energy of an indomitable will could ever produce. These things might enable me to subdue some of the accessories of self, while the parent stem was left wholly untouched. But " the grace of God that bringeth salvation," gives me victory over self in all the length and breadth of that comprehensive term. Full victory over all the evil that dwells in me is as much a part of " salvation " as deliverance from hell. Alas! we fail to make use of this victory; through spiritual indolence and unbelief, we fail to possess ourselves practically of that full salvation which grace has brought us; but that, in no wise, alters the truth of the matter. If I am a saved man, I should live as a saved man, in every respect. And how is this to be done? By faith. "The just shall live by faith." (Hab. 2:4; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38.) I can only exercise inward self-government by faith.

II. The second grand lesson which grace teaches me, as to my practical life, is to live " righteously." This contemplates me not merely in the inner circle of my own moral being, but in the midst of the circumstances and relationships of the scene around me—that outward world in which I am called to live and move from day to day. My divine Teacher not merely instructs me as to the government of myself, but also as to the government of all my transactions with my fellow. Here, too, I am to remember that my teacher is the grace that hath saved me. I must never forget this. If the resources of philosophy, or the energy of a strong will, might enable me to exercise a kind of inward self-government, 80 also the principles of a lofty morality, or that pride which spurns a mean action, might lead me to seek the maintenance of an unblemished reputation in all my transactions with my fellow men. But all this leaves me unsaved. Philosophy cannot save me, and therefore it cannot teach me. Morality cannot save me, and therefore it cannot teach me. It is " the grace of God " that alone can save me, and it is that same grace which alone can teach me. Hence, if I see a person who professes to be saved, giving way to bad temper, indulging in passion, or enslaved by a habit, I infer that that person has not learned practically the first great lesson of his divine Teacher. And if I see a person who professes to be saved, yet not guiding his affairs with discretion, but getting in debt, and indulging in extravagance, I infer that he has not learned the second great lesson of his divine Teacher. Let us not be deceived with vain words. If the legalist is silenced by the freeness of the salvation which grace brings, the antinomian is silenced by the purity of the lessons which grace teaches. " These things are good and profitable unto men." The gospel meets everything. It meets the lost sinner with a full salvation; and it meets the saved sinner with the purest and most perfect lessons—lessons of holy self-government and practical righteousness.

III. But there is a third lesson which grace teaches its saved pupils. It teaches them to live "godly." This opens up our relations with the world above. There is great force, beauty, and completeness in these words used by the inspired apostle. They present to us three great circles in which we are called to act: the world within, the world without, and the world above. They must be all taken together to see their divine beauty. There is really nothing left out. All that we can possibly want to learn is taught in the school of grace, if we will only accept the lessons; and let us bear in mind that the surest proof of our having received the salvation which grace brings, is our learning the lessons which grace teaches—those hallowed lessons of inward self-government, practical righteousness, and true godliness. May God the Holy Ghost make us to understand the fullness and freeness of the salvation, and the purity and elevation of the lessons, so that we may more distinctly apprehend, in the third and last place,

THE HOPE WHICH GRACE PRESENTS.

The apostle speaks of it as " a blessed hope," and surely nothing can be more blessed than " The appearing of the glory of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ." This is the proper hope of the believer, and he is taught to look for it by the selfsame grace that has brought him salvation, and that teaches him how to carry himself in reference to the world within, the world without, and the world above. é The Lord will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." (Psalm 84.)

Now, there are three things in reference to this " blessed hope," which I desire that my reader should clearly understand, namely, title, capacity, and moral condition. Our title is furnished by the blood of the cross; the capacity is furnished by the Holy Ghost; the moral condition is founded upon our learning and exhibiting the holy lessons taught in the school of grace.

Reader, permit me to ask you if, when the subject of Christ's appearing is introduced, you ever feel a sort Of bitch, difficulty, or reserve in your mind. Would you be afraid to see Jesus? Would you rather put off the moment of His advent? Do you feel yourself not quite ready? If so, it may be you are not yet able to "read your title clear;" or, it may be, you are not cultivating a spiritual capacity; or, finally, your moral condition is not such as would naturally introduce you to that scene of glory for which we are privileged daily to look. These are points of immense importance—points to which my reader should give deep and prayerful attention. If there be cloudiness as to my title; if there be defectiveness in spiritual capacity; or if my general moral tone and character be not formed by the holy lessons of grace, I shall not be in an attitude of waiting for the glory. In other words, to speak according to the peculiar style of the passage before us, if I am doubtful as to the salvation which grace brings, or if I am backward in learning the lessons which grace teaches, then I shall assuredly fail in looking for that blessed hope which grace presents. It is well to see this, in all its clearness, point, and power. If we are the recipients of grace and the expectants of glory, should not our lives exhibit the moral power of these things? Should they not have their proper effect in the formation of our character? Unquestionably. " He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure." If I expect to be with Jesus and like Jesus, by and by, I shall seek to be as much with Him, and as much like Him, now, as possible.

May the Lord work in us that which is well pleasing in His sight, and bring out in all our ways a more faithful exhibition of the divine life! The language with which our scripture closes is eminently calculated to awaken in our souls the most intense desire after these things; indeed, I cannot conclude this paper without quoting this noble passage at full length, praying the Holy Ghost to apply it in much power to the heart and conscience of both the writer and the reader.

"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation unto all men hath appeared, teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us (what a price! what objects!) that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people of possession, zealous of good works."

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