Titus - Commentaries by Charles Stanley

Holiness and the Second Coming of Christ, Holiness and the Second Coming of Christ: No. 5

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In dwelling on holiness, it is important to keep before our souls the infinite grace of God, or our treacherous hearts would soon turn practical holiness into as great bondage as going back to the law for righteousness.

How perfect is the word of God! The divine Author well knows our every danger. Mark the beautiful order in these verses. Grace; practical righteousness; connected with the blessed hope of the Lord's return. Why should we seek to reverse this divine order? Are we wiser than God? How often do we seek to win the favor of God by works of righteousness! Then, again, how much human talk of holiness, without the slightest connection with the coming of the Lord! Who can say it is not so? Now mark the order, then. First, grace; secondly, righteousness of walk; thirdly, the coming of the Lord.

" For the grace of God that bringeth salvation for all men hath appeared." The grace of God. This is not a quality infused into us, but the absolute free favor of God, that does not come, seeking some fruit in us, as was the case under law, but bringeth or carries with it, salvation for all men. Thus the folly of seeking salvation by works is exposed by a single sentence. Oh, think what the free favor of God carries with it: forgiveness, redemption, justification, sanctification, eternal life, eternal salvation—and all brought to all men; everything provided—no price as a condition, all grace, all free, justified freely, without money and without price. And men will not have it: no, they will seek to merit salvation! Has not God freely, in pure free favor, given His Son to die the atoning death of the cross? Has He not raised Him from the dead, for the free justification of all who believe? Does He not freely proclaim, through that blessed Son, free forgiveness of sins? Does He not declare all who believe are justified from all things? Do you believe God? Mark, it is not the grace of man, but the grace of God, that brings, that carries with it, all you need. All is from God to man. Oh, is it not wonderful to be justified freely, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus? And think of the joy the Father has in receiving the long-lost son. What a welcome the grace of the Father gives him! It is the very intensity of the free, unconditional favor that produces true repentance.

But you say, Would not such free, unbounded grace as that, bringing salvation, and demanding nothing as a price for it, produce ungodliness of walk? Let us mark the second truth in order.

"Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.” Now, is not this the very opposite of all mere human teaching? Suppose we said, You must give up your ungodly habits, you must give up drinking, and all your evil ways and lusts; you must be an abstainer, and lead a sober, godly life, in order that you may attain to the favor of God—nothing could look more reasonable to men, but would it be in accordance with this scripture, or in flat contradiction? Would it not be to shut out the true gospel of the grace of God altogether? It is the free favor of God that brings salvation with it, that teaches us to deny ungodly lusts of every kind, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, according to God, in this present world.

All this is practical holiness, and there cannot be holiness before we are born of God. How utterly vain the struggle. They that are in the flesh cannot please God. But the salvation which the free, unconditional favor of God brings to us, meets our every need—not only clothes us with divine righteousness, all sins being forgiven freely, but gives us a new nature; and, still more, the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. And thus, having the Spirit dwelling in us, we can now walk in the Spirit, and bring forth, in our practical way and life, these holy fruits of the Spirit.

No; a true knowledge of the free favor of God, in all its divine sovereignty, does not lead us to practice sin, as some assert; but teaches, and produces in us, these fruits of practical holiness. Is it really so with you, dear reader? Or, are you deceiving yourself, by seeking these fruits in the supposed perfection of your old carnal nature? Do you say, I am rather perplexed, I scarcely know. I read books on holiness, and I try to be holy. Yes, you may do all this, and really forget, or deny, the free grace of God that brings you all you seek.

But the next, the third truth in these verses, will at once test your supposed holiness, whether it is according to the word of God, or not. Yes, the third comes in order: " Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Savior, Jesus Christ.” See how closely holiness of walk is connected with this looking. What deep reality looking for that blessed hope gives! Yet how many talk of holiness who practically ignore that blessed hope—nay, deny it altogether, and only believe in a general judgment! Do you think it is the will of our Lord that we should lay aside the scripture, and be guided by the traditions of men? Did He not severely rebuke the unbelieving, foolish Jews for doing the very same thing—by their vain traditions making the word of God of none effect?

Then, in plain words, Have you received the grace of God, the free, unmerited, unconditional salvation, that God, in His free favor, brings to you? And can you say that that love of God to you, who only deserved eternal wrath, teaches you? Has it had this effect to lead you, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, you should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope?

Let us dwell on that blessed hope. Jesus has said: " In my Fathers house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go, and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:2, 3.) It is Jesus Himself that thus speaks out His hearts love to you. Is this your blessed hope? In a moment—it may be, the next moment. " We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." " For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive, and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thess. 4:16, 17.)

Is this our blessed hope? It is not merely, Do we believe He will come again?—the devils believe that—but, is it the hope of our hearts? Is He, the coming Lord Jesus, the one commanding Object of our hope? Behold the Bridegroom! Is it not time to see about the state of the lamps?

And there is not only the blessed hope of being caught up, changed in a moment, to be with the Lord Himself, there is also " the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Savior Jesus Christ/' To this world He was and is, the despised Nazarene, the rejected King. But He is coming, and He will appear glorious, the great God. Oh, think of this, ye deniers of His true divinity! He comes, the great God! He comes with the myriads of His saints and angels, to execute judgment on an ungodly world! Men may deride this; but He is coming. He will be revealed, at His appearing, the great God, and our Savior Jesus Christ.

Blessed hope for those who are washed in His blood, who can truly say, " we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins." Yes, they look " for the great God, and our Savior, Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Did He give Himself for this purpose? Then He cannot fail.

What encouragement to faith! How sanctifying the blessed hope! Nothing could present a more powerful motive for real holiness and godliness of walk. Not only what we shall be—blameless at His appearing—but even now zealous of good works. What is this world, with all its lusts and pleasures, its honors and ambition, its approval or hatred, to those who are looking for this blessed hope?

Can you say, I am looking for my Savior, Jesus Christ? Is He really your Savior? Does He whisper those tender words of love to you, I will receive you to myself? Pass on, then, ye fleeting sands of time; I shall soon see and forever be with Him I love—with Him who gave Himself for me. But do not, we beg, vainly dream of holiness and perfection, if saying in your heart, My Lord delayeth His coming.

Remember, then, the divine order of this scripture, and the indissoluble connection there is between holiness and the blessed hope. The grace of God, the free favor that bringeth, not seeketh, salvation, has the first place; then practical holiness, but that formed by the power of the object—the coming of the Lord Himself. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, 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, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." (Titus 2:11-14.)

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