

# Imperishable Grace

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*"Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." Gal. v. 4.*

THE object of the apostle in this epistle is to deliver the Christians from the false teachings of those who were zealously affecting them, but not well; for they were leading them into Judaism--bringing them into bondage--turning them again to weak and beggarly elements--setting up the righteousness of the law in opposition to the righteousness of Christ; and thus taking them away from the simplicity which is in Christ Jesus. Now the apostle says, "Where is the blessedness ye spake of? Before your eyes Jesus Christ was evidently set forth, crucified among you, and you professed His holy Name and gospel, and spoke of blessedness, blessed hopes, blessed experiences, and blessed confidence; but I solemnly profess unto you that Christ will not profit you if you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements; if you are circumcised you are debtors to do the whole law, and your profession of Christ will be of no avail."

Now, my dear friends, I have had some solemn exercise of mind during the last few days, and a very great desire to lay before you the true exposition of these words. Paul bids Titus to shew, in doctrine, uncorruptness, gravity, and sincerity. This, by the Lord's help and teaching, I am anxious to do this morning. The Arminians conclude from this, and other passages of Scripture, that grace is destructible, that a child of God may finally, eternally perish; but, if they considered the nature of grace for a moment, they would never again teach such an error, but would, with Dr. Gill, believe that the falling away my text speaks of is a falling away from, not the principle, but the profession of the doctrines of grace.

In opening up these words, I shall endeavour, as the Lord, may assist, to set before you the nature of grace in a three-fold aspect: First, As it is seen in God the Father; secondly; As it is manifested by God's Eternal Son; and thirdly, As it is applied by the Holy Eternal Spirit.

First of all, I wish to state that our contention for the doctrines of grace is no contention for mere doctrinal statements, no empty war of words, but a contention and a war, for eternal truths. We believe these doctrines, as revealed and applied, are the life, comfort, and hope of God's dear children; for they are the glorious outcome of the everlasting love of God's heart, of the gracious thoughts of His mind, and of the determinations of His will.

Now we will go to the subject in hand. I am, in the first place, to speak of grace as it is seen in God the Father. This grace is nothing less than His eternal love and favour, to poor ruined sinners. It was given them in Christ Jesus before the world began, II Tim. i. 9.

It is opposed to salvation by works, Rom. xi. 6. The blessed fruit of it is: 1st, Election, Rom. xi. 5; 2nd, Salvation, Eph. ii. 8; 3rd, A good standing before God, Rom. v. 2; and 4th, Glory, I Peter

v. 10. It is likewise called the abounding grace, nay, the much more abounding grace of God, Rom. v. 20. How very wonderfully it abounded in eternity; down towards its forlorn, wretched objects it looked, saw them without help, and the immediate fruit of it, if I may so speak, was the gift of Jesus Christ. It called into exercise the attributes of God, and made them harmonize in Jesus.

Justice forbid, on law grounds, the escape of a poor sinner from her stern inflexible grasp--pollution could not be permitted to approach eternal purity--but infinite wisdom found out a way. Everlasting love moved God's bowels towards poor sinners, and He determined to save them. Now, I believe, when the apostle tells the Ephesians they are "saved by grace" he includes all the actings of the wisdom, love, and will of God towards His people: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Jesus is made of God, "Wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

O what wonders love has done! The boundless grace of God is seen in the covenant of grace. Boston very truly observes that "as man's ruin was originally owing to the breaking of the covenant of works, so his recovery, from the first to the last step thereof, is owing purely to the fulfilling (by a Surety) of the covenant of grace." "I have made a covenant with My chosen." The Lord says this shall not be like the first covenant, "which My covenant they brake, saith the Lord." The blessed substance of this is: I will, they shall. "I will be their God, and they shall be My people." "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." "I will make them willing in the day of My power, and they shall not turn away from Me" (Psa. cx. 3; Jer. iii. 19; xxxi. 31-34).

Now these everlasting hills can never move. The promises of good in the first covenant depended upon the character of the person to whom they were made, but the promises of the second covenant all depend upon the Person making them. The goodness of the man interested in them cannot merit them, neither shall sin rob him of them, for they depend upon a divine shall and will, not upon the poor, fickle will of a creature. It is called the new and better covenant, established upon better promises. It contains in itself pardon for all the sins and iniquities of the election of grace, Jer. xxxi. 34; it has a word for backsliders, Psa. lxxix. 30-34; and it says, "Mercy is built up for ever" (Psa. lxxxix. 1-4).

Oh! what a mercy it is to be bound up in this bundle of life! Now, there are thousands who would tell you that your poor souls may be interested in this grace of God the Father, which was given you in Christ Jesus before the world began, which bears such precious fruit as I have mentioned, which, to the astonishment of your own souls, so wonderfully abounds, moves the bowels of God, calls into precious exercise the attributes of God, from which sprang the covenant of grace, with all its blessed provisions,--I say there are thousands who would tell you you may be interested in all this, and yet finally fall, that is, fall into hell! which is to say that the counsel of the Lord may come to naught like that of the heathen, that the thoughts of His heart may perish; even though it is said that "His counsel standeth for ever, and the thoughts of His heart to all generations." To say that one may fall into hell, who is interested in the grace of God, is to say that from loving from eternity He may in time commence to hate; from having no fury towards a soul, He may commence to have indignation. It is to say that although He determined to dwell in this or that particular soul yet the stubborn will, the unbelieving heart, of this or that person may

frustrate His determination. But is the decree of God such a poor, weak thing that it cannot bring forth nor bear fruit without the consent of man's crooked, perverse will? why, it is to break this will, or to give a new one, that the decree has gone forth, Psa. cx. 3. What a mercy, my dear friends, we have not so learned the Scriptures of truth!

The Lord has promised to put away, to forgive the sins of His people, and He is not a man that He should lie; He has given grace to His people in Christ Jesus before the world began and He is not the son of man that He should repent. His gifts are "without repentance." He calls His people to His feet, and says they shall not depart from Him, and His callings as well as His gifts are without repentance. "He is in one mind, and who can turn Him? and what His soul desireth, even that He doeth." "For whatsoever it pleased the Lord, that did He in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and in all deep places." "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Poor dear child of God, what do you say to these things? to the precious doctrine of the eternal choice, the everlasting love, and the gracious determination of His will to save you, as you have at times been sweetly made to hope? what could you do if these things were taken away? "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" Fall from this grace? why God must first cease to be; His Name, glory, and honour are all at stake, if I may so say, in this matter. Fall from this grace? God's choice become reprobation? His love be turned into hatred, and His determination to save you cease to exist? Of all impossibilities these are the greatest, if there are any degrees in impossibilities.

Blessed be God for that word, "He hateth putting away;" it suits some of our poor, fickle, and frequently wandering hearts. The Holy Ghost has taught some of us what Hart so well knew, and has so beautifully expressed:

"If ever it could come to pass,  
That sheep of Christ might fall away,  
My fickle feeble soul, alas!  
Would fall a thousand times a day;  
Were not Thy love as firm as free,  
Thou soon wouldst take it, Lord, from me."

I now take up my second head, which is to speak of grace as manifested by Jesus the Eternal Son of God.

"Ye know," saith Paul, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye, through His poverty, might be rich." Then the grace of Jesus Christ is manifested in His incarnation, humiliation and death. But how much does this short statement contain--"He was rich," was with God, was God, and is the eternal Son of God! "Then was I by Him, as one brought up with Him, and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him; rejoicing in the habitable part of His earth, and My delights were with the sons of men." Truly--

"This was compassion like a God,  
That when the Saviour knew

The price of pardon was His blood,  
He pity ne'er withdrew."

No, for He said, "A body hast Thou prepared Me, I delight to do Thy will, O God!" But let us look more closely at this subject. The grace of Jesus Christ is seen, first, in His willingness to be the Surety for His poor sinful people. God the Father chose the people and gave them to His well-beloved Son. "Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me" (How willing He was to have them!). . . . As the Father willed to save them, so He, the Son, willingly undertook in covenant for them, to be made under the law, that being in their law place, He might redeem them that were under the law, being made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him; all this He willingly before-time undertook to be and do for His poor ruined, helpless, sinful people.

Secondly, In His incarnation, at the eternally, appointed time, He was "made of a woman, made under the law." Yes, poor, dear, sin-afflicted soul; Jesus, the Son of God, "who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Grace, free, sovereign, eternal grace brought down thus; "He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor." The Son of God was made a little lower than the angels. What for? For the suffering of death. "Forasmuch, then, as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same, that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."

Thirdly, In that He came to pay the debts His people owed and could not pay. He magnified the law and made it honourable; this was by going to the end of it for righteousness for everyone that believeth. He gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time,--"The Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep."

"Well might the sun in darkness hide,  
And shut his glories in,  
When God the mighty Maker died  
For man, the creature's sin."

Yes, poor sinner, and it makes you hide your face too, and dissolves you in wonder, when your soul is favoured with an assurance that He died for you. Oh! the love that brought Him down with the full knowledge of what He must go through to redeem His people. "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the Man that is My Fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts; smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered; and I will turn Mine hand upon the little ones."

"He undertook and must go through;" and blessed be His glorious Name for ever, He did go through, for "He Himself bare our sins in His own body on the tree." Poor sin-burdened one, was ever grace like this? how sweetly does it sound to thee at times! His active obedience, His bloody sweat, His groans, and His meritorious death, by these things He paid the debt His people owed. Poor sinner, "Paid is the mighty debt you owed, salvation is of grace." What love fills His heart! it is a flame which waters cannot quench, a treasure which money cannot purchase.

Fourthly, His intercession springs from His eternal grace or love. He gave an instance of it here: "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory." He ever liveth to make intercession for His blood-bought family--not for the whole world, but for those given Him by His Father. He did not pray for the whole world: "I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine." When He was here in the flesh, He did not die for it; and can we suppose His intercession more extensive than His work of redemption?

Fifthly, His love is seen in, and manifested by, the gracious promises He has made to His poor doubting saints. "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." "And this is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." All His gracious words, His precious sayings, and even His reproofs, flow from the love of His heart. Is, then, this the grace from which the apostle says the Galatians would or could fall? Surely he would never so detract from the honour of that glorious Person who had been so revealed in him, and of whom he knew so much, the efficacy of whose righteousness, and the stability of whose covenant he had so written of throughout this epistle! No, no, the apostle had not so learned Christ. Nay, even to these same Galatians he writes, "I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded." Fall from that grace, lose all interest in that grace, which prompted the dear and blessed Redeemer to become Surety for His people, which made Him delight to do the will of God, though that will was, to Him, as Toplady says, "a will of suffering," which was such a mighty flame it could not be quenched by all the waves and billows that rolled over it, which still burns, and which makes Him feel a deeper sympathy with His poor afflicted people, each one in his particular sorrows, than they can feel for one another, Isa. xiii. 9,-- from this grace? O, blessed be God, never, never! Poor tempest-tossed and not comforted, His blood could as soon lose its efficacy as you lose your interest in it. If any one of His people could, how should He see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied? You may feel as if your hope and your strength had perished from the Lord; you may complain, as the psalmist did, "As for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me," but the mighty God of Jacob, even Jesus, stands at the right hand of the poor to save him, and the light of Israel will again and again shine upon your soul, for it is not quenched. Blessed be God, even Jehovah Jesus, His grace is sufficient to bring every one of His many sons to glory, and when they are all there with Him, He will say, "Behold, here am I, and the children which God hath given Me."

I will now speak of grace in its third aspect, according to my plan which is: Grace as it is applied by the Holy Eternal Spirit. He is called the Spirit of grace for, I think, two very obvious reasons. First, because He is the God of grace, equally so with the Father and the Son; what grace the Father and the Son have, that the Eternal Spirit has. Is it the will of the Father and the Son to save poor sinners by grace? so it is the will of the Eternal Spirit also. Since He is God, what God wills to do, it is the Holy Ghost willing. There is but one will, one flame of love, one glorious determination in the eternal and ever-blessed Trinity; therefore, the Holy Ghost is the God of grace. Secondly, He is the Spirit of grace because His work in the soul is a gracious work. He dispenses and applies grace, takes it out of the fullness which is in Jesus, and puts it into earthen vessels, dividing to every man severally as He will. His work is called "the grace of God ." "The hand of the Lord" was with those who preached Jesus at Antioch, and a "great number believed and turned to the Lord"; then when Barnabas came to see the Christians there he "saw the grace

of God, and was glad." Now "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." But these people at Antioch had believed in Jesus, therefore they so believed by the precious work of the Holy Ghost in their hearts. Barnabas saw this grace of God; His teaching, His work in creating faith in them, and revealing Jesus to them; this was the grace of God which he saw.

His blessed work goes by several names in the Scriptures, and, as the Lord may help me, I will attempt to set forth His grace, by taking a view of His work under those several names.

Then, first, it is a creation: "Created in Christ Jesus." The Maker of the world alone is able to make a Christian, to call into being and exercise feelings, desires, love, and dispositions which did not, could not, by any human possibility, exist in the breast of a sinner. "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature,"--something that he was not before. That power and that voice which said, "Let there be light, and there was light," must say, Let there be convictions, spiritual convictions of sin, honest, humble confessions of it; let there be light and life, let there be desires, prayers, entreaties for mercy; let there be hungerings and thirstings after righteousness; let there be pantings after God, even a dear Redeemer; after salvation, the pardon of sin and deliverance from the pit of corruption. The Lord, I repeat, must say, "Let there be these things in the soul" before ever they can be. Now, my friends, you have these feelings and desires in your souls, and precious indeed they are, they are created by the Holy Ghost. Taught by Him, are you not constrained most sweetly to put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts? How bitter is the old way, the former conversation how distasteful! How you desire to enter into that word, "Old things are passed away, and, behold, all things are become new!" This is the desire of every living soul, and to "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." This same truth of creation work is set forth in Isaiah xliii. 21, "This people have I formed for Myself; they shall shew forth My praise;" and again in Psa. c.: "Know ye that the Lord He is God: it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture." Ah, my brethren, whence is all this? Here is the answer, "By the grace of God I am what I am." "By the grace of God I am made a sensible sinner, a needy and helpless sinner, and though in myself a wretched sinner, yet by the grace of God I am not a despairing, but a hoping sinner; by the grace of God I desire to love, cleave to, and be found in the Lord Jesus." Yes, poor soul, what you are in all these respects, you are by the grace of God; it is He that hath made you, and not you yourself. He has wrought all our good works in us. If it were put to us, as it was to the disciples, by the dear Redeemer, "Will ye also go away?" what do we think and hope would be our answer? Do you, poor tried soul feel as if you must exclaim, "O, but my need of Him is so great, my poverty of soul so deep, my sin and guilt so heavy; and I hope I have at times had such glimpses of Him as have taken my heart away, and have raised within me such a hope in His precious Name and blood; that He is all my desire, either in heaven or earth"? These feelings are the creation of the Eternal Spirit in thy soul.

Secondly, His marvellous work is called being "born again." As the election of grace are predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ, this precious new birth is the unfolding of that decree. How many of God's dear sons are tried about this matter!

"We pray to be new born,  
Yet know not what we mean;

We think it something very great,  
Something that's undiscovered yet."

But when the blessed Spirit comes as the Spirit of adoption they then cry, "Abba, Father." What I wish to observe in this place is that, at the new birth, eternal relationship is manifested. In eternal union with Jesus, the soul now has life from the fountain imparted unto it. At the implantation of this new life the sinner is passive; the will has nothing to do with it; it is wholly of God, John i. 13; iii. 5-8; it is with the Word of truth the soul is new-begotten, James i. 18; it is an incorruptible seed that is implanted in the soul, I Peter i. 23. This incorruptible seed remaineth in those who are blessed with such an inestimable treasure, and they cannot sin, because they are born of God, I John iii. 9. When the Holy Ghost breathes life into a soul, how that soul begins to breathe, without knowing it at first, after God! "Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones, Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live." This done, what a moving there is among the bones, and how quickly is the imparted life made manifest! "Then said He unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost; we are cut off for our parts."

Thirdly, This work of grace, carried on by the Holy Ghost, is called a gift. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." "I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God." "And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear Me for ever." This is elsewhere denominated a good and honest heart, which distinguished the only true hearer of the gospel from the numerous spurious hearers, in the parable of the sower. O precious gift! it is a heart of flesh in which the Spirit of the living God writes the truth, love, and fear of God, in which is written the secret of the Lord; it is a heart to know the Lord, and this knowledge is eternal life, John xvii. 3, and is the only true ground of a sinner's glorying here, Jer. ix. 24. It is one heart; all the saints have the same God-fearing, truth-loving heart; it is a good and honest heart, bringing forth honest, godly fruits; It is not a stout unfeeling heart--for all such are far from righteousness--it is a broken heart, a contrite heart, trembling at God's word, and the highly-favoured possessor of it wants no tenant but God Himself, "O when wilt Thou come unto me?"

There are many other things said about His precious work of grace which I cannot enter into particularly now. I will just glance at a few. Having taught a poor sinner his own inability to pray aright, how mercifully does He make intercession for him with groanings which cannot be uttered, first showing sin, He follows that revelation by another, even a revelation of Jesus; cutting down all fleshly hopes, and rejecting all carnal confidences. He forms Christ in the heart, the hope of glory, and reveals a dear Saviour as the confidence of all the ends of the earth; making the poor soul feel his estrangement from God, and cutting away from him all his Arminian claims upon the mercy and favour of God, He comes as the blessed Spirit of adoption, constraining the soul to cry, "Abba, Father!" an utterance this he thought he never should, never dare take into his lips; bringing the soul into bondage under the law, He, at the set time, comes as the Spirit of liberty, for where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty; removing the veil, and revealing the Son, who said, "And if the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." He brings sweet liberty indeed, liberty from the law of Moses, and from the curse of the law; and,

lastly, He is said to be in His people "a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John iv. 14; vii. 38, 39).

This, then, is the grace of the Holy Ghost, His gracious work in the heart of a sinner. Had the apostle this grace in view when he said to the Galatians they were fallen from grace if they were circumcised? I know numbers would unhesitatingly answer, "Yes," but it is because they know not the Scriptures, nor the power of God. It is probable that many will deny that I have given a Scriptural view of grace. Let them accomplish two things, then I will give way to their objection at once; let them, first, overthrow this view by Scripture, and secondly, set before us another view from Scripture; but in the meantime, by the help of the Lord, we will abide by what He Himself, as we hope and believe, has taught us. To say a sinner may fall from this grace is simply to say that a creation work may of itself go into nothing, that feelings which were called into being by the Spirit can of themselves cease to exist. "But," one may object, "in speaking thus you destroy the will of man entirely." Though this is not a question of the will at all, yet I would observe that the objector would himself (by maintaining the possibility of falling) destroy the will of a sinner who has been quickened by the Holy Ghost, for if ever a will was exercised by a sinner it is in salvation matters; if this soul could perish, violence would indeed be done to his will. Bent towards the Lord by all his poverty of soul and all the desire of his renewed will, what violence indeed would be done to this will if the devil should be permitted to drive the poor sinner into hell! To say that this grace may perish is to say that a life breathed into the soul may die away, and that the eternal decree, which brought forth so sweetly, may yet fail and be barren. What an awful impeachment it is of the honour and glory of the Holy Ghost, for it says He forsakes the works of His own hands, is careless of those He has manifested so much love to as to quicken them; nay, more and worse, that He gives desires He will never gratify, a thirst He will never quench, an appetite He will never appease; that He puts in the heart a prayer for pardon and salvation which shall not be answered! But His work is a gift, the gift of a new heart. What becomes of this? Is it taken away again? Then God would repent of His gifts, which is contrary to Scripture; it is a pure seed incorruptible, undying, and it remaineth in the soul. "But," one may say, "may not Satan touch and defile this seed?" I answer, the Scriptures say not. "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not" (I John v. 18). I am not, my dear friends, preaching the non-backsliding doctrine, no, no; God forbid that I should be so misunderstood by anyone. The covenant which holds fast every favourite of heaven, has a rod for each backsliding child, Psa. lxxxix. 30-32, as I observed before.

Now, my dear friends, I believe this is the true grace of God which I have, though in a very feeble way, testified unto you; I doubt not there is a confirming testimony in your own hearts. What debtors are we to grace, free grace, and must ever be. What a lovely theme it is! How it warms and cheers the heart of a sinner deep in debt, with naught to pay, to be frankly forgiven! How suitable is this free, sovereign grace to the various needs of the Lord's people; what precious words of grace drop into the heart to uphold, guide, and comfort! For the hungry there is a word, "Blessed are ye that hunger now, for ye shall be filled;" and oh, poor thirsty ones, there is a good word for you, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty; and floods upon the dry ground." Grace is not suited to nor needed by the rich, the whole, the Pharisee; but to them that have need of healing it is most desirable. It suits the lame, for it says he shall leap; the dumb, for it declares he shall sing; while to those who are in graves, a gracious God says, "O My people, I

will bring you up out of your graves." To every tempted one a most gracious Saviour says, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Are you sinking under a burden? there is a word of grace, "Underneath are the everlasting arms;" let but the Holy Ghost send that word into your heart, what a sufficient word you will find it. The grace of the Eternal God is a threefold cord which cannot be broken: the grace of God the Father, the grace of God the Son, and the grace of God the Eternal Spirit. Happy, thrice happy, is the man who is interested in it, for though he may fall from the present sense and feeling of it, yet from the wonderful principle, the precious fruit and the mighty work of it in the soul, never! The Lord add His blessing. Amen.