

Really a Work of Grace or Not?

by Anne Dutton

The sermon emphasizes that the work of God upon the soul is a real supernatural work of divine grace, which is wrought in none but those who are prepared for glory.

Scripture: Psalm 51:10, Isaiah 54:5, John 4:14, John 6:37, Romans 8:1, 2 Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 1:13, Hebrews 6:19, 1 Peter 1:8

Topics: "Assurance Of Salvation", "Work Of Grace"

Description

Anne Dutton preaches to a brother in the Lord, affirming the work of God upon his soul as a true work of grace. She highlights the signs of grace in his life, such as being weaned from sinful delights, conviction of sin, dependence on Christ's righteousness, and embracing Jesus as Savior. Anne addresses the brother's objections about lacking certain experiences like deep terrors of conscience, overflowing joys in believing, inward troubles, and gradual progress, reassuring him that God works uniquely in each believer. She encourages him to seek the sealing of the Spirit for greater assurance and joy in Christ, emphasizing the intimate love relationship believers have with Jesus.

Transcript

My Dear Brother in the Lord,

The account you gave me of the Lord's work upon your soul refreshes my spirit, and that He was pleased to make my printed account of His gracious dealings with me a comfort unto you, as you found so great a part of it to answer to your own experience, for which I rejoice, and bless the Lord. And in answer to your request, "to give you my thoughts if the work of God upon your soul be really a work of grace or not?" I can with gladness assure you that I am fully satisfied that it is, and it appears clear to me from the following particulars, in that--

1. The Lord has hedged up your way with thorns, and weaned you from all sinful delights.
2. In that you have been convinced of your lost and perishing condition as a sinner, both by nature and practice.
3. Of the spirituality of the law as in force against you, and that flaming justice barred up mercy from you that way.
4. In that you have been brought off from dependence upon the perishing sands of your own duties.

5. In that God has revealed His Son in you, as your only and all-sufficient help--in the glory of His perfect righteousness and all-atoning blood, and in the glory of His infinite fullness--to save you to the uttermost, and to satisfy all your desires through time and to eternity.

6. In that hence, seeing Jesus to be such a suitable Savior to your case as a lost sinner, you have embraced Him as your Savior, and fled unto Him for refuge as the only, the glorious hope set before you in the gospel. Wherever these things are experienced, my brother, the work of God on that soul is saving--a special work of supernatural grace--by which the man is brought out of darkness into God's marvelous light, or made a new creature in Christ Jesus. As a believer in the Son of God, that soul is passed from death unto life, and shall not come into condemnation.

As to what you further mention, of your being drawn of late closer unto blessed Jesus than ever; that He is now become your spiritual rock, whence all your consolation flows; that as you said (which was sweet to me), "Take away Christ, and you take away all the comfort of my soul"; that if you had all the treasures that this world can afford, you would count all but loss and rubbish for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, your Lord; that you desire so to be with Christ, which is far better, that if you had heaven for your portion, and all the joy and happiness it could afford, yet, if you had not the presence of precious Jesus there the desires of your soul would never be satisfied; that your desire not to be saved, not just barely for happiness' sake, but that God and the Lamb might be thereby glorified; and that now, all the delight you have on earth is in the delightful service of blessed Jesus, so that it would be a hell to you to go back to your natural state, and your desire is to praise free grace, victorious grace, in life and death, and to reign in its triumphant praises to all eternity. These things, my brother, are further evidences that the work of God upon your soul is saving. But I take these to belong rather to some good degree of growth in grace than to the truth, or first being of it in your heart.

I would next attempt a short answer to those objections which arise in your mind and make you fear that the Lord's work on your soul is not saving, or whether it be any more than the fruit of a religious education.

But before I consider your objections in particular, let me say, a religious education is a great privilege, as a means to restrain from vice and immorality, and to train up youth in a doctrinal knowledge of the truths of the gospel; and is often blessed for conviction, and may be for conversion. But the most religious education that ever any person was favored with, as in and of itself, never did nor can give such a spiritual conviction of sin, of heart-sin, as to make the soul cry out in the views of the uncleanness of its nature, in the light of the law's spirituality, and of its own inability to help or save itself, Woe is me, for I am undone! Nor yet did the most religious education, as in and of itself, ever make Christ precious as the only and all-sufficient Savior unto any one soul.

No! these are, as I may say, the two main hinges upon which the soul turns from a state of nature to a state of grace. They are the two great characters whereby a new creature, a man that is in Christ, may be known, and the undeniable evidences of a real spiritual gracious change upon the heart, or of the soul's being brought out of nature's darkness into God's marvelous light. Such a man is new-made, has true, precious faith, the faith of God's elect, wrought in his heart, unto which the everlasting salvation of the soul is annexed. And the power that produced it was not the natural force of a religious education, but the supernatural power and almighty energy of the Holy Spirit in regeneration.

The most religious education is a tree of too low a nature to bear such high and precious fruits as a sight of a sin-ruined, law-pursuing, and perishing state, and a flight unto Christ for refuge, as beheld Mighty to

save and altogether lovely. It is impossible it should be found on any soul before it is engrafted into Christ and partakes of the spirit of grace from Him, or of His fullness as the root of grace and fatness, as the glorious olive-tree to His Church.

But I must come to your objections. And you fear the work of God upon your soul is not saving, and say:

Objection 1. Because I have not felt those terrors of conscience for sin that others have.

Answer. The same degree of terror is not necessary to be felt by every soul that is truly convinced of sin; nor is it usual for those who have had a pious education, and been restrained from outward immoralities, to feel the same degree of terror as those who have run great lengths in wicked courses. If a moralized person, who has been religiously educated, has had so much terror for sin, for his heart and life-sin, that he dare not trust in himself or in his own doings for life, but being warned of God by His holy law of the wrath which is to come, and by His gospel of fleeing unto Christ as the only hiding place from it, and being moved with fear (of being found out of Christ) runs unto Him for safety--it is sufficient to prove a saving conviction of sin. And as great a display of the power of the Holy Spirit in His work of convincing of sin is this, where the soul has less terror, as where the same work in other souls, that have been openly immoral, is attended with great terrors. I humbly think that the display of power in the former is the greatest. But, however, the glories of Omnipotence in various rays shine in both. The soul that has passed under the greatest terrors, which have been over-ruled to bring him to Christ, has cause to bless God forever for His kind dealings with him, in that, though He led him by a rough way, He brought him to such a glorious place of rest and safety. And the soul that has had less terror, that is not left to rest short of Christ, is equally safe with the other, and has reason in a particular manner to bless God that He gave him such an easy passage from his soul-pursuers into Christ, the city of refuge, and brought him through the straits of the new-birth without those pangs and throes which some souls feel. Which way however the Lord deals with us in conviction of sin, He leads us by a right way, that is and shall be most for His glory and our joy if we are brought thereby unto Christ, that city of habitation. But again, you fear the reality of the work, and say,

Objection 2. Because I have not experienced those overflowing joys in believing which other saints have.

Answer. The Holy Spirit, as the Comforter of believers, is a Sovereign, and divides unto every new-born soul individually as He will. The least comfort, the least beam of infinite favor, upon fleeing unto Christ for refuge, is an unspeakable blessing, a ray of light that is the dawn of eternal day. What though as to some souls who have been covered with the thick darkness of amazing terror, the light of God's salvation unto ravishing joy has arisen upon their spirits, and presently made day, yes, high noon, as it were, at once with them; perhaps they may be called hereafter to walk by faith in darkness, and as seeing no light, to trust in the name of the Lord, and to stay themselves upon their God.

And you, whose night has not been so dark, and upon whom the light has gradually arisen, may shortly have the clear shine of the Sun of righteousness, and walk in the light of God's countenance all the day long. Those earnest desires which are wrought in your soul, after the clear witness of the Spirit and the full sealing of the Holy Spirit, foretell a morning of joy unspeakable and full of glory at hand. Wait awhile, and you shall have joy enough to fill every corner of your soul to the brimful. The joy of faith, the joy of spiritual sense, the joy of the Holy Spirit in His witness to your interest in the three-one God, your exceeding joy, shall enter into you here; and hereafter you shall enter into joy, into your Master's joy, and be immersed in pleasures for evermore, while as a vessel of mercy you are cast into Him, the ocean of joy and glory, to

take your fill of God in Christ unto bliss unknown, to the days of eternity. But further, you fear the work of God upon your soul is not saving, and say,

Objection 3. Because I have not those inward troubles and temptations from Satan which other Christians have.

Answer. You may have much of these hereafter; and let your present freedom be esteemed by you as your great privilege, and be the matter of your thanksgiving. It was well you said that you "have not been wholly free from inward temptations," for among the rest, I must tell you that this is an inward temptation, in that you are put upon questioning the work of grace on your soul because you have no more inward troubles. Oh, my brother, do not covet temptations, but go on to pray that you may not be led into temptation, but delivered from evil. Once more, you fear, and say,

Objection 4. Because the work of God has been so gradual upon my soul.

Answer. The gradation of the work is no argument against the truth of it, but is rather an evidence of the same. The kingdom of God, or the work of grace in the souls of His people, is progressive. The word of the gospel, as a living seed, being cast into the heart, and received by faith of the operation of God in its blessed effects upon the soul, springs up, first in a small, tender blade, then advances to the ear, and last of all, to the full ripe corn in the ear, as grace ripens for and hastens apace unto glory. This is true concerning the good work of God, begun in the souls of all the saints. But yet it must be confessed that in some the first work, as well as its after-progress, is much more speedy than in others. The Lord acts herein, as I hinted under another head, as a Sovereign; and in His various dealings with all His children abounds towards them according to the exceeding riches of His grace and the infinity of His wisdom. And as far greater display of the glory of divine grace is it to that there is such a vast variety in the particular experiences of particular souls, while the same blessed work in the general is carried on in all, than if every one in particular did particularly experience the same thing at the same time and in the same degree.

Our God is a great Being! Great in His love, grace, and mercy, great in His wisdom and power, and in all His immense perfections; and He delights to act like Himself, to cast abroad His infinite glory in a thousand various rays, in a thousand various ways of working, upon the vessels of mercy, in His time--preparing them for glory, for that glory He ordained them to and prepared for them before time began, which shall be to His exalted praise in a thousand various notes among the saved of the Lord, while they all join the song, "Salvation unto God and to the Lamb!" unto ages without end.

As to these objections, my brother, which arise in your mind, and many more of a like nature which at times perplex the hearts of God's people, there is no just ground for them, inasmuch as the things objected as lacking in some particular souls, which are to be found in others truly gracious, belong not to the essentials of a state of grace, but to the 'circumstantials' which with much difference in different persons attend gracious souls. If we would judge of our state of grace by comparing our experience with that of others whom we look upon to be truly gracious, let us do it in those generals wherein all agree, and not in particulars, in which there is so much difference. See the two I mentioned before I came particularly to answer your objections.

It appears to me, my brother, that you were a regenerate soul when what the world calls innocent diversions became so disagreeable to you, that what was your former chief delight became your greatest burden. The cause, as I conceive, was this, the new nature was wrought in your soul, a holy, spiritual

appetite, that could find no delight in natural sinful pleasures, but still sought pleasures of a higher kind, of a heavenly extraction, agreeable to itself and its heavenly descent and taste, with which alone it could be satisfied. This is evidenced to me by that pleasure which you then found in heart-mourning for sin; by that fear which you then had lest convictions should wear off without any saving effect; by your desire after deeper convictions of sin; and by your earnest prayer for grace to live a holy life here, even if you might never enjoy happiness hereafter. These things, together with what you have experienced since, make the work of God upon your soul appear to me very clear and full, that it is, indeed, a real supernatural work of divine grace, which is wrought in none but those who are prepared for glory, or "made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

But oh, rest not in present experiences. You are to see greater things than these. Follow hard after the sealing of the Spirit. He can open such clear, satisfying, soul-ravishing views of your interest in Christ to you in a moment as will far transcend all that the creatures by discourse or argument can give you in an age. Oh, when the Holy Spirit comes in; the great power of God to seal upon your heart your eternal interest in Jesus, unbelieving fears and carnal reasonings shall fly before Him as the shades of night or glooms of day before the rising morn, the out-breaking sun, in his clear meridian-shine. And immediately, in full assurance of faith and raptures of joyful spiritual sense, you will cry out with Thomas, "My Lord, and my God."

Oh, my brother, is this the joy you long for? This is the joy that is reserved for you. This is the joy with which you shall be satisfied. Your Beloved is yours, and you are His, and you shall know it. Enfolded in His arms, and leaning on His bosom, your love-sick soul with love shall be solaced, feasted, filled. Your Beloved shall bring you into His banqueting house, and His banner over you shall be love. He will bid you eat, as His friend, that heavenly bread, that bread of life. His body broken for you, for you in particular; and call you to drink, give you to drink as His beloved of the wine of His love that flowed in His blood, shed for you, for you as distinctly as if it was poured out for never another in the world. "Drink," He will say, "O! beloved, O infinitely beloved soul! Come, open your thirsty mouth, open it wide, I will fill it--take your fill, you can never drink my love dry. Drink, yes, drink abundantly, be inebriated with my love, with all my immense glories as yours in love! View Me, handle Me, possess Me as your own, for I Myself, in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells, and yours in love--to satisfy and solace you with bliss ineffable, with pleasures new to surround you, to ravish you through time and to eternity's abounded space."

Thus familiar, my dear brother, will your lovely, loving a Lord be with you; thus gracious will He be to you in whom His soul delights. Your Maker is your husband, and as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you in renewed displays of His old, everlasting love, that knows neither bound, change, nor end! Oh happy, thrice happy are you! Jesus is yours forever! Drawn then by His love-cords, do you likewise be His, and give up yourself to His service in love, to glorify Him both now and for evermore.

The times look dark, the heavens are black with clouds, the Church, like a ship in a tremendous sea, may be tossed with the waves; but, since our Lord is with us in the ship, we shall not sink, we shall have blessed company in trouble, safely out-ride the storm, and be brought at last to our desired haven. Jesus being at the helm, the Church need not fear; well He will steer her through danger, and bring her soon into her promised rest and glory.

Grace be with you. In the arms of Christ I leave you.

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