

THE LIFE OF FAITH Chapter 10 Grace Preparing for glory

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Transcript

THE LIFE OF FAITH

Chapter 10

Grace Preparing for glory

"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 Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:11-13).

The opening "For" looks back to verse 10. In the immediate context the apostle had exhorted servants to walk amiably and faithfully, so that they "adorned the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things". It is deeply important that we should be sound in doctrine, for error acts upon the soul the same as poison does upon the body. Yes, it is very necessary that we be sound in the Faith, for it is dishonoring to God and injurious to ourselves to believe the Devil's lies, for that is what false doctrine is. Then let us not despise doctrinal preaching, for "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine" (2 Tim. 3:16). But there is something else which is equally important as being sound in doctrine, namely, that we adorn it by our conduct. The sounder I am in doctrine, the more loudly I advertise my orthodox views, the more do I bring that doctrine into reproach if my life be worldly and my walk carnal. How earnestly we need to pray for Divine enablement that we may "adorn the doctrine in all things". We need the doctrine of Scripture written upon our hearts, moulding our character, regulating our ways, influencing our conduct. We "adorn" the doctrine when we "walk in newness of life", when we live each hour as those who must appear before the judgment seat of Christ. And we are to "adorn the doctrine in all things": in every sphere we occupy, every relation we sustain, every circle God's providence brings us into. The apostle now enforces what he had said in verse 10 by reminding us that "the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men". This is in blessed contrast from the law, which brings naught but "condemnation". But the grace of God bringeth salvation, and that in a twofold way: by what Christ has done for his people, and by what he works in them. "He shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21): save from the guilt and penalty of sin, and from the love or power of sin. This grace of God "hath appeared": it has broken forth like the light of the morning after a dark night. It has "appeared" both objectively and subjectively—in the gospel and in our hearts: "when it pleased God. . . to reveal his Son in me" (Gal. 1:16); "God who commanded the light

to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts" (2 Cor. 4:6). The grace of God—his lovingkindness, his goodwill, his free favor—hath appeared "to all men". That expression is used in Scripture in two different senses: sometimes it means all without exception, as in "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God". In other passages it signifies all without distinction, as it does here—to the bondmen, as well as the free, to the servant as the master, to the Gentiles as to the Jews; to all kinds and conditions of men. But how may I know that the grace of God which bringeth salvation has appeared to me? A vitally important question is that, one which none who really values the eternal interests of his or her soul will treat lightly or take for granted. There are many who profess to be "saved" but they give no evidence of it in their lives. Now here is the inspired answer. "Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts." Divine grace teaches its favored recipients subjectively as well as objectively, effectually as well as theoretically. Grace in the heart prevents us from abusing grace in the head: it delivers us from making grace the lackey of sin. Where the grace of God brings salvation to the soul, it works effectually. And what is it that grace teaches? Practical holiness. Grace does not eradicate ungodliness and worldly lusts, but it causes us to deny them. And what but "Divine grace" can? Philosophy cannot, or ethics, nor any form of human education or culture. But grace does, by the impulsive power of gratitude, by love's desire to please the Saviour, by instilling a determination to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called". Alas, many who are glad to hear of the grace which brings salvation become restless when the preacher presses the truth that God's grace teaches to deny. That is a very unpalatable word in this age of self-pleasing and self-indulgence; but turn to Matthew 16:24, "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me". And again, "Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27): that is the unceasing demand of Christ, and naught but Divine grace working within can enable any one to meet it. Grace teaches negatively: it teaches us to renounce evil. Dagon must first be cast down before the ark of God can be set up. The leaven must be excluded from our houses before the Lamb can be fed upon. The old man has to be put off if the new man is to be put on. Grace teaches a Christian to mortify his members which are upon the earth: "to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts". Grace teaches the believer to resist these evils, by preventing the flesh from ruling over him, and that, by refusing to allow sin to dominate his heart. "Ungodliness" is failing to give God his due place in our hearts and lives. It is disregarding his precepts and commands. It is having preference for the creature, loving pleasure more than holiness; being unconcerned whether my conduct pleases or displeases the Lord. There are many forms of "ungodliness" besides that of open infidelity and the grosser crimes of wickedness. We are guilty of "ungodliness" when we are prayerless. We are guilty of "ungodliness" when we look to and lean upon the creature; or when we fail to see God's hand in providence—ascribing our blessings to "luck" or "chance". We are guilty of "ungodliness" when we grumble at the weather. "And worldly lusts": these are those affections and appetites which dominate and regulate the man of the world. It is the heart craving worldly objects, pleasures, honours, riches. It is an undue absorption with those things which serve only a temporary purpose and use. "Worldly lusts" cause the things of heaven to be crowded out by the interests and concerns of earth. This may be done by things which are quite lawful in themselves, but through an immoderate use they gain possession of the heart. "Worldly lusts" are "the lusts of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). Now Divine grace is teaching the Christian to "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts". It does this by putting upon him "the fear of the Lord", so that he departs from evil. It does this by occupying the heart with a superior Object: when Christ was revealed to the heart of the Samaritan woman she "left her waterpot" (John 4:28). It does this by supplying the powerful motives and incentives to personal holiness. It does this by the indwelling Spirit resisting the flesh (Gal. 5:17). It does this by causing us to subordinate the interests of the body unto the higher interests of the soul.

Grace teaches positively. It is not sufficient that we "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts", we must also "live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world". "Soberly" comes first because we cannot live righteously or godly without it: he who takes to himself more than is due or meet will not give men or God their portion. Unfortunately the word "sober" is now generally restricted to the opposite of inebriation, but the Christian is to be sober in all things. Sobriety is the moderation of our affections in the pursuit and use of earthly things. We are to be temperate in eating, sleeping, recreation, dress. We need to be sober-minded, and not extremists. Only Divine grace can effectually teach sobriety, and if I am growing in grace, then I am becoming more sober. Grace does not remove natural inclinations and affections, but it governs them—it bridles their excess. The first thing, then, that grace teaches us positively is self-control. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city" (Prov. 16:32). "Righteously." This concerns our dealings with our fellows. It is giving to each his due, dealing honorably with all; injuring none, seeking the good of all. To live "righteously" is doing unto others as we would have them do unto us; it is being truthful, courteous, considerate, kind, helpful. "Do good unto all men, especially unto those who are of the household of faith", must be our constant aim. This is the second half of the law's requirement, that we should "love our neighbor as ourselves". Only Divine grace can effectually "teach" us this. Naught but Divine Grace can counteract our innate selfishness. "Godly." This is the attitude of our hearts towards God, ever seeking his glory. Godliness is made up of three ingredients, or more accurately, it issues from three springs: faith, fear, love. Only by faith can we really apprehend God: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12). Forty years ago we often heard the expression so and so is a God-fearing man": the fact we rarely hear this now is a bad sign. But there are two kinds of fear, a servile and a filial—a dread of God and an awe of God. The first kind was seen in Adam when he was afraid of the Lord and hid himself. The second kind was exemplified by Joseph when tempted by the wife of Potiphar: reverential fear restrained him. Only Divine grace can "teach" us this. While love constrains unto obedience: "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). It is only love's obedience which is acceptable unto God: the heart melted by his goodness, now desiring to please him. "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." Now this must not be divorced from its context, for there we are shown the necessary prerequisite—Grace preparing for Glory. The passage as a whole is made up of three parts: in the past, the grace of God brought salvation to the believer; in the present, Divine grace is teaching him, both negatively, and positively, how to live acceptably unto God; third, in the future, the work of Divine grace will be perfected in the believer, at the return of Christ. Verse 13, then, is the necessary sequel to what has been before us in verses 11 and 12. My head may be filled with prophecy, I maybe an ardent premillennarian, I may think and say that I am "looking for that blessed Hope" but, unless Divine grace is teaching me to deny "ungodliness and worldly lusts" and to "live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world", then I am deceiving myself Make no mistake upon that point. To be truly "looking for that blessed hope" is a spiritual attitude: it is the longing of those whose hearts are right with God. Thus, our text may be summed up in three words: grace, godliness, glory. Now our "hope" is something more than a future event, concerning the details of which there may be room for considerable difference of opinion. Our hope is something more than the next item on God's prophetic program. It is something more than a place in which we are going to spend eternity. The Christian's hope is a person. Have you noticed how prominently and emphatically that fact is presented in the Scriptures? "I will come again, and receive you unto myself (John 14:3); "This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner" (Acts 1:11); "We look for the Saviour" (Phil. 3:20); "The coming of the Lord draweth nigh" (Jam. 5:8)— not even the Great Tribulation draweth nigh, not the Millennium draweth nigh, nor even the Rapture draweth nigh, but the coming of the

Lord. It is with his own blessed person that our poor hearts need to be occupied. Here is a poor wife whose husband has been away for many months in distant lands, whose duty required him to go there. News arrives that he is coming back home: the devoted wife is filled with joy at the prospect of the return of her husband. Is she puzzling her brains as to what will be his program of action after he arrives? No, the all-absorbing thing for her is himself—her beloved is soon to appear before her. Now do not misunderstand me: I am not saying that the plan of prophecy holds little of interest, or that it matters nothing to us what course Christ will follow; but that which I am seeking to emphasize is that the primary and grand point of the whole subject is having our prepared hearts fixed upon Christ himself. God would have us occupied not so much with prophetic details, as with the blessed person of his dear Son. That "blessed hope", then, which the Christian is "looking for" is not an event, but a Person: Christ himself. "And this is his name whereby he shall be called, the Lord of righteousness" (Jer. 23:6)—the Lord is our righteousness. "For he is our peace" (Eph. 2:13)—the Lord is our peace. "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear" (Col. 3:4)—the Lord is our life. "By the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, who is our hope" (1 Tim. 1:1)—the Lord is our hope. To me "that blessed hope" is summed up in three things. First, that Christ is coming to receive me unto himself. Second, that Christ will then make me like himself—for nothing less than that will satisfy him or the renewed heart. Third, that Christ is going to have me forever with himself an eternity of bliss spent in his own immediate presence. Then will be answered his prayer " Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory" (John 17:24). Now "looking for that blessed Hope", for Christ himself, is an attitude of heart. The Christian "looks" with the eyes of faith, and faith always rests alone upon God and his Word. Faith is not influenced by sensational items from the newspapers about the latest doings of Hitler and Mussolini etc. Scripture says, "The coming of the Lord draweth nigh", and faith believes it. The Christian "looks" with the eyes of hope, joyously anticipating perfect fellowship with its Beloved. The Christian "looks" with the eyes of love, for nothing but his personal presence can satisfy him. It is an attitude of anticipation: Christ has given his sure promise that he is coming, but the exact time is withheld—that we may be in constant readiness. It is an attitude of expectation, for we do not "look for" something we know will never happen. It is an attitude of supplication, the heart's response is, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." A final word upon Christ's title here: "The glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ", or as Bagster's Interlinear more correctly renders it, "And appearing of the glory, the great God and Saviour, of our Lord Jesus Christ". Three things are suggested to us by Christ's being here called "the great God". First, it points a contrast from his first advent, when he appeared in humiliation and lowliness as the "servant". Second, it shows us he is called "God" not by way of courtesy, but by right of his Divine nature. Third, it evidences the fact that the Saviour is in no wise inferior to the Father, but his coequal, "the great God".

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