

The Word of the Truth of the Gospel

by Horatius Bonar

The sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting God's word and His free love, and the need for immediate acceptance of His Son for salvation.

Scripture: John 3:16, Romans 10:17, Ephesians 2:8

Topics: "God's Grace", "Faith and Trust"

Description

Horatius Bonar addresses the sinner's quest for acceptance before God, emphasizing that mere human efforts, like Adam's fig leaves, are insufficient for true reconciliation. He highlights God's grace as the ultimate covering for sin, revealing that faith must be rooted in divine authority rather than human understanding. Bonar encourages believers to continually engage with God's Word, asserting that it is through the Scriptures that the Holy Spirit imparts peace and understanding. He stresses the importance of trusting God immediately, rather than waiting for a feeling of readiness, as true faith is an active response to God's invitation. Ultimately, Bonar reassures that God's love and mercy are freely available to all who seek Him.

Transcript

How shall I come before God, and stand in his presence, with happy confidence on my part, and gracious acceptance on his?

This is the sinner's question; and he asks it because he knows that there is guilt between him and God. No doubt this was Adam's question when he stitched his fig leaves together for a covering. But he was soon made to feel that the fig leaves would not do. He must be wholly covered, not in part only; and that by something which even God's eye cannot see through. As God comes near, the uselessness of his fig leaves is felt, and he rushes into the thick foliage of Paradise to hide from the Divine eye. The Lord approaches the trembling man, and makes him feel that his hiding place will not do. Then he began to tell him what will do. He announces a better covering and a better hiding place. He reveals himself as the God of grace, the God who hates sin, yet who takes the sinner's side against the sinner's enemy, - the old serpent. All this through the seed of the woman - "the man" who is the true "hiding place." Adam can now leave his thicket safely; and feel that in this revealed grace, he can stand before God without fear or shame. He has heard the good tidings, and brief as they are, they have restored his confidence and removed his alarm.

Let us hear the good news, and let us hear it as Adam did, - from the lips of God himself. For that which is revealed for our belief is set before us on God's authority, not on man's. We are not only to believe the truth, but we are to believe it because God has spoken it. Faith must have a divine foundation.

We gather together a few of these divine announcements; asking the anxious soul to study them as divine. Nor let him say that he knows them already; but let him accept our invitation, to traverse, along with us, the field of gospel statement. It is of God himself that we must learn; and it is only by listening to the very words of God that we shall arrive at the true knowledge of what the gospel is. His own words are the truest, the simplest, and the best. They are not only the likeliest to meet our case; but they are the words which he has promised to honor and to bless.

Let us hear, then, the words of God as to his own "grace," or "free love," or "mercy." "The Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin." "The Lord is long suffering and of great mercy." "His mercies are great." "The Lord your God is gracious and merciful." "Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful." "His mercy endureth forever." "Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee;" "thou art a God full of compassion and gracious, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth;" "thy mercy is great unto the heavens;" "thy mercy is great above the heavens;" "his tender mercies are over all his works;" "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by the transgressions of the remnant of his heritage; he retaineth not his anger forever, because he delighteth in mercy;" "I will love them freely;" "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son;" "God commendeth his love towards us;" "God, who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he hath loved us, even when we were dead in sins;" "the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man;" "according to his mercy he saved us;" "in this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him; herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins;" "the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth;" "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ;" "the word of his grace;" "the gospel of the grace of God."

Such are a few of the words of Him who cannot lie, concerning his own free love. These sayings are faithful and true; and though perhaps we may but little have owned them as such, or given heed to the blessed news which they embody, yet they are all fitted to speak peace to the soul even of the most troubled and heavy laden. Each of these words of grace is like a star sparkling in the round, blue sky above us; or like a well of water pouring out its freshness amid desert rocks and sands. Blessed are they who know these joyful sounds.

Let no one say, - "We know all these passages; of what use is it to read and re-read words so familiar?" Much every way. Chiefly because it is in such declarations regarding the riches of God's free love that the gospel is wrapped up; and it is out of these that the Holy Spirit ministers light and peace to us. Such are the words which he delights to honor as his messengers of joy to the soul. Hear then, in these, the voice of the Spirit's love of the Father and the Son! If you find no peace coming out of them to you, as you read them the first time, read them again. If you find nothing the second time, read them once more. If you find nothing the hundredth or thousandth time, study them yet again. "The word of God is quick and powerful;" his sayings are the lively oracles; his word liveth and abideth forever; it is like a fire, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces. The gospel is the power of God; and it is by manifestation of the truth, that we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

There are no words like those of God, in heaven or in earth. Hence it is that we are to study that which is written, for He Himself wrote it for you. Do not think it needless to read these passages again and again. They will blaze up at last; and light up that dark soul of yours with the very joy of heaven.

You have sometimes looked up to the sky at twilight, searching for a star which you expected to find in its wonted place. You did not see it at first, but you knew it was there, and that its light was undiminished. So, instead of closing your eye or turning away to some other object, you continued to gaze more and more intently on the spot where you knew it was. Slowly and faintly the star seemed to come out in the sky, as you gazed; and your persevering search ended in the discovery of the long sought gem.

Just so it is with those passages which speak to you of the free love of God. You say, I have looked into them, but they contain nothing for me. Do not turn away from them, as if you knew them too well already, yet could find nothing in them. You have not seen them yet. There are wonders beyond all price hidden in each. Take them up again. Search and study them. The Holy Spirit is most willing to reveal to you the glory which they contain. It is his office, it is his delight, to be the sinner's teacher. He will not be behind you in willingness. It is of the utmost moment that you should remember this; lest you should grieve and repel him by your distrust. Never lose sight of this great truth, that the evil thing in you, which is the root of bitterness to the soul, is distrust of God; distrust of the Father, who so loved the world as to give his Son; distrust of the Son, who came to seek and save that which was lost; distrust of the Holy Ghost, whose tender mercies are over you, and whose work is to reveal the Christ of God to your souls. Besides, keep this in mind, that in teaching you he is honoring his own word and glorifying Christ. You need not then suspect him of indifference toward you, or doubt his willingness to enlighten the eyes of your understanding. While you are firmly persuaded that it is only his teaching that can be of any real use to you, do not grieve him by separating his love, in writing the Bible for you, from his willingness to make you understand it. He who gave you the word will interpret it for you. He does not stand aloof from you or from his own word, as if he needed to be persuaded, or bribed by your deeds and prayers, to unfold the heavenly truth to you. Trust him for teaching. Taste and see that he is good. Avail yourself at once of his love and power.

Do not say I am not entitled to trust him till I am converted. You are to trust him as a sinner, not as a converted man. You are to trust him as you are, not as you hope to be made ere long. Your conversion is not your warrant for trusting him. The great sin of an unconverted man is his not trusting the God that made him; Father, Son, and Spirit; and how can any one be so foolish, not to say wicked, as to ask for a warrant for forsaking sin? What would you say to a thief who should say, I have no warrant to forsake stealing; I must wait till I am made an honest man, then I shall give it up? And what shall I say to a distruster of God, who tells me that he has no warrant for giving up his distrust, for he is not entitled to trust God till he is converted? One of the greatest things in conversion is turning from distrust to trust. If you are not entitled to turn at once from distrust to trust, then your distrust is no sin. If, however, your distrust of the Holy Spirit be one of your worst sins, how absurd it is to say, I am not entitled to trust him till I am converted! For is not that just saying, I am not entitled to trust him till I trust him?

You say that you know God to be gracious, yet, by your acting, you show that you do not believe him to be so; or, at least, to be so gracious as to be willing to show you the meaning of his own word. You believe him to be so gracious as to give his only begotten Son; yet the way in which you treat him, as to his word, shows that you do not believe him to be willing to give his Spirit to make known his truth. Nay, you think yourself much more willing to be taught than he is to teach; more willing to be blest than he is to bless.

You say, I must wait till God enlightens my mind. If God had told you that waiting is the way of light, you would be right. But he has nowhere told you to wait; and your idea of waiting is a mere excuse for not trusting him immediately. If your way of proceeding be correct, God must have said both "Come" and "wait," "Come now, but do not come now," which is a contradiction. When a kind rich man sends a message to a poor cripple to come at once to him and be provided for, he sends his carriage to convey him. He does not say, "Come; but then, as you are lame, and have besides no means of conveyance, you must make all the interest you can, and use all the means in your power, to induce me to send my carriage for you." The invitation and the carriage go together. Much more is this true of God and his messages. His word and his Spirit go together. Not that the Spirit is in the word, or the power in the message, as some foolishly tell you. They are distinct things; but they go together. And your mistake lies in your supposing, that He who sent the one may not be willing to send the other. You think that it is He, not yourself, who creates the interval which you call "waiting;" although this waiting is, in reality, a deliberate refusal to comply with a command of God, and a determination to do something else, which he has not commanded, instead; a determination to make the doing of that something else an excuse for not doing the very thing commanded! Thus it is that you rid yourself of blame by pleading inability; nay more, you throw the blame on God, for not being willing to do immediately that which he is most willing to do.

God demands immediate acceptance of his Son, and immediate belief of his gospel. You evade this duty on the plea, that as you cannot accept Christ of yourself, you must go and ask him to enable you to do so. By this pretext you try to relieve yourself from the overwhelming sense of the necessity for immediate obedience. You soothe your conscience with the idea that you are doing what you can, in the mean time, and that so you are not guilty of unbelief, as before, seeing you desire to believe, and are doing your part in this great business!

It will not do. The command is "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ." Nothing less than this is pleasing to God. And though it is every man's duty to pray, just as it is every man's duty to love God and to keep his statutes, yet you must not delude yourself with the idea that you are doing the right thing, when you only pray to believe, instead of believing. The thief is still a thief, though he may desire to give up stealing, and pray to be enabled to give it up, until he actually give it up.

The question is not as to whether prayer is a duty; but whether it is a right and acceptable thing to pray in unbelief. Unbelieving prayer is prayer to an unknown God, and it cannot be your duty to pray to an unknown God.

You must go to your knees, believing that God is willing, or that he is not willing, to bless you. In the latter case, you cannot expect any answer or blessing. In the former case, you are really believing; as it is written, "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of all those that diligently seek him." In maintaining the duty of praying before believing, you cannot surely be asserting that it is your duty to go to God in unbelief? You cannot mean to say that you ought to go to God, believing that he is not willing to bless you, in order that by so praying you may persuade him to make you believe that he is willing. Are you to perish in unbelief till in some miraculous way faith drops into you, and God compels you to believe? Must you go to God with unacceptable prayer, in order to induce him to give you the power of acceptable prayer? Is this what you mean by the duty of praying in order to believe? If so, it is a delusion and a sin.

Understanding prayer in the scriptural sense, I would tell every man to pray, just as I would tell every man to believe. For prayer includes and presupposes faith. It assumes that the man knows something of the

God he is going to; and that is faith. "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." But then the Apostle adds, "How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?" Does not this last verse go to the very root of the matter before us? It is every man's duty to call upon the name of the Lord; nay, it is the great sin of the ungodly that they do not do so. Yet says the Apostle, "How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?"

But I do not enter further on this point here. It may come up again. Meanwhile, I would just remind you of the tidings concerning God's free love, in the free gift of his Son. Listen to what He himself has told you regarding this, and know that God who is asking you to call upon his name; for if thou but knewest this God and his great gift of love, thou wouldest ask him and he would give thee living water. Remember that the gospel is not a list of duties to be performed, or feelings to be produced, or frames which we are to pray ourselves into, in order to make God think well of us, and in order to fit us for receiving pardon. The gospel is the good news of the great work done upon the cross. The knowledge of that finished work is immediate peace.

Read again and again the wondrous words which I have quoted at length from His own book. The Bible is a living book, not a dead one; a divine one, not a human one; a perfect one, not an imperfect one.[22] Search it, study it, dig into it. "My son," says God, our Father, "receive my words; hide my commandments with thee; incline thine ear unto wisdom; take fast hold of instruction; attend unto my wisdom and bow thine ear to my understanding; keep my words and lay up my commandments with thee." Do not say these messages are only for the children of God; for, as if to prevent this, God thus speaks to the simple, the scorers, the fools. "Turn ye at my reproof;" showing us that it is in listening to His words that the simple, the scorer, and the fool cease to be such and become sons. Do not revert to the old difficulty about your need of the Holy Spirit; for, as if to meet this, God, in the above pages, adds, "Behold I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you." Not for one moment would God allow you to suspect his willingness to accompany his word with his Spirit.

Honor the words of God; and honor him who wrote them, by trusting him for interpretation and light. Do not disparage them by calling them a dead letter. They are not dead. If you will use the figure of death in this case, use it rightly. They are the savor of death unto death in them that perish; but this only shows their awful vitality. As the blood of Christ either cleanses or condemns, so the words of the Spirit either kill or make alive. The words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit, and they are Life.

Again I say to you, honor the words of God. Make much of them. Them that honor me I will honor, is as true of Scripture as it is of the God of Scripture. Peace, light, comfort, life, salvation, holiness, are wrapt up in them. "Thy word hath quickened me." "I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me."

It is through belief of the truth that God hath from the beginning chosen us to salvation. It is with the word of Truth that he begat us: and all this is in perfect harmony with the great truth of man's total helplessness and his need of the Almighty Spirit.

"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." "Hear, and your soul shall live."

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