John Grace

by J.C. Philpot

John Grace was a remarkable Christian who embodied a living, feeling, spiritual, and supernatural religion, and his ministry was blessed by God, touching the hearts of many people.

Scripture: Proverbs 11:25, Matthew 12:35, John 4:14, John 7:38, Colossians 3:23, 1 Thessalonians 1:5, 1 Peter 4:10
Topics: "Christian Character", "Spiritual Ministry"

Description

J.C. Philpot reflects on the life and ministry of John Grace, highlighting his deep spirituality, genuine love for good men, and unwavering commitment to a daily, living, feeling, spiritual, and supernatural religion. Grace's ministry was marked by a living spring of experience, a good knowledge of the Word, and a readiness to bring forward scriptural proofs and illustrations. His personal character was characterized by great amiability, readiness to do good, and a liberal spirit, making him a beloved and respected figure among those who knew him.

Transcript

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It is rather more than 10 years since we so far knew the late John Grace as to become personally and, indeed, we may say, intimately acquainted with him. We were supplying at Eden Street Chapel, London, in the summer of 1854, when one morning he quite unexpectedly, and without any mutual friend's or other introduction, walked into our lodgings to make our personal acquaintance; for, though well known to each other by name, we had never met but once before, in the year 1838, and that only for so short a time as to afford no opportunity for anything beyond a little conversation. One very marked feature of his character was that he was "a lover of good men;" and believing, we suppose, that the unworthy writer of these lines was one of these "good men," he felt desirous to form his acquaintance. He therefore came and introduced himself. We at once fell into spiritual conversation, and a mutual union was, as we have reason to believe, found and felt, which not only subsisted without break, but, we may say, increased rather than diminished up to the time of his removal from this scene of sin and sorrow.

All who had the privilege of his friendship will long remember his open, cheerful, affectionate manner and address; his peaceable, tender spirit; and that where he had once formed a spiritual friendship, how firmly and uninterruptedly he maintained it by correspondence or conversation. He would often come out of his

way on his journeys to the north, just to spend a few hours with us, and generally entered the room with such words as, "Let brotherly love continue." Divine things were uppermost with him in heart and tongue; and so at once we usually got, not into carnal, worldly conversation, or a long rigmarole of outside work, but into some sweet living and daily experience, into which we could see eye to eye and feel heart to heart. The life of God was much kept up in his soul, and therefore freely flowed out of his mouth. (John 7:38; Matt. 12:35.)

He was not resting upon dry doctrine, nor even a past experience which, for lack of continual renewings, had become stale and moldy. A daily life of faith in the Son of God, daily exercises from a body of sin and death, daily communications of grace and strength out of the fullness of a risen Mediator, and all kept up by a spirit of prayer and supplications was both his experience and his theme. A dead, carnal, lifeless profession was his abhorrence. Life in the soul, feeling in the heart, communion with the Lord--in a word, a daily, living, feeling, spiritual, and supernatural religion was what he knew for himself and what he looked for in others; and where he found not this, whatever were the pretensions, however correct the creed, plausible the tongue, or consistent the conduct, there, as he had no satisfaction, so he had no union or communion.

But with all this there was no cant, no sanctimonious long face, or drawling, whining phrases; no putting on of a kind of mock spirituality, whereby so many try to deceive themselves and others. We never knew a more spiritually-minded man, and yet nothing of this mock spirituality or feigned humility was visible in him. Spirituality, indeed, of mind and of conversation he had; but with all this delight in spiritual things, there was a most pleasing frankness and openness. He would ask about the wife and family, have a cheerful word for the little ones--now with us no longer little ones, the olive branches round the table, little and big, for he had not only a friendly but a fatherly heart. Thus he was a welcome guest wherever he went; for, without any worldliness or unbecoming lightness on the one hand, or pharisaic austerity on the other, he could so blend spiritual things in his conversation with passing occurrences that there was nothing repulsive in his discourse on heavenly things, even to those who could not experimentally enter into their meaning or their fullness.

But what made his conversation to be seasoned with salt was, that he had a good experience both of law and gospel; and sometimes at the breakfast or dinner table he would relate with much feeling some very marked and blessed things which he had tested, felt, and handled in his own soul. The last time that he was with us at our present abode he gave us, after dinner, an account of the sweet deliverance which he received under Mr. Vinall when he rode so many miles to hear him on a week evening, and the deep exercises of his soul previously, with the fears and faintings of his deferred hope. In a similar way he would often refer to his early days, when he sat under Mr. Vinall's ministry, and whom he loved and valued as his spiritual father, though by no means insensible to his peculiar infirmities.

The present low state of vital godliness in the churches, the lack of dew, unction, and power in the ministry, compared with the days of Mr. Huntington and his immediate followers, as Mr. Vinall, &c., the carnality of professors generally, and the levity both in conversation and conduct which so stamps the generation in which our days are cast, were things which he deeply lamented and deplored. His own soul being kept alive and fruitful, he saw all the more clearly and felt the more deeply the lack of life and fruitfulness in others. And yet with all this, he was not censorious or bitter. We never knew him guilty of that common yet detestable practice of picking holes in other men's or ministers' coats, and, under a show of a wonderful concern for holiness of speech and life, slandering and backbiting friends; nor did we ever find him spurring and flogging old nature, as if the creature, by a little extra exertion, could be made to

perform spiritual acts. He did not thus belie either his knowledge or his profession. By grace alone he knew he was what he was; and without this grace in others he equally well knew that as there could be no beginning, so there could be no advance in the divine life.

But besides these there were other noticeable features also in his Christian character which much commended both his profession and his ministry to those who knew and loved the grace of God in him. Among them was his great amiability of disposition and readiness to do good. He had naturally an active and, indeed, we may say a business mind; and as this was united to much natural amiability of disposition, and was guided and directed by the love and spirit of the gospel, he was always ready for every good word and work. He was favored also with a large congregation and a liberal people to help him forward; and, thus aided and seconded, he was always ready to do good in relieving the poor and needy, and taking up any destitute case which was commended to his conscience. In this way, by the liberality of his congregation during the Lancashire distress, he was able to afford timely help to many places in the North, and took a journey there to see for himself the real state of things, and to have the pleasure of personally distributing it. Coupled with this amiable and affectionate disposition, we must add that he was possessed of a very liberal spirit, hating everything stingy and selfish, and was ever ready to show kindness and liberality to his friends even when not needed by them.

Dropping the editorial "we," I cannot help mentioning that when he came to see me on his journeys northward, he would generally bring with him a basket of fish caught that morning, or some book which he thought I might like to possess. These things may seem trifles; but trifles, as they are called, often show men's real spirit more than larger matters; for the former are the free, spontaneous flowings forth of the disposition, while the latter are often forced upon men by circumstances. But, besides these presents, thinking that I needed some better table than I possessed for my letters and papers, he named it among his friends, and, to my surprise, on reaching home one day two or three years ago, I found in my room a very handsome library table, sent free to my door, accompanied by a kind letter, that it was given to me by himself and friends as a testimony to my long labors in the cause of truth. I love to mention these things as a little memento of my esteem and affection for him.

Of his ministry we do not feel in the same position to speak as freely and clearly as we have spoken of his personal character, from this simple circumstance, that we never, to our recollection, heard him preach above three or four times. But, as far as we could thus judge, he seemed possessed of considerable gifts, and to have not only a good knowledge of the word, but a great readiness in bringing forward passages and especially scriptural characters and personages in connection with his subject. This aptness of bringing forward scriptural proofs and illustrations not only gave a liveliness to his preaching and a force to his words, but much made up for his lack of order; for it must be confessed that he did not usually carry into his discourses that orderly arrangement which so distinguished him in other things. He had also a nice and forcible way of quoting hymns, and especially those of his prime favorite, Hart, which backed his words with sweetness as well as authority.

But what made his ministry so useful and acceptable was the living spring of experience by which it was fed. Gifts, the greatest and most splendid, soon dry up, or bore and wear--unless they are continually fed by grace. But he had the living water, of which the Lord spoke, springing up into everlasting life. (John 4:14.) He was also at a point about his religion and experience, that it was from God. He knew his standing, and could, therefore, speak with decision and power. He dwelt a good deal when we heard him, as we believe was usually the case, on his own experience, which, being unmistakably the work of God, gave point and edge to his words. Thus, without being so separating as some are in word, he was more

separating in deed; for nothing in our judgment is so separating as a good and sound experience, as it appeals so directly to the conscience; and, if there be any feeling, is so calculated to raise up the personal inquiry, "What do I know of these things?"

The Lord, as we have every reason to believe, much honored his ministry. Again and again by letter, for we frequently corresponded, or in conversation, when we met, would he relate most marked instances of the blessing of God on his ministry. At Brighton he had many hearers from London, and indeed all parts of the kingdom, who had come there for health and change of air. Thus he could cast a wider net than most of his ministerial brethren, and many good fish were caught in it who had before swum carelessly in the sea.

Many people of rank and wealth as is well known, resort during the season to Brighton. These have, of course, a retinue of servants. To many of these servants Mr. Grace's ministry was singularly owned and blessed. We have often thought of the sovereign grace of God in this. The master or the mistress is passed by. They must go to 'church'; the servant creeps into the 'chapel', where grace lays hold of his heart.

His was not a long, though in its first attack a somewhat sudden and unexpected illness, and he was mercifully dealt with, and most friendly and graciously supported in and under it. He had not what people call his peace to make, or a God to find on his deathbed. His loins were already girt and his light burning; and, reclining on the everlasting arms laid beneath him, he gently passed away into the presence of the Lord whom he so dearly loved and had so long and faithfully served.

Source: https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jc-philpot/john-grace/

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