

# Frederick William Grant

by John Bjorlie

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*Frederick William Grant was a biblical scholar and minister who dedicated his life to making Christ more precious and His Word more loved and studied, despite facing controversy and division.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 3:5, Ephesians 4:3, Colossians 3:16, 2 Timothy 2:15, 2 Timothy 4:7

**Topics:** "Biblical Teaching", "Christian Unity"

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## Description

John Bjorlie delivers a sermon on the life of Frederick William Grant, a devoted Anglican priest turned Bible expositor who emphasized the importance of accurate biblical teaching and the pursuit of truth. Grant's work, including 'The Numerical Bible' and 'Facts and Theories as to a Future State,' focused on presenting the Word faithfully and delving into deep theological topics. Despite facing controversies and divisions within the Church, Grant remained committed to upholding the unity of the Spirit and seeking Christ above all else. His passion for Christ and the Scriptures continued until his passing in 1902, leaving a legacy of devotion to God's Word.

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## Transcript

Frederick William Grant (1834-1902) was born into a God-fearing Anglican home in the Putney district of London, England. Presumably in his teenage years he became a believer while privately reading the Bible. He went on to King's College School, in order to be groomed for a position in the British defense department. But getting those positions often required inside connections to pull the necessary strings. Disappointed, at the age of twenty-one, Frederick went to Canada.

In the 1850s the Church of England was aggressively opening parishes in the Canadian frontier. Frederick was examined and ordained as an Anglican priest, though he never attended their standard seminary training. About the same time he also delved into medicine. Whether this was his first profession, or a sideline, we do not know. But he patronized a pharmacy owned by a believer who had a literature rack. The pharmacist fellowshiped with an assembly, which Frederick had assumed was a place to be warned against. But reading the literature, he became convinced that the authors were not in a dangerous sect, but rather, were faithfully presenting the Word. He and his brother, Robert, who had also come over to Canada, and had become an Anglican priest, left the "systems of men" as they referred to them, around 1860 after embracing the truths they had discovered. F. W. lived in Toronto before moving to the United States, where he lived in Brooklyn, New York and then in Plainfield, New Jersey.

Amid all his labors for the saints of God, he did not shirk that lofty responsibility to be a godly husband and father. The Grants were the happy parents of four children, Frederick, Robert, Frank, and Hattie.

Samuel Ridout states, "His place in the hearts of the saints rests...in his identification with the Word of God. Unknown to many in the flesh, who have profited by his ministry, with little of what may be called popularity, or the magnetism supposed to be so essential in a leader, he is lost sight of in the precious truth which it was his joy to unfold."

Grant's emphasis on numerics has received mixed reviews, and it is probably safe to say that most Bible students do not read his *The Numerical Bible*, issued in seven volumes, for his notes on numerics, but rather for his devotional comments. When C. I. Scofield worked on his notes for the Scofield reference Bible, he had Darby's Synopsis and Grant's Numerical Bible on his desk. Grant's large book, *Facts and Theories as to a Future State*, was recommended by C. H. Spurgeon, who said it was "the last word on the right side of every question discussed" about the state of the soul after death. It is not as readable as Sir Robert Anderson's book, *Human Destiny* which was written on the same topic, but it is far more complete. Anyone who is seriously studying this topic should get Grant's book. It is perhaps his most important work. As with William Kelly and J. N. Darby, Grant was engaged in issues confronting the whole Church. These men were not playing church in a pinched circle of devotees, trying to be the big fish in a little pond. Their work shows their burden with the issues that all saints faced, regardless of affiliation. They wrote about big issues for a wide audience.

Grant hated denominationalism. When he saw saints dividing and circles of assemblies forming, each circle unreconciled to the next, he mourned, "Our shame is public. It requires no spirituality to see that exactly in that which we have professedly sought we have failed most signally. 'The unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' is just most surely what we have not kept." Ironically he was perceived as the guiding spirit behind the "Grant party" in North America.

The telling of how this happened is also the telling of Grant's darkest hour. H. A. Ironside devotes a chapter in his book, *A Historical Sketch of the Brethren Movement* to this painful ordeal. Of course H. A. I. was quite biased in favor of brother Grant. There he says that "In America F. W. Grant had become by 1880 the leading figure among the exclusive Brethren. His platform gifts were not of a high order but as a teacher he was unexcelled. Many consider him, to this day, the superior of Darby himself in accuracy and spiritual insight, but he always held himself as but a disciple greatly indebted to J. N. Darby. Up to the last, the two were fast friends, though for a number of years there had been slight doctrinal differences between them."

To look in the best light at why these "slight differences" fueled such debates, we need to lift ourselves out of our present era. Today it is easy to become comfortable with sloppy, haphazard, and careless Bible teaching. We are surrounded by many who assume that doctrine doesn't matter. But Grant lived in the golden era of biblical exposition. Scholarship in general, especially in England, had reached a high water mark in the 1880s. To those who do not bother their heads about accuracy and truth, the discussions and controversies of that day seem painfully trivial, as they divided over the north and south side of a hair. But these brethren engaged in debates brought on by a zeal for biblical accuracy.

In 1881, John Nelson Darby spoke for the last time at the Bible conference in Croyden, England. He spoke from Romans 7, and referred to the new birth and the sealing of the Spirit. F. W. Grant listened to the entire message, but was "perceptibly upset" by some of the doctrines promulgated that he stood up before

the meeting was adjourned and walked out. This was noticeable enough that brothers J. B. Dunlop and Major McCarthy spoke with brother Grant at length to arrive at some resolution of the issue.

In the magazine, *Helps By The Way*, which Grant edited, he printed his brother Robert's spirited article on the topic. Back in England it was viewed as an attack on Darby's teaching, and they told Grant so. We cannot go into a blow-by-blow account of what happened to F. W. Grant at this time. The score cards seem fairly diverse, depending on if you are listening to H. A. Ironside or Napoleon Noel. We do know that shortly before Darby died in 1882, he wrote a booklet about the sealing of the Spirit, answering Robert Grant. But F. W. was so cautious, that by the time he finally published his own booklet, to answer his accusers from across the waters, Darby was with the Lord.

The timing was not in Grant's favor. To publish just then appeared to be an attack on a dead man who, of course, was not present to defend his position. The English hymn writer, Lord Adelbert P. Cecil, told Grant that his manuscript was inflammatory, and pled with him not to publish it; if he did, division would follow. He answered, "If the truth will divide us, the sooner we are broken to pieces the better."

Grant's statement was partially reported, leaving the first phrase out, "If the truth will divide us..." The impression left was that Grant was bent on causing division, truth or no truth. Grant's motives were judged, and his words inaccurately reported.

In 1883, Grant published the booklet. Cecil's warning was not idle. A breach followed in 1885 which affected hundreds of assemblies and thousands of saints. To seal these proceedings, in 1889 Cecil was returning from a visit to Native American believers when he lost his balance and fell out of a small boat in the Bay of Quinte, off Lake Ontario. Hearing the news, F. W. wrote his brother, "Dear Cecil is drowned and with him goes all hope of healing the division." With evangelist Alfred Mace, Cecil was seen as Grant's chief disputant. After F. W. Grant's homegoing, brother Mace wrote a letter to Grant's widow, apologizing for his part in this sad division. With sorrow Mace confessed to others that "we came over to get Mr. Grant."

Grant's maturity in the grace of God shows through the dark times of 1881-1885. He had been blind-sided by the enemy. The painfulness of it was that the instruments used had been some of his most cherished friends. If those times seem like dense velvet, remember that Grant continued to mine rare and beautiful jewels from the depths of God's Word to lay against that background. These gemstones sparkle in his own writings, and in the spoken and written ministries of the Lord's servants that he influenced, such as John Bloore, Inglis Fleming, Robert Grant, B. C. Greenman, J. B. Jackson, P. J. and Timothy Loizeaux, R. J. Reid, and Samuel Ridout.

Ridout was privileged to care for brother Grant in his final days, and he also wrote the sketch of his life in *Hy. Pickering's Chief Men Among the Brethren*. Ridout says, "The passion of our brother's life, the desire that consumed him, was to make Christ more precious, to make His Word more loved, more read, more studied. He made a significant utterance shortly before his departure. Propped in his chair, with the Bible open in front of him, as was his custom through the days of weary, helpless waiting, he turned to the writer of these lines, and with a depth of pathos, glancing at his Bible, said: "Oh, the Book, the Book, the BOOK!" It seemed as though he said: "What a fullness there; how little I have grasped it; how feebly expressed its thoughts." Thus he passed to be "with Christ" at Plainfield, New Jersey, on 25th July, 1902, on his sixty-eighth birthday."

Harry Ironside visited the venerable Donald Ross in Chicago just after word came that brother Grant was with the Lord. Ross himself was just two months short of his own homegoing. "Mr. Ross was a patriarchal figure with long flowing beard. He sat in a big chair, and when his son Chas. Ross mentioned that I was with exclusives, he asked sharply 'which branch?' I replied, 'With those who refused the judgment against F. W. G.' 'Oh,' he said, 'I'm glad of that.' Then after a moment or two of silence, he exclaimed, 'Frederick Grant is in heaven!' 'Yes,' I replied, 'He is with the Lord.' 'Frederick Grant is in heaven!' he declared a second time with peculiar energy. Again I answered as before. Almost fiercely he exclaimed, 'I tell you Frederick Grant's in heaven! Aye--and they were glad to get him there! A little clique of them tried to cast him out of the church of God on earth. They let him die, so far as they were concerned, in the place of the drunkard or the blasphemer. But oh, what a welcome he received up there! And he's with Cecil now and the two are reconciled. Soon I'll be there too--and we'll all have fellowship together at last.'"

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