

A Principle of Grace in the Heart, a Good Thing, Always Tending Toward the Lord God of Israel.

by John Gill

The sermon emphasizes that every regenerate man has some good thing in their heart, which is the result of God's goodness, grace, and mercy.

Scripture: 1 Kings 14:13, Romans 7:18, Ephesians 2:4, Philippians 1:6

Topics: "Grace", "Regeneration"

Description

John Gill emphasizes that every regenerate person possesses a principle of grace in their heart, which is a good thing that always inclines towards the Lord God of Israel. He illustrates this through the example of Abijah, the son of Jeroboam, who, despite being raised in an idolatrous family, had some good thing towards God. Gill explains that this good thing is not a result of human effort but is a work of divine grace, manifesting itself in various forms such as faith, hope, love, and repentance. He encourages believers to recognize and nurture this grace within themselves, as it will ultimately lead to actions that honor God. The sermon concludes with a call to support the ministry and the church, reflecting the good that is found in the hearts of believers.

Transcript

A PRINCIPLE OF

GRACE IN THE HEART,

A GOOD THING

ALWAYS TENDING TOWARDS

THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL.

1 KINGS 14:13

Because in him there is found some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel.

The whole verse reads thus, And all Israel shall mourn for him; for he only, of Jeroboam, shall come to the grave; because in him was found some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel, in the house of Jeroboam.

These words are spoken of Abijah, son of Jeroboam, king of Israel. He was now sick, and Jeroboam was concerned for him. He wanted to know what would become of him; whether he would recover from his sickness, or not. Therefore he sends his wife to Abijah the prophet, upon this errand: but, as he knew the prophet had no good opinion of him (a dislike to him, indeed, because of his idolatry), he orders his wife to disguise herself, and go as a country-woman, with presents to the prophet, to know what would become of the child.

She goes; but as soon as she enters the prophet's house, he, being before apprized of it by the Lord, gives her to understand he knew who she was: told her, he had a message from the Lord, that would be disagreeable to her, and her family; namely, that God, for the idolatry of her husband, had determined to cut off her whole family: that such of them as died in the city should be eaten by dogs; and such as fell in the field, should be devoured by the fowls of the air: and that, as to the child she came to inquire about, he should die as soon as she got home, or before her feet entered the city.

But in as much as he was a promising youth, he informs her, there would be a general lamentation for him by all Israel; and also, that he was the only one of the family that should be interred in a decent manner, for the reason given in the text; Because in him there was found some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel. It seems, there did appear in him some dislike of that idolatry his father had set up in the kingdom, and in his own family; and he had some regard to the pure worship of God; which raised the expectations of the people of Israel, that when there should be a change, things would be the better, both with regard to civil and religious affairs.

Those things which they observed in him, arose from a principle of grace, which the Lord had implanted in his heart, called, some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel. The observation that I make upon these words, is, That in every regenerate person there is some good thing towards God; let him be of what family he will, or in what place he may. This child was the son of a king, brought up in a palace, educated in a family very idolatrous; and yet there was some good thing in him towards the Lord God of Israel.

The apostle Paul says indeed of himself, that in him, that is in his flesh, dwelt no good thing (Rom. 7:18): even then he was a regenerate person. How then must we understand the apostle, seeing it is manifest there is some good thing in every regenerate man; and no doubt was in him. It may be replied, there was no good thing in him naturally; for there is none that doeth good, no not one (Ps. 14:3); and the reason is, because there is no good thing in them. If there was, there would be some good thing done by them; but there is no good thing in them naturally, and therefore there is none done by them.

Paul means, there was no good thing in him, except what grace had produced: for if there be any good thing in man's heart, it is not by the power of man, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts. It is he that works in all good men, both to will and to do of his own good pleasure. There was no good thing in him, that he could call his own; whatever good thing was in him, it was from the Lord. Was he spiritually alive? it was not he that lived, but Christ that lived in him (Gal. 2:20).

Did he perform so many great and good things, more than others? It was not he, but the grace of God, that was with him. Besides, there is a restrictive clause in that passage; In me, that is, in my flesh; which signifies there was some good thing in another part of him, though not in his flesh; or the old man, in whom

there is no good; from whom nothing good comes; and by whom nothing good is done. But, in the inward man of the heart, there dwelt some good thing; and so it is, in every regenerate man.

I shall now endeavour to shew, I. What that good thing is, which is in every regenerate man. II. That this good thing, is something in them. III. That it is but some good thing, not every good thing; or however, that it is not every good thing complete. IV. That this good thing in regenerate men, will be found in them, sooner or later. For in him is found some good thing. V. That this good thing is sometimes found in a child, the child of a king; and one that comes from a bad family.

Some good thing was in this young man in the house of Jeroboam. There is an emphasis upon that, in the house of Jeroboam; that sinful, vile, idolatrous family. VI. Wherever there is a good thing in any, it is always towards the Lord God of Israel, I. I shall inquire what this good thing is, that is in the heart of every regenerate man. In my last discourse I have shewn you what wickedness there is in the heart of man: and what the plague of a man's heart is; and now I shall shew you what goodness there is in a regenerate man's heart.

This, in general, is no other than the good work of grace in the heart; which the apostle calls a good work: Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6). The efficient cause of it is good, even God; who is good essentially; independently good; and from whom every good thing comes. Whatever is done by him, must be good, whether in nature, providence, or grace. The work of creation, when he reviewed it, was declared to be very good.

The work of the new creation, the spiritual workmanship of grace upon the soul, is also good, very good. The moving cause of this is the goodness, grace, and mercy of God, who, for the great love wherewith he loved us, hath quickened us, when dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:4, 5). The mean, by which this work is generally wrought, is the good word of God. Of his own will begat he us, with the word of truth (Jam. 1:18). The effects thereof are good. It makes a man good: it enables him to do good works.

It is productive of every thing that is good. The grace of God, not only as a doctrine, but more especially as a principle, influentially teaches men, that denying ungodliness and worldly lust, they should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world. Now it is this good work, in general, which is the good thing that is found in every regenerate man. In particular it may design the various graces of the Spirit of God, which are wrought in the souls of those who are born again.

Indeed the Spirit of God himself has a place in the hearts of such persons, as the author and finisher of this good thing, the work of grace: and who himself is good. Thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness (Ps. 143:10). He is good himself, essentially good. Good in his influence, operations, gifts, and graces. He is promised in the covenant of grace; I will put my Spirit within them. He has, in conversion, a place in the hearts of his people; received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? (Gal. 3:2).

And, indeed, this indwelling of the Spirit of God in the hearts of his people, is the grand criterion which distinguishes a regenerate from an unregenerate man: Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit. Ye are not in a carnal and unregenerate state, but in a spiritual and regenerate one; if so he that the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now, if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his (Rom. 8:9). The Spirit of God is in his people, as the author of the good work of grace upon their souls.

In consequence of his being there, a new heart is given them; a new spirit is put within them, in which are new principles of grace, holiness, life, love, joy, peace, and comfort; new desires, new affections, new resolutions; all things are become new. This is the new creature, the new man the Scripture speaks of; which is no other than an assemblage of the several graces of the blessed Spirit. The fruits and graces of the Spirit are many; the principal of which are these three, Faith, Hope, and Charity, or Love; but the greatest of them is love.

Where one is, there are the others. Where Faith, the principal, cardinal, leading grace is, there is Hope; for Faith is the substance of things hoped for (Heb. 11:1): and there also is love; for faith works by love (Gal. 5:6). There are besides these, several other graces, which, altogether, make up this good thing that is found in every regenerate man, and which is towards the Lord God of Israel. Thus, for instance, there is the grace of repentance towards God. In Acts 20:21, the apostle uses this phrase of the doctrine of repentance, and so of faith; but what he says of either of these, as a doctrine, is true of them as a grace; Repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.

For true evangelical repentance, is no other than a godly sorrow, or a sorrow after a godly sort, and for sin because it is committed against a God of love, grace, mercy, and goodness. The Spirit of God convinces every man, that he powerfully works upon, of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; shews him the evil nature of sin, and the just demerit of it; shews it to him in the glass of the divine law, where he sees it in its proper colors; and thereby it becomes exceedingly sinful unto him; fills him with shame and confusion of soul; brings him to God in an humble manner to confess it, and causes a self-loathing and abhorrence, on account of his offences.

Thus it was with Job, I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes (Job 42:6). There is no doubt to be made, of his having some good thing in him towards the Lord God of Israel, when he said these words. So there was undoubtedly in the poor publican, when he stood, and dared not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, and said, God be merciful to me a sinner. There was in him repentance towards God.

There is the fear of God, and that is a good thing. This the Lord, according to the tenor of the covenant of grace, puts into the hearts of his people, when he calls them by his grace. I will put my fear in their hearts (Jer. 33:40). This appears as early in conversion, as any grace whatever; for the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 9:10). As soon as ever a man is made, in any measure, wise to salvation, the fear of God appears in him. There is a tenderness of heart and conscience.

He cannot do the things which others do, or which he himself before had done: as Nehemiah says of some that governed before him, that he did not, as they, because of the fear of the Lord. There is a fear implanted in their hearts of offending God; for the fear of the Lord, as the wise man defines it, is to hate evil, and depart from iniquity (Prov. 8:13). There is love towards the Lord God of Israel, God appears in his amiable perfections, in the declarations and promises of his grace, and the expressions of his love.

The love of God is shed abroad in the heart, and that causes him to love God. We love him, because he first loved us (John 4:19). Christ appears in all the loveliness of his person, offices, and grace; and in his love in dying for his people. Thus he becomes the object of such a soul's love, to such a degree, that he cannot but say as Peter did, Lord thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee (John 21:17). There is also love to the brethren, to the saints, upon whom the image of Christ appears: and by this it is known that such are passed from death to life; that they are born again, because they love the brethren (1

John 3:14).

There is love to the good word and ways of God, the worship of God, and ordinances of God, and to every thing that is good. There is also hope of happiness in another world. Though a man before conversion was without hope: yet being regenerated, he is begotten again to a lively hope. Christ being set before him as the object of hope, and he encouraged to flee to him, and lay hold upon him; he expects everlasting life. His hope is as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which enters into that within the veil (Heb. 6:19).

This must be allowed to be some good thing surely; for it is called a good hope through grace (2 Thess. 2:16). There is faith also; and that is another part of this good thing towards the Lord God of Israel. A sinner that is wrought upon, as just now described, trusts in God as his Saviour, and says, as Job did, though he slay me, yet will I trust in him and he also shall be my salvation (Job 13:15, 16). Now this faith is the gift of God unto him; it proceeds from the operation of the Spirit of God upon him, by the instrumentality of the word.

Faith comes by hearing (Rom. 10:17); and it is productive of good works for faith without works is dead (James 2:20). Now this is some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel. There are other graces also which I might mention such as patience, under afflictive dispensations of providence. For though no affliction is joyous, but grievous; yet it works the peaceable fruits of righteousness, to them who are exercised therewith and the chief of these is a peaceable frame of soul, or quietness of mind under the rod.

Tribulation, to regenerate persons, sometimes is of use; to increase their patience, rather than to destroy it. Tribulation worketh patience (Rom. 5:3); is a mean of increasing it. The apostle James says, Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations (Jam. 1:2). He means, not the temptations of Satan; but afflictions, which are temptations, or trials, of the graces of God's people. For he adds, The trying of your faith worketh patience; and let patience have its perfect work (Jam. 1:4).

When this appears in exercise, it is a clear case there is some good thing in such a person, towards the Lord God of Israel. When, like Aaron, they hold their peace under trying circumstances; and with David, are dumb because the Lord did it; are still and know that he is God, a sovereign Being, who does whatever he pleases. There is also resignation to the will of God. Those who are not inured to afflictions, are like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; fret and are impatient under it.

But where there is some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel; there will be, more or less, of submission to the will of God. Such will say, as Eli did; It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good. Not my will, but thine be done. In a word, this good thing, found in the heart of a regenerate man towards the Lord God of Israel is, the sanctification of the Spirit, in all the several branches thereof, of which those that I have mentioned are some. It is called the sanctification of the Spirit, because he is the author of it: for if we are sanctified, it is in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:11).

This, in the present state, is imperfect; but is carrying on, and will be brought to perfection in all those in whom it is begun. The God of truth will sanctify us throughout, and will preserve our whole souls, bodies, and spirits, blameless, to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Where this is, there will appear many good things. The text says, some good thing: several good things it may be truly said. Good thoughts will arise in the hearts of such. For though the heart of man is bad, and so wicked as I represented unto you in my last discourse, though the thoughts of a carnal man's heart are only evil, and that continually and though

regenerate persons have a great deal of reason to complain, of the vanity of their minds and the sinfulness of their thoughts; yet there are good thoughts arise in them, which are of God.

I say, of God; because we cannot think a good thought, of ourselves (2 Cor. 3:5). But there do arise good thoughts concerning God, his being, perfections, and purposes; his love, his everlasting love to his people We have thought of thy loving kindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple (Ps. 48:9) And O, how pleasant are the thoughts, how sweet the meditations of God's people, upon the everlasting love of God, and the fruits of it! It is pleasing to the Lord, when his people are thus thoughtful of him.

A book of remembrance was written for them that thought upon his name (Mal. 3:16); upon his name as proclaimed, a God gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in goodness and truth. There are also good desires in the hearts of regenerate persons. The desires of their souls are to the name of the Lord, and to the remembrance of him. There are spiritual breathings after him, as the hart panteth after the water brooks. There are holy resolutions which are formed in their minds, under the influence of divine grace.

In the strength of divine grace, they resolve to make mention of the Lord, of his righteousness, and of that only. In the strength of divine grace, they are enabled to resist sin; to strive against it, and to abstain from all appearance of evil: to resist Satan's temptations, and to do every good work. It was the holy resolution of Joshua, and it shewed some good thing in him towards the Lord God of Israel, when he said, As for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord. Resolutions indeed, taken up in a man's own strength, signify nothing; but when they are made in the strength of divine grace, arising from an internal principle, they are of worth, and come to something.

In short, where there is some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel, the good word of God dwells in the heart. The matter of this word is good, and the effects of it are good. Now this comes, not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance in the hearts of regenerate persons; where it works effectually, and where it dwells. It abides, it dwells richly in all wisdom. It is received in the love of it, and is highly esteemed, more than necessary food.

It is more, to the Believer, than thousands of gold and silver. If now we put all these things together, and others that your own experiences may dictate, you will know in some good measure, what is that good thing that is in the heart of every regenerate man. --But I go on, II. To observe, that this good thing, possessed by regenerate persons, is something within them, The text says not, some good thing done by them; but some good thing in them, towards the Lord God of Israel: this good thing is all internal; nothing external.

It is not an outward form of godliness: there may be that, where there is not the inward power. The apostle speaks of some that had a form of godliness, that is, the outward form, but denied the power (2 Tim. 3:5); that is, the inward power upon the heart. There may be a notion of things, where there is no grace. There may be an outward profession of faith, where there is no true faith; and an external obedience to the ordinances of the gospel, and yet this good thing may be wanting; as in Simon Magus, who professed to believe, but was destitute of true faith, and was in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity (Acts 8:23).

This good thing is not an outward reformation of manners. There may be this, and no good thing in the heart. Herod heard John gladly, seemed to have a great flow of affection for what he heard; yea, it is said, he did many things; that is, agreeable to what he heard preached: he did them externally. There was an

appearance of good things done by him, and yet there was no good thing in him. So the scribes and pharisees were outwardly righteous: looked like good men; made a fair shew in the flesh; and thought themselves very holy and religious; but inwardly, as our Lord says, were full of all manner of wickedness.

So that there is a great difference between some good thing in a man, and such good things as may appear outwardly. This good thing, is not an outward humiliation for sin; such as was in Pharaoh, while he was under the terror of the plagues of thunder, hail, and lightning; who cried out, The Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked (Ex.9:27); but, as soon as the storm was over, he returned to his former hardness of heart. Such a disposition was in Ahab, concerning whom the Lord says, See how Ahab humbleth himself (1 Kings 21:29): yet it was only an external humiliation; for there was no good thing in him.

There may be a great many tears shed by persons, seeming on account of sin; but these are no true mark or sign of good things in them. Esau sought the blessing with tears, but found no place for repentance. Judas made a confession of sin, and yet there was no good thing in him. An abstinence from the gross enormities of life, is not this good thing. Restraints may be laid upon persons, by their parents, masters, or civil magistrates; or through the force of conviction in an awakened conscience; which when over, they return like a dog to his vomit, and like a sow that is washed, to her wallowing in the mire.

But this good thing is within a man: some good thing in him towards the Lord God of Israel; something in a man's heart. This appears by all the names that it goes by in Scripture. Sometimes it is called the inward man: I delight in the law of God, after the inward man, says the apostle (Rom 7:22). The inward man renewed day by day (2 Cor. 4:16). The hidden man of the heart (1 Pet. 3:4); or that which is out of sight, For he is not a Jew that is one outwardly. Circumcision is not that of the flesh, but of the heart.

It is sometimes called spirit; not only from the author of it, the Spirit of God, (whatsoever is born of the Spirit of God, is Spirit [John 3:6]) but from the seat of it, the spirit or heart of man. He is renewed in the spirit of his mind (Eph. 4:23). It is sometimes called seed, which lies under ground; and is not to be seen: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible (1 Pet. 1:23): the seed of the word; the seed of divine grace, which remains. Hence the apostle John says, such cannot sin, (that is, live in a course of sin) because their seed remains in them: that is, an inward principle of grace, which forbids them so to act.

It is sometimes called a root. The root of the matter is found in me, says Job (Job 19:28). The root of the righteous, which is a hidden principle of grace in them, and brings forth much fruit. The reason why the stony ground hearers relinquished their profession, was, because there was no root (Matthew 13:6). Sometimes it is called oil in a vessel (Matthew 25:4). The lamp is an outward profession; the oil is an internal principle of grace in the heart. Sometimes it is signified by an epistle.

Ye are our epistle, says the apostle (2 Cor. 3:2). God inscribes, upon the hearts of his people, his laws and his word. I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts (Jer. 31:33). All which shews, that this good thing is within a man. This also is clear from the several parts of which this good thing consists. It includes in it, the illumination of the understanding, raising the affections to things above, where Jesus is; renewing of a man in the spirit of his mind: making of him willing, in the day of God's power, to submit unto his way of salvation, through the justifying righteousness of Jesus Christ; sprinkling the heart from an evil conscience, and the like; all which shews it to be an internal work.

III. This is but some good thing; not every good thing; or, however, not every good thing complete. There is a great deal, indeed, bestowed upon God's people, and wrought in them in their regeneration, and first

conversion; for where sin abounded, grace does much more abound. The grace of God is exceeding abundant, with faith, and love, and every other grace. For as before observed, where one grace is, there is every grace. Where there is hope, there is faith; and where there is love, there are faith and hope.

These always go together. Yet this good thing is imperfect in the best of saints. The good work of grace is but a begun work. It is, however, carrying on gradually, and will be performed till the day of Christ. Faith has its deficiency; hope is defective; love is imperfect; and we know but in part (1 Cor. 13:9). In some this good thing is very little, as at first conversion. It is a day of small things with newly regenerate persons: little knowledge, faith, hope, and the like; and therefore compared to the bruised reed and smoking flax: and yet, by these appearances, it is clear there is some good thing.

In the bruised reed there is a moistness which shews it to be alive; in the smoking flax there are fire and heat. So in the lowest believer, in the exercise of grace in the weakest manner, there appears some good thing in him (though it is but little) towards the Lord God of Israel. Some light in him, though it is but small: a little knowledge of himself, and the corruptions of his nature: a little knowledge of the person, offices, and excellencies of Christ: a little light in the doctrines of the everlasting gospel.

It is as much as he can say, One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, I now see (John 9:25). He has sight, but it is glimmering, in comparison of the light he afterwards has; for the path of the just is as a shining light, which shines more and more to the perfect day. There is affection evident, and more affection, perhaps, than judgment; and more zeal than knowledge; which is generally the case with young converts; yet for all this, there is some good thing. There is hope, though it is but in a small degree.

Under all his discouragements, such an one can say, I will put my mouth in the dust; if so be, there may be hope. "I do not know whether there is any foundation for hope or no; but I will put my mouth in the dust, I will be in an humble manner at the feet of God. I am told there is hope in Israel concerning this thing; and therefore, I will encourage myself as much as I can, that there will be favour shewn to me, a wicked, miserable creature." Now, in these humble expressions, there is some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel.

And yet, indeed, he does not abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost: he has not arrived to the full assurance of hope; but there is some good hope through grace, though it is but small. So faith, at first, is like a grain of mustard seed, which is the least of all seeds. There is but little faith, as our Lord says, in his address to his disciples, O ye of little faith (Matthew 6:30); and to Peter in particular, O thou of little faith (Matthew 14:31). Faith is but mere peradventure at first.

The language of such a soul is, "I cannot say he will receive me; but I will venture upon him. If I perish, I perish." Now in this language there is some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel. But, IV. Wherever this good thing is, it will be found; for in him (says my text) is found some good thing. God has found it there: and there is very good reason why he finds it; because it was he himself who put it there. The Lord knows the good thing he hath put into the hearts of his people, and he finds it.

He sees not as man sees: he knows the heart, and sees what is in the heart. As it is said of our Lord, he knows what is in man. He knew what good was in the heart of Peter; he knew how he loved him. Though there was but very little seen of it when he had so lately, and so basely denied him; yet he knew himself, he had love in his heart to Christ, and he knew that Christ was acquainted with it. Lord (says he) thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee. So wherever there is any good, ever so small, towards the God of Israel, God will find it out, because he put it there.

This also will be found by the person himself, sooner or later. Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith: Know ye not, that Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? (2 Cor. 13:5); except ye be void of judgment, as the word more properly signifies. It is not so well rendered reprobates; it being a word somewhat startling to the minds of men. "If ye are not spiritual persons, ye cannot know whether Christ is in you, or not; but if you have any spiritual knowledge, judgment, or feeling; then, upon reflection and self-examination, you will find Christ is in you.

You will experience, if you observe it, some outgoings of your souls to Christ, and acts of faith and hope upon him." Thus this good thing in the hearts of God's people may be found by themselves. So it is also by others, that converse with them. Such as fear the Lord, often speak one to another; and as they are speaking one to another, they find what good thing is in each other. Thus the apostle Paul, though in his former life he was an enemy to the Christian religion, when he came before Peter, James, and John, and they conversed with him, they perceived the grace of God in him.

They found there was some good thing in him towards the Lord Jesus Christ, whom he had persecuted; and then they gave him the right hand of fellowship. And where there is some good thing in the heart, it will shew itself in the life and conversation; and it will be found at the great day of account. The apostle says of faith, That it might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:7). And I am persuaded, that there is in many persons some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel, that does not appear now; and it may be, may never appear to satisfaction in this world: and yet will be found at the great day of accounts, when God will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the secrets of every heart; what he had wrought there.

V. This good thing is sometimes to be found in a Jeroboam's house; or in a wicked man's family; and is sometimes, as I observed, to be found in a youth. Jeroboam's son is, in this chapter, called a child: how old he was is not certain; but God works this good thing betimes in the hearts of some persons. Obadiah knew the Lord from his youth; and Timothy, from a child, knew the holy Scriptures. Those that seek the Lord early shall find him. Sometimes this is found in one of princely birth, as this child was, the son of Jeroboam king of Israel, though it is a rare thing.

For not many mighty, not many noble, not many wise men after the flesh, are called (1 Cor. 1:26): but some there are; some in the family of a king. All the saints salute you; chiefly they of Caesar's household (Phil. 4:22). Sometimes this good thing is found in one of a bad family. Jeroboam's family was a bad one. He was an idolater, and set up the calves of Dan and Bethel. It is often said of him, to his disgrace, Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, that made Israel to sin: and yet there was some good thing in his family; which shews grace does not run in a line.

Good men are not born of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:13). How many good men have had bad children? Eli's sons, and Samuel's sons, did not walk in their father's steps. And so it is, that some in the family of bad men are chosen by God. The Lord takes one of a family, and two of a tribe: takes one, and leaves another. Those who are instances of this kind, have abundant reason to admire distinguishing grace. VI. This good thing, found in the heart of every regenerate person, always acts towards the Lord God of Israel.

The bias of it is towards him sin inclines the mind to that which is evil: hence the imaginations of the thoughts of men's hearts are only evil, and that continually. There is an aversion to God, and all that is good. The language of an unregenerate man is, Depart from me, I desire not the knowledge of thy ways;

but where grace is, where this good thing is, it biases the mind towards God and Heaven. Wherever that exists, the language is, My soul thirsteth after God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?

As all grace comes from God, so it returns to him in its acts and exercises. Repentance is towards God. Faith, hope, and love are towards God. Every grace acts towards God; it is exercised upon him, and upon the Lord Jesus Christ: whom having not seen ye love, in whom though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory (1 Pet. 1:8). Christ is the object of faith, of love, of joy, and of every other grace. Where this good thing is, the thoughts will be employed about God, and the affections, like pillars of smoke, perfumed with frankincense, will ascend towards him.

The desires of the soul will be to his name, and to the remembrance of him. This good thing in the heart will operate and shew itself in thankfulness to God for all the good things bestowed. A man that has some good thing in him towards the Lord God of Israel, will call upon his soul, and all that is within him, to bless the name of the Lord. He will bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for all spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Christ; especially, for Christ, the unspeakable gift of his love.

This good thing will cause a man to manifest his concern for the honour of God; for his cause and interest in the world. Such in whom this good thing is, love the habitation of his house, the place where his honour dwells. His tabernacles are amiable, and a day in his courts, is better than a thousand elsewhere. They cannot give themselves the liberty of being absent from the house and worship of God; but must attend upon them. They will exhort and stir up one another to love and good works.

They will not only attend the worship of God themselves, but endeavour to bring others with them; saying, Come, let us go up to the house of the Lord; for he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths. Those in whom this good thing is, will lay out themselves, their time, their talents, and, all they have and are, for the honour of God, and his cause and interest. They will honour the Lord with their substance, and with the first fruits of their increase. Where there is some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel, there will be some good thing done for the honour of the Lord God of Israel.

This leads me to mention, Our yearly collection for the poor Ministers, and the Churches in the country. I persuade myself there is some good thing in many of you, and if so, there will be some good thing done by you: and I doubt not, but this will be attended unto, which is certainly a good work, as it serves greatly to promote the honour and interest of religion, and the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is a work which you have been used to, and I need not take up much of your time to inform you of the nature of it.

It has been continued in the churches in and about London, between forty and fifty years (This sermon was preached, September 1762). The fund was raised so long ago, by several churches, that united in the benevolent design. It is in some measure increased; and the interest of the stock and fund, together with the collections made by the several churches, are annually distributed for the relief of poor ministers and churches in England and Wales. A great number there are assisted and made more comfortable thereby.

Pastors, whose churches are not able to give them a proper maintenance, but are obliged to work with their own hands, are, by your liberality a little eased; their families are a little better provided for, and the gospel a little oftener preached, than otherwise it would be, were it not for your generosity. An attention to this, therefore, must be a good thing, and I am satisfied of your readiness to assist in so good a work. This business is managed by your deputies, who are annually chosen to see that the money is distributed to none but such as are sound Ministers of the Gospel: and you, yourselves, are in some measure witnesses

that those persons are, as you now and then have an opportunity of hearing them.

You hear what sound, savory, spiritual, and evangelical ministers they are. You are sometimes drawn thereby into admiration and thankfulness, that the churches in the country are so well supplied with ministers; surely then, this will excite such of you, in whose hearts there is some good thing, to do this good thing for the interest of your Redeemer. Many arguments might be made use of to engage you to this. It is, by the providence of God, so ordered in the common course of things, that some have a larger share of the things of this world, and others are in a poorer state of life; that one may supply the other.

So it is in the churches: there are some that have more in number, and among them, persons that are capable of handing forth for the relief of others: thus the churches in Macedonia relieved the poorer saints in Jerusalem: and so it should be with you. You have many mercies to be thankful for. Temporal mercies; the health of this city, and of the whole nation, is a mercy to be taken notice of. The plenty of provisions; the peace we have at home, and now we are upon the eve of a general peace, when your trade and commerce will be more enlarged, without fear from the enemy: but above all, the gospel of the grace of God, continued with you, and which is likely to be so by means of our gracious Sovereign upon the throne: These things should encourage us to do all we can to promote the interest of the Lord our God.

It cannot be thought, indeed, that all of you should be sufficiently provided for this good work at this time, many of you having not heard of it before. For the sake, therefore, of such, this collection will be repeated next Lord's day, and then finished. It is to be hoped you will come with open hearts and open purses, and liberally contribute: and let none of you stay away upon this account. Come yourselves, and bring as many of your friends as you can with you: bring those who are now absent, whom you are acquainted with; bring your children, encourage your servants, and every one to do according to their ability; and thus make it manifest there is some good thing in you, by doing something for the honour of God, and the good of his cause.

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