

On Two Common Errors

by Thomas Reade

The sermon emphasizes the importance of finding a balance between divine grace and human endeavors in the plan of salvation.

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5, John 15:5, 1 Corinthians 3:6, Philippians 2:12, James 4:7

Topics: "Divine Grace", "Human Effort"

Description

Thomas Reade preaches about two common errors among professing Christians: one that diminishes divine grace by relying solely on human efforts for salvation, and the other that devalues the necessity of divine grace for spiritual goodness. The truth lies in the balance of acknowledging the absolute need for divine grace while also engaging in human endeavors as God works in us. Reade emphasizes the importance of using the means appointed by God while fully depending on His promised blessings, cautioning against both enthusiasm and impiety in our approach to salvation.

Transcript

20. ON TWO COMMON ERRORS

There are two fatal errors, which, it is to be feared, abound among professing Christians. The one, which considers divine grace as disrobed of its glory, by insisting upon the necessity of human endeavors in the great work of salvation. The other, which declares as injurious to morality, the emphasis that is laid upon the absolute necessity of divine grace to the production of every thing that is spiritually good in any man. The truth embraces both these propositions: that is, the absolute need of divine grace, without which "nothing is holy;" and the absolute necessity of human endeavors, since God works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Though salvation be all of grace, yet God is pleased to work by means. A Paul must plant, an Apollos water, while God gives the increase. The husbandman deposits his seed in the ground, yet God alone can crown his labors with an abundant harvest. To depend upon the divine blessing, without using the means which Infinite Wisdom has appointed, is enthusiasm. To use the means appointed, without an entire dependence upon the promised blessing, is impiety. If a father, for instance, should pray for the conversion of his children, and yet allow them to run wild, without presenting any checks to their evils, under the impression that the Almighty in his good time will save them, if they are to be saved; and that if they are not among the elect, no blame can attach to him, should they finally perish; would he not, by such erroneous views of the plan of salvation, be actually aiding the cause of Satan, and the destruction of his

unhappy offspring, under the false notion of glorifying the sovereignty of God and the freeness of divine grace?

So, on the other hand, if a father should endeavor to train up his children in virtuous habits, and be anxious to guard them against the seductions of the world; and yet draw all his hopes of success from his own exertions and paternal instructions, without once feeling the force of that all-important declaration of the Savior, "Without me, you can do nothing;" would he not, by such conduct, manifest great impiety? and might not the Almighty withhold his spiritual blessing, to show how easily he can blight the most powerful human endeavors?

To trust God with all our hearts, in the diligent use of the appointed means, is the path which Infinite Wisdom has marked out for man, as a moral agent. To be enabled to do this in a right spirit, is the work of divine grace, and the way to obtain the divine blessing. The Bible, while it reveals the utter inability of man to do any thing that is good, by any natural power of his own, addresses him as a creature endued with rational powers, and of high responsibilities. Hence, the sacred volume abounds with exhortations to diligence, motives to obedience, and promises of grace and strength both to do and suffer the holy will.

Spiritual pride and spiritual sloth are alike condemned. He who says "I will not," and he who says "I can not," may be equally under the influence of a bad spirit. The latter, which has a show of humility, may spring from spiritual sloth, as the former does from spiritual pride. When grace really enlightens the mind and affects the heart, the sinner, though deeply conscious of his utter inability to save himself; dares not make this an excuse for continuing in sin. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, he cries mightily to God, through Christ, for deliverance from the guilt and power of sin; and is graciously helped by him who never said to the seed of Jacob, "Seek me in vain."

The Antinomian, and the self-righteous error, are both reprobated in the Scriptures of truth. While we would carefully avoid those metaphysical niceties which darken the simplicity of the Gospel, we should pray to discover those subtle webs which Satan weaves to catch the feet of the unwary. Divine truth is beautiful in its own simplicity--and grand in its own sublimity. Every human addition, like paint on the diamond, obscures its luster. An honest heart, and a sincere intention to please God in all things, will clear the path of duty from many a stumbling-block, which the pride of human reason has cast up; "for if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God."

People, in general, are more ready to argue a point in theology, than to crucify a beloved lust. Those who are much acquainted with the religious world, will find many theological disputants for one self-denying follower of Jesus. The apostle was compelled to say in his day: "there are many unruly and vain talkers." And such characters have been found in every age of the church, to the annoyance of the humble Christian. The Bible is not given to us for disputation, but for edification; and its doctrines are designed to have a practical tendency on the mind and heart.

If real Christians, who differ from each other on some abstruse points of theology, were to meet on the ground of our common Christianity, they would be surprised to find how nearly they approximate each other in genuine experience and practice. They would, with delightful feeling of joy, recognize a brother, where they expected to meet a foe. The weapons of controversy being thus laid aside, and agreeing to differ on points confessedly abstruse, and beyond the power of finite reason to solve, they would cheerfully hold out the right hand of fellowship, and exhibit to the world that charity which is the bond of perfectness, and the beauty of the church of Christ.

This is a state of feeling devoutly to be wished. May this spirit of mutual love and affection abound more and more among the true followers of the Lamb. Then will each member of the church, by his holy walk and conversation, prove his election of God; and all the members of the mystical body, deriving daily nourishment and strength from their glorified head, be growing in a fitness for the "general assembly of the first-born," however they may differ in their views or some of those 'deep things of God' which can only be unraveled in the world of light and glory.

It is no small craftiness of Satan to engage the mind about non-essentials, and to beget among Christians a spirit of strife and contention. This crafty enemy has succeeded too well in all ages, to the grief of good men, to the weakening of the good cause, and to the joy of the enemies of the Gospel of Christ. All this only tends to confirm the Scripture doctrine of human corruption, and Satanical agency. It calls for great watchfulness, circumspection, and prayer; as well as humility and dependence on the Spirit of truth.

The grand design of God, in his revelation of mercy, is the display of his own perfections in the salvation of his fallen creatures. Hence, the command to perishing sinners is: "Look unto me, all you ends of the earth, and be saved; for I am God, and there is none else, and besides me there is no Savior." While the exhortation to believers is: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." "Blessed Lord, give me that wisdom which is from above.

Preserve me from falling into those errors, which would excuse spiritual sloth, or feed spiritual pride. Bestow upon me the spirit of prayer; and give me grace to live in the spirit of my prayers. Cause me to walk before you with a humble, loving, obedient heart; that, living a life of faith in your beloved Son, I may work by you and for you, while it is called today, before the night comes when no man can work." Wherever I turn my eyes within, What loads of guilt, what depths of sin, Like oceans deep, like mountains high, Call for the vengeance of the sky!

Deceit, ambition, lust, and pride, Within the human heart reside; There Satan, seated on his throne, Claims the whole empire as his own. But Jesus comes! the mighty Lord! He wields the bright celestial sword; The strong man armed is forced to fly, While angels chant the victory. Glory to God in heaven above, On earth sweet peace and sacred love; Good-will to men--the foe is foiled, And God and sinners reconciled. Come, mighty conqueror of the heart, Subdue my soul in every part; Ascend your long-usurped throne: Oh, be my king, and reign alone.

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