

GREAT GRACE AND GOOD FRUITS

A SERMON

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“The exceeding grace of God in you.” 2 Corinthians 9:14

GOD himself, is the only glory which the grace of God does not exceed. It exceeds the creation, it exceeds the law, it exceeds the old covenant, it exceeds time; it exceeds everything except the Lord himself; and it is well for us it is so; for if sin, and the curse which it has entailed, exceed everything else, what is there that God hates, curses, and loathes as he does sin? and what is there to equal the terribleness of the threatening's of his holy word, taking hold of a sinner, and banishing that sinner to everlasting destruction from his presence and from the glory of his power? This being our state, were it not that the grace of God exceeds everything, there could be no hope for any. And then if the word *grace* means *favor*, then it means that favor of God which is the manifestation of the love of God, which in breadth, in height, in depth, exceeds everything else. It is electing grace, giving us to Christ, to be severed from him no more for ever; it is provisional grace, having provided a ransom for us, having imputed all our sins to Christ, past, present, and to come, even all of them, and the Lord Jesus Christ has put them away by the sacrifice of himself; and, says the apostle to these Corinthians, “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that you through his poverty might be made rich;” that is, he took our poverty, and has put that poverty eternally away. It is exceeding grace. And so, when the Lord met with us, whatever our sins were, whatever our state was, his grace exceeded the whole; and whatever our infirmities and faults have been since we have known his name, even in this sense also where sin has abounded grace has much more abounded; and whatever is needed to immortalize the body at the last great day, and to make us like Christ, the grace of God will accomplish; and all the glory that the Savior has entered into, and that the people will forever possess, all that glory is nothing else but the carrying out of the grace of God; that as sin has reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life. “The exceeding grace of God in you.” And in this verse the apostle also throws out an idea that does considerable credit to the other Christian churches connected with Corinth, or looking to the Corinthians; for he speaks of them as praying for them, and longing after them, for the exceeding grace of God in them; the other churches longing after them in the spiritual sense for the exceeding grace of God that was in them. That is a good sign; for that is just the reason that the world hates the church, because of the exceeding grace of God in the church; it is just the reason that the Pharisee hates the real child of God, because of the exceeding grace of God that is in that child of God; just the reason the mere letter professor, the dead, dry doctrinalist, who holds the doctrines

in his head, but his heart is at home in something averse to God, that man also dislikes the real Christian, because of the exceeding grace of God in that real Christian. It did therefore, great credit to the other churches; it showed the spirit that they were in, that they prayed for and longed after these Corinthians for the exceeding grace of God in them. It is a good sign that you are alive from the dead, if that man, that Christian, that woman, be most acceptable to you wherein you find most of the grace of God; where their conversation and the testimony they bear show that they know something of the grace of God; and that you feel all the better for their company and their conversation; you leave them with a good impression; they have told you something of what their hearts and souls have felt of the exceeding grace of God; and you feel convinced that they are decided for the glorious gospel of the exceeding grace of God. You know what the Savior says upon this subject; "He that shall receive one of these little ones," these little ones that are by conviction of sin brought down, and made very little in their own eyes, and that have a heart to receive God's truth; "He that shall receive one of these little ones in my name receives me; and he that receives me receives him that sent me." There is, therefore, infinitely more in our text than I shall ever be able to lay before you; "the exceeding grace of God in you."

This "grace of God in you" I think will mean two things. First, it will mean in what it has done for you, in taking you up from the dust and the dunghill, and bringing you over into sonship, bringing you over, in a word, into oneness with the Savior, to make you inherit a throne of glory, and to place you in that position described by the apostle Peter, that "he has begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fades not away." Therefore, the "exceeding grace of God in you" will mean that which the grace of God has done in bringing you from where it has brought you from, in constituting you one with the Savior, and interesting you in the exceeding great and yea and amen promises of the everlasting gospel. And then "the exceeding grace of God in you" will of course also mean the work of God in the soul; grace living in the heart, reigning in the heart, prevailing in the heart, overcoming everything; for grace must reign, the elder shall serve the younger; and it was on this ground that the church could say, "we shall live and not die, and shall declare the works of the Lord."

But I shall this morning deviate a little from the course I should otherwise adopt, this being the day for our annual collection for the necessitous among us; and therefore, I shall this morning preach, in part, a sort of charity sermon; for although those who are right-minded do not need perhaps exhortation upon the subject, yet there are some so hard-headed, and hard-hearted too, that unless we hammer them pretty hard, and give them some pretty good shakings, we can get nothing out of them; and therefore, I do think it needful not to pass by these, because I have made up my mind to have a good collection; we have never had a bad one yet on such occasions, and I do think we shall have a good one today; indeed, it has begun well this morning, and having begun in the spirit I hope we shall end in the spirit; and then it will be a spirited matter from first to last. I shall therefore, order the text in a manner that will give me an opportunity of throwing out a broad hint or two as I go along. I am going to preach, the Lord enabling me, a gospel sermon; but then in that order that will enable me to throw out a few hints, and if I possibly can, unite with that, administrations to the necessities of the saints. And in so doing, I notice the grace of God under three main heads, the exceeding grace of God. First, *the order of it*: second, *the cheerfulness of it*; and third, and last, *the final prospects of it*.

First, THE ORDER OF IT. "The exceeding grace of God in you." The order of this grace of God was very beautifully typified in the Old Testament age; and it is in this first part of my sermon I shall have an opportunity of giving you a few hints, or rather setting that before you by which you will see through, as it were, the veil into what the Lord means upon this matter. First, the order of the grace of God in olden time. The Lord was pleased, as you are aware, to establish a mercy seat and a dwelling among the Israelites, and they were to have access to God eternal, to God Almighty, to the Lord God gracious and merciful, abundant in goodness and truth; a God that was near to them. They were to have access to him by the sacrificial service and by that mercy seat; and therefore, if the Israelites got into such a state of mind as to slight that sacrificial service, or to slight the mercy seat, or to slight the house of the blessed God, then away went all the favors which they were otherwise to have; so that there could be no prosperity without this service of God, in that order which he had established. And the apostle in this chapter seems to make a little allusion to that as I may presently notice. But the Israelites did somewhat pervert, and indeed dreadfully pervert, the sacrificial service, and they did dreadfully neglect and pervert the mercy-seat; and they did dreadfully apostatize from the presence of the blessed God, and were taken up with other things; and when they went away from God's order, then everything went wrong, And just so now spiritually. If I am in that state that I am making very little of the sacrifice of Christ, that I am making but very little of the mercy-seat, that I am making but very little of the presence of the Lord, that I am treating his presence as though I could do as well without it as with it, as though I could do as well without his blessing as with it; you may depend upon it that though I may seem to succeed, the end thereof will be bitterness. It is a singular thing and yet a common thing too, that we know not the meaning of any of the Lord's dealings with us until we get somewhat to the end of those dealings. We may be prospering in the world, and getting on what you may call exceedingly well, very fast, saving money, and accumulating property; but what the meaning of that is the end will show; it may mean something dreadful, it may mean a terrible curse to you; it may mean that you are in a slippery place; and that by degrees you will grow carnal and carnal, that there shall be a worm at the root of all, a curse at the root of it all; and perhaps the meaning is that God will by this very prosperity you have, bring such calamities upon you, as you never dreamt of. This may be the meaning. So that your interpretation of your prosperity, and God's meaning in it, may be directly opposite. In this part, before I lay before you what the Lord says in the Old Testament about the order of his mercy, I may just lay down a symptom or two to show how you are in that respect. If your prosperity makes you selfish, makes you rather shut up than not the bowels of compassion towards the brethren and towards the cause of God; and makes you rather neglect the house of God, rather neglect the Bible, and grow carnal and careless, and make up your happiness in your worldly prosperity; all this is a symptom and a sign that there is something wrong; and by and bye you will be ready to curse the day that ever these things had such dominion over you. But if, on the other hand, the Lord is pleased to fill your heart with gratitude, to open your hand towards the poor and needy a little more than a few of you do, I do not know whether they are here this morning but there are some, I know, perhaps would not visit a poor person, a poor creature in affliction, or give five shillings scarcely in a twelve months if it were not hammered out of you; I may perhaps hammer a little out of you this morning, but if I do, it will come in a poor sort of way; this is a bad sign, depend upon it; for carnality of mind, in any shape or form, is always a sign against us; as on the other hand spirituality of mind is a sign for us. Just so I say of the poor man, the man that cannot get on; everything seems to go against him; he would like to be a little more independent in circumstances, and a little more comfortably situated; but somehow or another he never can get on. Still the man is driven perhaps by his necessities more

to the throne of grace, and more to the word of God; and he says, though things go against me, and I cannot get on, I cannot provide for my family as I would like, and cannot make them what I could wish, and I cannot get my circumstances as I should like; everything seems to go crooked; and were it not for the sweet support I have in the love of God, in the name and work of Christ, bless the Lord it does drive me there. Very well then, the Lord means you good by poverty. And so, if you be prosperous, if your prosperity increases correspondingly your gratitude to God, and opens your heart and your hand in proportion, then your prosperity is a blessing. In a word, whatever be our lot, let it be prosperity or adversity, let it be gain or loss, let it be sickness or health, if it has a tendency to bring us near to God; then the end thereof shall surely be the good of our souls and the glory of his blessed name. Let me come now closer to the word of God, In olden time if they neglected the sacrificial service, or neglected the throne of grace, then things went somewhat in accordance with their so doing; that is, things were put upon a conditional footing; though I am not now speaking so much of conditions as I am of signs and evidences for or against, Hence, in olden time, when they thought they could do without the Lord, what does the Lord say upon it? Let us take that spiritually, and we shall see how easily it will come in, to show the order of the grace of God. When they thus, treated the sacrificial service lightly, and the mercy seat lightly, and the presence of the Lord lightly, and thought the house of the Lord very expensive, thought it cost a great deal of money, thought really it was quite time to attend to that by and bye, and it was very tedious, forgetting, at the same time, that all they had come from the hand of the Lord. Now the Lord says, just look at it, here it is, "You have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but you have not enough; you drink, but you are not filled with drink; you clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earns wages, earns wages to put it into a bag with holes." Now, this was the result, the natural consequence of violating the order of things which the Lord had established. Let us take all this spiritually; and see how the apostle applies it. Suppose such a thing could be, and God forbid it should be, I hope not with any of you, that you should begin to make light of Calvary's groans, begin to make light of a Savior's anguish, begin to make light of his unfathomable sufferings, of his sacrificial perfection, the sacrificial perfection of an incarnate God; so that it begins to become a mere hearsay thing to you, you are not living as though you were a daily sinner, needing the daily healing virtue of the precious blood of Christ, and you grow cold towards it, and carnal, and careless: what would be the result? Why, the result would be, that your soul would bring in nothing; your faith would bring in nothing; no, you may go through all your formalities, you may come to the house of God constantly, you may go through a form of prayer morning and evening, you may read a chapter every day, or two chapters, but then at the same time there is no heart in it, no soul in it; the Savior is not prized, and his sacrifice is not prized; it is true, you receive the word intellectually, but then the soul is not fed, faith is not strengthened, spirituality is not increased, love does not burn high, and hope does not abound. You receive it; oh, yes, I understand it all, believe it all, receive it all. Ah, but the soul is not there; there is no vitality, there is no spirituality; you can drink in what is said, but then you have no love, there is no real affection to God. And you can wrap yourself in the truth, as it were, but you are very chilly, very cold, cold as possible, cold as ice; and as for your treasuring up from time to time tokens of the Lord's love, why in such a state we have no tokens to treasure up, we are not seeking his presence, and we do not care about his sacrifice; and, therefore, what little religion we get, why, what is it but a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains? All this is an awful state of things for the real Christian to get into; how far he may get into this I do not know; I know I have been in this state, and it is the state above all states that I dread. I really feel as though I had rather any affliction, any calamity, any loss, let it be almost what it may, should overtake me as a means, if nothing else would do it,

of bringing me closer to God, than to live at that dreadful distance in which I am, as it were, sowing much, going through much formality, and yet bringing in but little, receiving in reality just enough to keep me alive, and hardly that; receiving all intellectually, I am drinking it in as it were naturally, with my natural reason and judgment; but the soul not satiated; that I am wrapping myself in the truth, but in a mere natural sense, and not spiritually, the soul is not warmed; and that I am not laying up from time to time the sweet tokens of his love, that I may by and bye look back at them, and say, "I called upon your name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon, and you heard me, and strengthened me with might in my soul; and you said, I will surely do you good." Here was, therefore, an order of things; so that if they would prosper, it must be by cleaving close to the sacrificial service, to the mercy-seat, and to the house of God, not minding the expense of that house. And the Lord says, "Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house my house, lying in waste, and see if I will not pour out a blessing, that there shall not be room to contain it." So that when the house was finished, and the people walked in sweet harmony with the sacrificial service, with the mercy-seat, and the presence of God; why then they sowed little, and brought in much; then they ate in plenty, and did praise the name of the Lord their God, who had dealt bountifully with them; they drank, and praised the name of the Lord; they drank, and made a noise, a noise of gratitude, a noise of thanksgiving, a noise of praise unto the Lord their God; and they were clothed, and then they were warm and comfortable; then they could face any weather. Ah, says the soul, now I am wrapped in the garment of humility, in the garment of righteousness, in the garment of salvation; and I shall be warm in the coldest weather; it may be cold all round, but I shall be warm and happy, and rejoice in the Lord my strength; and I shall not now put my wages, as it were, into bags with holes; I am now treasuring up the tokens of God's love, and I shall look back to these way-marks, and see a mercy here, a manifestation there, and a token there, that will help me on in days to come. The grace of God had its order then, and so it has now. When they took the ark away from the priesthood, and rested it upon a human invention, namely, a cart, the Lord smote Uzzah; and David afterwards made this confession, "We sought not the Lord after due order." So, then the grace of God has its order.

Now the apostle seems to give us a strong hint in this chapter. He is urging here upon the Corinthians to be liberal towards their poor brethren who were scattered about and persecuted in different parts of the world. He says, "He that sows sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which sows bountifully shall reap bountifully." Now here we must look at the law of proportion; that is, each one is to give as the Lord has dealt with him. Ah, what a collection we should have today if this should go right through the chapel; one would give £20, another would give £10, another would give £5, and a great many would give £1; some would give half a crown, some a shilling, some sixpence, yes, even a fourpenny-piece would be the fair law of proportion with some; so great is the difference between circumstances. Why, we should indeed have a collection today if we could just get you all over into that one spirit. And yet that is nothing but what is right. If the Lord has sown bountifully in your field, and you are reaping from day to day, week to week, month to month, and year to year, a good harvest, then you will have large tithes to pay in proportion. But we cannot keep this law of proportion always up; and there is this apparent difficulty here. Says one, If I go by the law of proportion, I do not always find that the Lord heaps as it were, into my lap an abundance accordingly. Ah, but you are no judge of that; you know very well that the Lord can turn much into a little or into nothing, as was the case with Job; and you know he can turn a little into much. I see this everywhere. There are some among us, perhaps somewhat sparingly supplied; but somehow or another the Lord blesses them, and they turn and

twist, and look about in such a manner as to make it go a long way, and secure a great many comforts with it too. I have seen this. And there is another: he could sow bountifully, but he does not choose to do it; and the Lord says, I will sow for you; so, the Lord either puts a curse at the root of that man's possessions, which shall break out by and bye; or else he sends I don't know what, perhaps a lawyer, or a doctor, or something or another. Ah, I know some of you perhaps will not believe this; well, I hope you do believe it too; the best way of showing that you believe it, is to give handsomely as you pass the plate this morning. So that really, I cannot see your faith; I never can see that; that is an invisible thing; but the apostle James has very carefully explained to us the way in which even faith may be seen. I cannot see the soul of man, except by its effects. James says, "I will show my faith by my works;" and you will say, Well, this is a blessed order of things; here is the sacrificial perfection, the mercy-seat, and the presence of God; and by this sacrificial perfection, and by this mercy-seat, and by the presence of God, here is that exceeding grace that triumphs over everything; and we do want a way in which we can declare our love to the blessed God, our desire that he would continue to bless us and ours; our desire that he would continue to be our Guide, and continue to keep us near to himself, so that this morning we will show our faith by our works. It does the minister a wonderful deal of good when he sees it, depend upon it.

Second: I will now notice the next part then; namely, THE CHEERFULNESS OF THE GRACE OF GOD. There is a cheerfulness about it. God loves a cheerful giver. God the Father gave us his Son, and delighted he had a son to give us; gave us a Savior, and delighted he had a Savior to give us; gave us a Great High Priest, and delighted he had a Priest to give us; gave us a King, and delighted he had such a King to give us; he gave him because he loved us. "God so loved the world." "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And the dear Savior, though a man of sorrows, had underneath those mountains of sorrows under which he labored, and groaned, and bled, and died, yet there was an undercurrent of delight in the prospects before him; "for the joy set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame." "I delight to do your will, O God;" and the will of God was the eternal life, the eternal salvation, justification, and glorification of a number that no man can number. There is a cheerfulness about it; so that that undercurrent of delight that Christ possessed sometimes broke out. "I thank you, O Father that you have hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes, even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight." God loves a cheerful giver, because it is so much like himself. And the gifts and callings of God in this great matter are without repentance; he never repented he gave us his Son; Jesus never repented he laid down his life; the Holy Ghost never repented of any gift or calling of which he is the author; all is cheerful from first to last. But in order to make this matter clear, I will just notice four or five Scriptures where this word cheerful is used. The first time I think it occurs in the New Testament it is connected with the free, the absolute, the entire, the final forgiveness of sin. "Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you;" forgiven in the counsels of heaven, forgiven in mediatorial perfection, and now forgiven in manifestation; forgiven finally; "be of good cheer." Enough to make us cheerful; here is God the Father, not a particle of wrath against us, but the reverse; "I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore in loving-kindness have I drawn you." And as for the Savior, what I say of him of course is expressive at the same time of the love of the Father; the dear Savior, rather than a fault should be laid to our charge; rather than one cloud should rise at the judgment day to dim the glory of that transcendent scene, rather than one witness should be able to move his tongue against any one of his brethren, he lays down his infinitely precious life, and puts to silence eternally every sin, and every avenger, and every adversary; the

enemy shall be still as a stone; not one shall be seen, not one shall be heard, not one shall be there. Jesus shall appear with his people on his right hand, with, "Here am I, and all that you have given me." "Be of good cheer." I am sure that man is not employed by the Holy Ghost who tries to bring that sin to the judgment seat of Christ that Christ died for. Then second, are we in trouble; toiling and rowing, we cannot get to land; don't know how matters will go? The fourth watch of the night; there is our extremity; you see not till the fourth watch of the night; they were thoroughly wearied out, thoroughly worn out, just going in to despair; something walking on the water, knew not who it was or what it was, supposed it was a spirit, some minister of vengeance sent from God to complete their despair, but so far from that, "Be of good cheer, be not afraid; it is I." How changed is the scene. And when Jesus came into the ship, immediately the waves were stilled, and they were at the land whither they went. "Be of good cheer." he came to them cheerfully; so, he will to you. I like those words of one of our hymns very much,

"He sees when I am sunk in grief,
And quickly flies to my relief."

So, you will find if you are one that cleaves to his sacrifice, to his mercy-seat, and are seeking his presence. Again, does the world very often overcome us, entangle us, and perplex us; trouble on every side; so that in the world we have in one shape or another a good deal of tribulation? Jesus says, never mind; mind it not. Lord, I am so assimilated to the world, it makes me so much unlike you, Lord; I want to come before you, Lord, and say I have overcome the world. Ah, but stop; you must come in the right way; "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Now for the explanation, "This is our victory over the world, even our faith." So, if I have a right victory over the world, I must receive that victory; and if I receive that victory, I must receive Jesus Christ. So, if the devil tells me I am overcome, my answer shall be, Christ never was; if he tells me I am so perplexed by the world, my answer is what the Lord said to Philip, "What shall we do that those five thousand may eat?" this he said to prove him, he himself knew what he would do; he overcame the difficulty. "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." Are we shut up as one was in prison, after he had been laboring and toiling for the souls of men? "Be of good cheer, Paul; as you have borne witness of me here in Jerusalem, so you must also testify of me in Rome." There the Lord connects Jerusalem and Rome together. Directly upon the back of this, more than forty men bound themselves by a great curse that they would not eat nor drink till they destroyed Paul. "Be of good cheer, Paul." Then when he come to Caesarea, "Will you be heard at Jerusalem?" go back there again. "Be of good cheer, Paul." stick to where you are; and that good cheer went with him. So, my hearers, whatever enemies we may have, the Lord says, Be of good cheer; you shall go to your ultimate destiny. I have united your present position with your ultimate destiny; and that which I have thus joined together, neither sin, nor hell, nor death, nor Satan, can put asunder. Well, must a valuable freight be thrown overboard, and according to the common course of things much harm be done to the ship, and loss of lives? The Lord comes in, "Be of good cheer, Paul, for not a hair of the head shall be hurt of any one of those that are with you; I give you all them that sail with you." They think you are the worst man in the ship; but I will put honor upon you. Be of good cheer. The ship was broken to pieces; but on boards and broken pieces of the ship they all cheerfully came to land. Ah, says the devil, that Paul will be of good cheer, do what I may; I will manage him some way or another. And so, Paul did his part as well as the rest; he was not a lazy man; you recollect people called him so, said he was preaching for money; and so, he would not have it, and worked as a tent maker; and now he set to work, and gathered some sticks to make a

fire. Ah, said Satan, I have got him now; that viper will fasten to his hand. Bless you, he was as cheerful as could be, quite happy. They wondered how he could look so cheerful with that viper on his hand; ah, he will begin to swell presently, and he will drop down dead. No: he stood and warmed himself very comfortably; and he shook the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. Here then is the exceeding grace of God in the cheerfulness of it.

Now the people of the world say, Ah, these high doctrines do not produce good works. I have an answer for you, sir, you hate the truth, and you would rather give a hundred pounds against the truth than a hundred farthings for it; so, because it does not produce good works in *you*, you conclude it does not produce good works in other people. Do you know, sir, that there is a considerable difference between a dunghill and a rose? What do you mean? Do you mean to call me a dunghill? If you are a Pharisee, your religion is nothing better than a dunghill; and when the truth comes near it, when the sun shines upon it, it makes it, you know what. Whereas the rose, the sun fills it with beauty and fragrance. The disagreeableness of the dunghill does not lie in the sun that shines upon it, but in the nature of the dunghill; and the rose derives its fragrance from its character, from the surrounding atmosphere, and from the sun that shines upon it, together with the genial shower that freshens it. So, the blessed truths of the everlasting gospel; the real quickened child of God is ready to lay down his life for the truth. These doctrines will produce good fruits; they never produced any in you, and so you judge other people by yourself. We can understand it all, there is no love lost between us. I would not give two-pence for your religion, and I know you would not for mine. I would not go over the threshold, and I say it out of no personal disrespect to any one, to hear a legal minister. I was reflecting yesterday on the blessed truths of God, and I thought within myself, now if I were a hearer instead of a minister who are the ministers I would hear? Well, I thought, I would rather hear a man of the humblest gifts, if he could not even speak ten sentences without making at the same time as many blunders in grammar, if that man had the grace of God in his heart, however great his ignorance, or however contracted his gifts, or however broken his manner of expression, if it was the pure testimony of experimental truth, I would rather hear such a man as that than I would hear the most talented man the devil ever sent. The serpent was talented, and he spoke well and succeeded well for his own awful cause; the ass was not very talented, said but little; but I like the sermon of the ass better than I do the sermon of the serpent.

I did intend in conclusion to have said a word or two upon *the prospects of this grace*, as indicated in the last verse of this chapter. The apostle sums up the whole in these words; "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift;" Christ Jesus; by which gift unspeakable, eternal joy is brought about, and by which the Lord has reserved for us a language that cannot be spoken with mortal tongues.