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(1280)

The Grace of the Doctrines;
OR,
"What will ye see in the Shulamite?"

Song Sol.
6: 13

By Mr. A. LYTHGOE,
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My dear Friends,—It is with much fear, I trust godly fear, and trembling of heart that I venture to speak to you on such a subject as announced by our Chairman. And yet, my dear friends, what a vital subject it is to you and me. Shall I sum it up in these words,

"Am I made a real Christian
Washed in the Redeemer's blood?
Have I union
With the Church's living Head?"

Some of you may think the title of my subject rather a strange one. It was laid upon my mind several months ago when our dear brother, Mr. Atherton, asked if I would take part in this Conference.

I want to speak to-night, as a poor helpless sinner, to those who know by the grace of God their own helpless ruined state. In connection with the Sovereign Grace Union we hear much of the Doctrines of Grace; the vital question comes home to my own soul, Do I know the grace of the doctrines? I would like to use great plainness of speech, as I do not wish to be misunderstood in the utterance of a single word.

What do we understand, first of all, by the Doctrines of Grace? I understand that the Doctrines of Grace set forth the great and glorious plan formed by the Trinity in Unity before the world was made, before angels were formed, when

the great scheme of salvation was wrought in the mind of God for the eternal welfare of His dear Church. What do I understand by the grace of our doctrines? By the grace of our doctrines I understand the inwrought experience in the soul of the believer by the Holy Ghost; an experience that you and I must have if we are ever to enter the gates of heaven. The flesh is only too ready, my dear friends, to lay hold of an easy way to heaven. The flesh is willing to say, "I believe in the Doctrines of Grace, I attend a free-grace place of worship, I won't listen to anything else, so I am all right." May the Lord deliver you and me from such a spirit as that, and yet, we can see on every hand how many cling to the pillars of the house, and even contend for the Doctrines of Grace, that know little or nothing of the grace of the doctrines. I told you that tonight I wanted to speak a few words to the little ones. I am a little one myself, and I do not know how to speak to any other. Let me ask a question in the first place. I ask, "Is it possible for you or me to have the unction of the Spirit, to be hewn out of the mass of the human race, and to know nothing whatever about it experimentally?" I do not think it is, and by the grace of God I would like to see if we can trace out a few marks which, I believe, belong to the blood-bought sheep of Christ.

In the first place, we often exalt the new birth as one essence to salvation. "Ye must be born again;" and it seems to be a great difficulty in the minds of many of God's people who are not fully assured that they are born again. They have many doubts and fears, and many ups and downs, and have often to say with dear John Newton,

" 'Tis a point I long to know
(Oft it causes anxious thought),
Do I love the Lord, or no?
Am I His, or am I not? "

Well, my dear friends, I can walk with such a person as that far better than I can walk with someone who can always see his calling and election sure, and who is always on the

mountain top. To those who are in the former state I would commend the words of dear Daniel Herbert :

" What is this point you long to know ?
Methinks I hear you say 'tis this :
' I want to know I'm born of God,
An heir of everlasting bliss.' "

How does that fit you? You know, my dear friends, I have come to this, that true religion is a real personal thing between the believer and his God. He has got to have an answer from heaven itself. It would not satisfy you if your best friend told you, "I am sure that you are one of the children of God." Ah, no! the believer wants to feel the blood mark sealed upon his own heart. Now friends, let us look at some of the marks. Some will tell you that a child of God, when he is converted, when he is born anew, when the Holy Spirit dwells in his heart, then it is plain sailing to heaven. I do not find it so, I do not believe it is so. Look at what Mr. Hart says :

" When his pardon is signed, and his peace is procured,
From that moment his conflict begins."

We read the exhortation in the Scriptures, "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." In my early days, when I trust the Lord was beginning to teach me, I used often to dwell on that passage, and I used to think that growing in grace meant that I should get more and more sanctified, that I should be made more and more conformable to the image of Christ, that I should love the Lord with all my heart, that I should walk in the way of His commandments, and thus I should grow in grace. Have I found it to be so in experience? No, I can say with John Newton,

" I asked the Lord that I might grow
In faith, and love, and every grace ;
Might more of His salvation know,
And seek more earnestly His face."

And I can also say with him,

" Instead of this, He made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart."

I believe that is the way we grow in grace. When the Holy Ghost begins to teach a child of God and to lead him into the school of grace, He shows him first of all two strange sights. I am speaking now of a real, regenerated child of God, one who has had his sins forgiven, one who has felt his calling and election sure. But he must also know something else. Isaiah of old saw a vision; it is set forth in the 6th chapter of his prophecy. "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple." He saw a vision of God. Did that vision make him feel holy? No, and if you get a vision of God you will cry out as Isaiah did: "Woe is me, for I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." I believe every child of God is led by the Spirit to see what he is in himself, a wretched wanderer from God, defiled from head to foot by sin, no soundness in him. I am sure, my dear friends, that every one of us has a certain amount of carnal religion wrapped around us, but when we get such a vision as this we are stripped naked in the sight of a holy God. The soul that is led through such an experience as this strives to come to God, strives to feel as he once felt before, and wonders if he has ever really loved the Lord at all; and I believe that it is at such a time as this that the bitter cry goes out from his heart, "O that I knew where I might find Him!" He cannot understand himself, he believes the Lord has forsaken him, he goes here and there, and is a mystery to himself and everybody about him; no one can understand him but God. You know Job asked the question, "Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in?" and it was a question that Job himself could not answer. No doubt some of you will think that this is setting forth strange experience, but I believe, more or less, that the true-born sheep of Christ have to be taught by these severe methods that they are in themselves as weak as worms. I believe it

was Mr. Philpot who said, "To bring a man to this state he has to be nearly bled to death." The flesh always wants to find out a smooth path, and always wants to go its own way. The Spirit of God works absolutely contrary to the ways of the flesh.

Let us consider another mark of growing in grace. The child of God as he grows in grace has a knowledge of Satan that he never possessed before. He may have thought that he knew something about him, but the unregenerate know not Satan. Let us never forget that a false religion is one of Satan's greatest delusions. This enemy of God and His Church especially tries to show his power in tempting and tormenting those whom he cannot destroy, those whom Christ has snatched as brands from the burning; and if you are a child of God you will know something of the temptations of Satan, the enemy of your soul. Satan is often pictured as a monster of iniquity, a vile loathsome being that no words can express. I am doubtful if this is a wise view for the child of God to take. Let us never forget that he often assumes the character of an angel of light. He may walk with you as your best friend and he may whisper in your ear what you may think is the voice of God.

Now, my friends, we will try and come to another mark. You will see in connection with the subject, "The Grace of the Doctrines," there is a question asked, "What will ye see in the Shulamite?" I believe the word Shulamite is only mentioned in one place in the Word of God, in the 6th chapter of the Song of Solomon. It may be helpful to read the whole verse, "Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that We may look upon thee. What will ye see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies." It is the voice of the Bridegroom speaking to the Bride. That glorious invitation goes forth to the wandering sinner, "Return, return." Then we come to the character and experience of the Shulamite. The voice asks, "What will ye

see in the Shulamite?" and the answer is, "The company of two armies." I believe, my dear friends, that you can take this scripture truth as evidence as to whether you are a real Christian or not. The child of God feels within the company of two armies, there is a constant warfare going on between the two—the army of sin and flesh and the army of grace. They both dwell in his soul, and they can never become reconciled the one to the other on this side Jordan; the more he grows in grace, the more he is clothed with the armour of God, the fiercer will be the war waged between the two armies. Sometimes he feels that grace is reigning and he is able to say, "I am more than conqueror through Him that loved me," and he can triumph through the power of God. At other times his sinful heart seems to get the mastery and show him his own weakness. Jesus hides His face from him, he seems to be left alone, and he feels that sin is reigning, but it is not. He can rest on this,

" Though earth and hell oppose the way,
The weakest saint shall win the day."

I believe, dear friends, I have tried to set before you a little of what the Lord has taught me. We each must pass to Canaan's land through the wilderness. We each must suffer spiritual hunger and thirst, and we often feel it is a hard journey. We often get footsore and weary, our soul often faints within us, and sin and Satan afflict us. We bewail our lack of faith, and often cry with David, "My soul cleaveth unto the dust." We would worship God in the beauty of holiness. We would walk by faith and not by sight, and we wonder what it is all for. My dear friends, these experiences we pass through are all necessary if you and I are vessels of mercy, stones hewn out by the great master Builder. He is preparing us and shaping us into the right shape that we may be fitted into that "house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." He is refining us as silver and gold is refined in the furnace.

When we get low in our feelings, when we cannot see God,

when we feel that He has forsaken us, let us remember this word of exhortation from the Holy Ghost found in the Epistle of Peter: "Beloved"—that word ought to encourage you. We are not beloved for our seeking the Lord; we are not beloved because we are Christians. These are not the reasons why God loves us, this is the effect of His love. What does the passage say?—"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." I have thought it strange many times, and have not you when you have felt that the hand of God has gone out against you, when your mouth has been shut in prayer, and you could only groan before God? "Think it not strange," it is to try you, to prove what is in your heart.

The time is gone, but my dear friends, I feel I can say this, "I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us—(that pass through these strange experiences)—from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."
