

**“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” (Eph. 2:8-10.)**

**“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying (resisting) ungodliness and worldly lust, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.” (Titus 2:11-15.)**

Free Grace! *"Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations. (Free Grace!) Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel."* (Ezek. 36:31-32.) Free Grace!

But, Why? Isaac Watts: *"While all our hearts and all our songs, join to admire the feast, Each of us cries with thankful tongue, Lord, why was I a guest? Why was I made to hear thy voice, and enter while there's room, while thousands make a wretched choice, and rather starve than come? 'Twas the same love that spread the feast, that sweetly forced us in; else we had still refused to taste, and perished in our sin. Pity the nations, O my God! Constrain thy flock to come; Send thy victorious word abroad, and bring the strangers home."* Free Grace! *"There was nothing in us to merit esteem, or give the Creator delight. 'Twas even so, Father, we ever must sing, because it seemed good in thy sight."*

***“Notwithstanding, in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven. In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him. And he turned him unto his disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: for I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.”*(Lk. 10:20-24)**

There are two sins of man that are bred in the bone, and that continually come out in the flesh. One is self-dependence and the other is self-exaltation. It is very hard, even for the best of men, to keep themselves from the first error. The holiest of Christians, and those who understand best the gospel of Christ, find in themselves a constant inclination to look to the power of the creature, instead of looking to the power of God and the power of God alone. Over and over again, Holy Scripture has to remind us of that which we never ought to forget, that salvation is God's work from first to last, and is not of man, neither by man. But so it is, this old error – that we are to save ourselves, or that we are to do something in the matter of salvation – always rises up, and we find ourselves continually tempted by it to step aside from the simplicity of our faith in the power of the Lord our God.

Why, even Abraham himself was not free from the great error of relying upon his own strength. God had promised to him that He would give him a son – Isaac, the child of promise. Abraham believed it, but at last, weary with waiting, he adopted the carnal expedient of taking to himself Hagar, to wife, and he fancied that Ishmael would most certainly be the fulfillment of God's promise; but instead of Ishmael's helping to fulfill the promise, he brought sorrow unto Abraham's heart, for God would not have it that Ishmael should dwell with Isaac.

***“Cast out the bondwoman and her son; for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman.”(Gen. 21:10)***

Now we, in the matter of salvation, are apt to think that God is tarrying long in the fulfillment of His promise, and we set to work ourselves to do something, and what do we do? – sink ourselves deeper in the mire and pile up for ourselves a store of future troubles and trials. Do we not read that it grieved Abraham's heart to send Ishmael away? Ah! and many a Christian has been grieved by those works of nature which he accomplished with the design of helping the God of grace. Oh, beloved, we shall find ourselves very frequently attempting the foolish task of assisting Omnipotence and teaching the Omniscient One.

Instead of looking to grace alone to sanctify us, we find ourselves adopting philosophic rules and principles which we think will effect the Divine work. We shall but mar it; we shall bring grief into our own spirits. But if, instead thereof, we in every work look up to the God of our salvation for help, and strength, and grace, and succor, then our work will proceed to our own joy and comfort, and to God's glory. That error, then, I say is in our bone, and will always dwell with us, and hence it is that the words of the text are put as an antidote against that error. It is distinctly stated in our text that salvation is of God. *"Not for your sakes do I this."* He says nothing about what we have done or can do. All the preceding and all the succeeding verses speak of what God does. *"I will take you from among the heathen."* *"I will sprinkle clean water upon you."* *"I will give you a new heart."* *"I will put my Spirit within you."* It is all of God: therefore, again recall to our recollection this doctrine, and give up all dependence upon our own strength and power.

The other error to which man is very prone, is that of relying upon his own merit. Though there is no righteousness in any man, yet in every man there is a proneness to truth in some fancied merit. Strange that it should be so, but the most reprobate characters have yet some virtue as they imagine, upon which they rely. You will find the most abandoned drunkard pride himself that he is not a swearer. You will find the blaspheming drunkard pride himself that at least he is honest. You will find men with no other virtue in the world, exalt what they imagine to be a virtue – the fact that they do not profess to have any; and they think themselves to be extremely excellent, because they have honesty or rather imprudence enough to confess that they are utterly vile. Somehow the human mind clings to human merit; it always will hold to it, and when you take away everything upon which you think it could rely, in less than a moment it fashions some other ground for confidence out of itself.

Human nature with regard to its own merit, is like the spider, it bears its support in its own bowels, and it seems as if it would keep spinning on to all eternity. You may brush down one web, but it soon forms another, you may take the thread from one place, and you will find it clinging to your finger, and when you seek to brush it down with one hand you find it clinging to the other. It is hard to get rid of; it is ever ready to spin its web and bind itself to some false ground of trust. It is

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against all human merit that I am this morning going to speak, and I feel that I shall offend a great many people. I am about to preach a doctrine that is gall and vinegar to flesh and blood, one that will make righteous moralists gnash their teeth, and make others go away and declare that I am an Anti-nomian, and perhaps scarcely fit to live. However, that consequence is one which I shall not greatly deplore, if connected with it there should be in other hearts a yielding to this glorious truth, and a giving up to the power and grace of God, who will never save us, unless He prepares us to let Him have all the glory.

Let us examine the doctrine contained in this text: ***"Not for your sakes do I this saith the Lord God."*** The motive for the salvation of the human race is to be found in the breast of God, and not in the character or condition of man. Two races have revolted against God—the one angelic, the other human. When part of the angelic race revolted against the Most High, justice speedily overtook them; they were swept from their starry seats in Heaven, and henceforth they have been reserved in darkness unto the great day of the wrath of God. No mercy was ever presented to them, no sacrifice ever offered for them; but they were without hope and mercy, forever consigned to the pit of eternal torment.

The human race, far inferior in order of intelligence, sinned as atrociously; or at any rate, if the sins of man were rightly weighed, I can scarcely understand how even the sins of devils could be much blacker than the sin of mankind. But, God who in His infinite justice passed over angels, and suffered them forever to expiate their offences in the fires of hell, was pleased to look down on man. Here was election on a grand scale; the election of man, and the reprobation of fallen angels. What was the reason for it? The reason was in God's mind, an inscrutable reason which we do not know, and which if we knew probably would not understand. But God, who doeth as he wills with His own, and giveth no account of His matters, deals with His creatures as the potter deals with his clay. ***"Not for your sakes do I this. O house of Israel, be ashamed and be confounded for your own ways."*** When we talk about election of men and reprobation of fallen angels, there is not a civil war for a moment. Every man approves of Calvinism till he feels that HE is the loser by it; but when it touches his bone and flesh then he kicks against it.

The only reason why one man is saved, and not another, lies not, in any sense, in the man saved, but in God's bosom. The reason why this day the gospel is preached to you and not the heathen far away, is not because we are superior to the heathen; it is not because we deserve more at God's hands; His choice of the USA, in election of outward privilege, is not caused by the excellence of America, but entirely because of His own mercy and His own love. There is not reason in us why we should have the gospel preached to us more than another. Today, some of us have received the gospel, and have been changed by it, and have become the heirs of light and immortality, whereas others are left still to be the heirs of wrath. ***"There was nothing in us to merit esteem, Or give the Creator delight. 'Twas 'Even so, Father!' we ever must sing, Because it seem'd good in thy sight."***

Now, let us review this doctrine at length. We are taught in Holy Scripture that, long before this world was made, God foreknew and foresaw all the creatures He intended to fashion; and there and then foreseeing that the human race would fall into sin, and deserve His anger, determined, in His own sovereign mind, that an immense portion of the human race should be His children and should be brought to Heaven. As to the rest, He left them to their own deserts, to sow the wind and reap the whirlwind, to scatter crime and inherit punishment.

Now, in the great decree of election, the only reason why God selected the vessels of mercy must have been because He would do it. There was nothing in any one of them which caused God to choose them. We all were alike, all lost, all ruined by the fall; all without the slightest claim upon His mercy; all deserving His utmost vengeance. His choice of any one, and His choice of all His people, are causeless, so far as anything in them was concerned. It was the effect of His sovereign will, for thus saith the text: *"Not for your sakes do I this, O house of Israel!"* As for the fruit of our election, in due time Christ came into this world, and purchased with His blood all those whom the Father hath chosen. Now come ye to the cross of Christ; bring this doctrine with you, and remember that the only reason why Christ gave up His life to be a ransom for His sheep was because He loved His people, but there was nothing in His people that made Him die for them.

The love of God is so immense, so boundless and so infinite, that you cannot conceive for a moment that it could have been caused by anything in us. Stand at the foot of the cross, ye merit-mongers, ye that delight in your own works; and answer this question; Do you think that the Lord of life and glory could have been brought down from Heaven, could have been fashioned like a man, and have been led to die through any merit of yours? Shall those sacred veins be opened with any lancet less sharp than His own infinite love? Do you conceive that your poor merits, such as they are, could be so efficacious as to nail the Redeemer to the tree, and make Him bend His shoulders beneath the enormous load of the elect's guilt? You cannot imagine it. After Christ's death, there comes the work of the Holy Spirit. Those whom the Father hath chosen, and whom the Son has redeemed, in due time the Holy Spirit calls *"out of darkness into marvelous light."*

Now, the calling of the Holy Spirit is without regard to any merit in us. If this day the Holy Spirit shall call out of this nation a hundred men, and bring them out of their estate of sin into the state of righteousness, you shall bring these men, and let them march in review, and if you could read their hearts, you would be compelled to say, "I see no reason why the Spirit of God should have operated upon these. I see nothing whatever that could have merited such grace as this – nothing that could have caused the operations and motions of the Spirit to work in these men." By nature, men are said to be dead in sin. If the Holy Spirit quickens, it cannot be because of any power in the dead men, or merit in them, for they are dead, corrupt and rotten in the grave of their sin. If then, the Holy Spirit says *"Come forth and live,"* it is not because of anything in the dry bones, but for some reason in His own mind.

Therefore, know ye this, men and brethren, that we all stand upon a level. We have none of us anything that can recommend us to God; and if the Spirit shall choose to operate in our hearts unto salvation, He must be moved to do it by His own supreme love, for He cannot be moved to do it by any good will, good desire, or good deed, that dwells in us by nature. God's people, after they are called by grace, are preserved in Christ Jesus; they are *"kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation;"* they are not suffered to sin away their eternal inheritance, but as temptations arise they have strength given with which to encounter them, and as sin blackens them they are washed afresh, and again cleansed. Mark the reason. God keeps His people by His own free sovereign grace. If you have been fed and supplied in your hour of need, it is not because you have been a faithful servant, but because of God's mercy.

I love you. Amen.