

GRACE AND GLORY

For the grace of God which brings salvation to all men has appeared, teaching us, by renouncing all faithlessness and worldly desires, to live in this present world soberly, justly and religiously, as we await the blessed hope and the appearance of the glory of the great God and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity.
—Titus 2:11-14.

WE explained this morning that, as soon as we are told of the goodness of God which is revealed to us in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, we should be stirred up to live holy lives. God rightly claims to own us, since he has paid dearly for us, and especially since, as has been said, he has made known to us the purpose of our redemption. As Zechariah succinctly says in the words of his song: 'We have been set free that we may serve God all the days of our life' (Luke 1:74-75). Or, as Paul writes in the sixth chapter of Romans: 'We were once slaves to sin, but now we have been freed, so that sin may no longer have dominion over us' (Rom. 6:14, 18).

How may this be done? By submitting to the righteousness of God. Here there is neither force nor compulsion: it is a submission which is better and more desirable than all the dominions of this world. For if man has to have free will in order to gratify his appetites, it is as if he were to plunge into the deepest hell, harassed and driven by the devil as he wills. That is because our appetites are at enmity with God; sin is our master and it does its worst when we give our flesh free rein. The only way, therefore, to be truly free is to yield control to God and his righteousness.

Let us, however, return to the point on which we touched earlier, namely our need to forsake all ungodliness and worldly desires if we are to dedicate ourselves to God. Now we know that nothing but iniquity is found in us, and that God cannot expect anything good from us until he has remade us. Otherwise we do not know what it means to serve God. We may pretend to be more or less devout, but we are confused and careless. We have not the least liking for true religion unless God remakes us and wholly changes us. As for unbelievers, they appear indeed to have a certain zeal for goodness, but Scripture cannot lie when it describes men as rebels against God, for they go against his will and would throw off his yoke if they possibly could. Why do they rely on ceremonies to put things right, if not to escape the hand of God who would be their judge? Were they to succeed, they would surely defy all majesty and would turn all order upside down. Thus, until God renews us and brings us to himself, we remain so godless that we would live the life of beasts, never thinking about the kingdom of heaven or knowing what it is to have been created, so brutish would we be.

Now because godlessness is more concealed, being an evil which festers inwardly and is not so visible, Paul adds the words *worldly desires*, which bear witness to what really lies within us—our unbridled love of evil. And instead of letting nature do its work of leading us to God, so that we know him and behold him, we are worse than the brute beasts. For although beasts cannot distinguish between right and wrong, they remain within their bounds and limitations. Although they obey their natural instincts, they at least rest once their needs are satisfied; and when they have rested they go back to work. When hungry they eat their food, or else they look for it. Yet how pitiful is man, who tries to hide his instincts and always plays false! We are reckless and impatient in all our wants. Not content with rest and comfort, we are happy only when we sow confusion and mingle heaven and earth. In short, because we are

entangled in the here and now and because we never think about the kingdom of heaven, we could not be more depraved. There is not a drop of goodness in us, and like blind men we pursue our own interests. These look only to this world, whereas we have been made for a very different end. Our lot would be most wretched if we could see no further than the earth, where we suffer so much misery, so much worry, so much trouble and distress.

The brute beasts have a much better life. They fear only for the present; they are immune to worry, are not led by ambition and can foresee no mischief that might befall them. Unlike men they are not jealous of each other; they feel no concern for what might happen a hundred years after their death; they make do with the food that is before them. Men, on the other hand, continually fret, and if God should desert us, where would we be? The world holds us fast; it owns us; we are bound to it—entombed, even, in it! Senseless, we think only of this transitory life. Consequently we see that, in order to draw near to God, we must escape the nature which we inherited from Adam. Above all, we must become new creatures. That is why Paul first declares that we must renounce ungodliness and all worldly desires. He then goes on to describe the essential purpose of it all: *that we may live in this present world holy, just and sober lives.*

Here Paul makes the Christian life to consist of three things: holiness or reverence for God, so that he is obeyed; fairness and probity toward our neighbours; and decency and self-discipline, so that we are not unruly but are temperate and chaste. Such is the true perfection which God demands of us and at which we must aim if we are to benefit as we go through life. It is true that holy Scripture, as has been said, often mentions two things only when it teaches what perfect righteousness is. Just as the law includes two tables, so righteousness consists in the pure service of God and in upright and

honest conduct toward our neighbour. These two things are quite sufficient, but the self-discipline or sobriety which Paul describes makes up a third element which is indissolubly linked to the other two. How can we reach the spiritual rest which is asked of us unless sobriety prevails? Or how can we be patient in our afflictions? Earlier Paul had laid down as a basic principle God's service and the love we owe our neighbour. Yet there is no contradiction in what he now adds, for self-discipline means that a man restrains himself as if he were a prisoner, so that he is not prey to his pleasures but is mastered by God's hand, submitting as God wills to his rule and not to his own inclinations.

When our hearts are thus obedient we have that sobriety of which Paul speaks. So we see that in using these three words Paul intends to show that God does not lead us by twists and turns, but traces out for us a sure and infallible road, provided we do not wilfully depart from it. We ought not to be like those who devise solemn devotions in order to please God; they go to very great pains but end up fussing over nothing. Let us therefore keep to the right path, for, as Paul makes clear, men waste their time when led astray by their imagination. True spiritual rest is found in the assurance that only a life governed by God's law will be acceptable to him.

Concerning probity, the word implies all forms of upright conduct toward our neighbour, conduct which leads us to be naturally fair and just, as Jesus Christ himself declares: 'Do to others only what you would have them do to you' (Matt. 7:12). Thus when we have dealings with our neighbour there must be no deceit, ill-will or cruelty; we must not resort to theft or seek our own gain; we must not be motivated by personal ambition in order to trick others or to get the better of them. Instead let us try to share with our fellows so that no one has cause to complain about us. Especially let us not seek to benefit ourselves, but let us look to what will benefit

everybody else. To describe probity in a word, it is to render to each man what is his by right. Even simpler, however, is our Lord Jesus Christ's definition: to do to all what we would have them do to us.

Of course we can argue endlessly about what is due to us. On that score none of us is in need of counsel! True, anyone who has cause to go to law will seek advice to prepare his case as plausibly as possible, so that he may better defend his rights. But there is no man, however ignorant or obtuse, who has not the wit to say, 'This belongs to me!' Naturally he may not be able to argue his case so fully as to spell out all his rights, but at any rate he is quite capable of saying, 'This is mine, and I am being robbed of my rights!' Why, then, are we so short-sighted that we fail to maintain the rights of others? It is because we are defiled. Without doubt it is our own natural leanings which account for our lack of probity. If some general case is put to us which arouses neither animosity nor prejudice, we are quick enough to say, 'This is what must be done. This is the right course to take.' We do not have to be great scholars or to have gone to the best schools in order to judge swiftly and decisively when a case is put before us. But when something occurs to skew our judgment, we lose all sense of what is right.

We must therefore learn that to please God we must live with our neighbours in such a way that we give no one cause to complain. That is one point. There are many, however, who labour to please God by means of ceremonies, as in popery where many such things are done. They mean to gratify God, yet some are given to thieving, others to trickery or malice, while others still are eaten up by pride and ambition. They have many a Mass sung in order to redeem themselves, but what is that if not mere mockery of God? It is not to worthless trivia like this that God calls us. Rather we should learn to practise what is right and to make that our aim. The true fruits which God requires and recognizes are these: that we walk uprightly,

assisting those who need our help and refraining from all injury and offence.

In addition to probity there is holiness. And rightly so, for it is not enough to enjoy men's approval and to avoid harming anyone. God deserves to come first. If wives, as has been said, must be subject to their husbands, how much greater by comparison is our duty to God? Wives are partners to their husbands yet they owe them respect as to their head, and they must also humble themselves. Here, however, it is a question of our Lord Jesus Christ who has made a spiritual marriage with us, one much more sacred than all the marriages that ever were. But if we betray our pledged word, if some engage in superstition and idolatry by meddling or wallowing in papist filth, what shall we say to that? They may of course argue that they have offended no one. No one, perhaps, here below, but should God's majesty be profaned that way? Someone may object: 'I'm not a thief.' Nevertheless you have injured God! Paul says the same thing (Rom. 2:22-23). We need, therefore, to look to ourselves, and when we are told to live uprightly among men and to cause harm to none but rather to do them good, let us condemn these poor fools who occupy themselves with silly trifles and who seek to honour God with their endless monkey-tricks.

It is all a terrible mistake. Why so? Because God will have mercy and not sacrifice; he requires uprightness, faith and judgment, as he says through his prophet and as our Lord Jesus Christ also declares (Isa. 56:1; Hos. 6:6; Matt. 9:13; 12:7; 23:23). God tests whether we fear him or not by seeing if we walk justly and live harmlessly with one another. That is what he demands.

Nevertheless God himself must not be overlooked. We must turn to him and put our whole trust in Jesus Christ, in whose name we ought always to call upon God his Father, since necessity compels

and drives us every minute of the day. We are to glorify God, looking to him for every blessing and making sure that we profit from all that is commanded in the first table, which we should especially keep. The rest, too, we are to follow, for God's law cannot and should not be split in two. There are indeed two tables which must be distinguished, so that we know that God's service has first place, and that love for men is added to it. Even so God did not give one part of his law to the Jews and the other to the Gentiles. He willed that all should receive it, for it is so bound together that no man may lawfully separate it. As Scripture says, 'Cursed is he who does not perform all these things' (Deut. 27:26).

It is true that no one can fulfil all that God commands—far from it. And even though God guides us by his Holy Spirit we are always hindered by our weaknesses. Nevertheless we must make it our aim to submit to God at all times and in all things, since he who forbade immorality also forbade robbery, as James says (James 2:11). God's majesty is injured every time we give way to sin in any form. That is why we must learn to combine holiness with probity and fairness, and to live among men without causing them injury, offence or violence, lest God be denied his rights and lest our worship cease to be pure. We must not, however, think ourselves absolved if, on that score, our fellow men do not condemn us. For if before men we conceal our true selves and are ashamed to follow Jesus Christ, he will deny us before the angels in paradise. Body and soul must therefore be dedicated to God—of that we must be sure. If a woman should even pretend to bargain with a lecher she is already considered immoral. If a servant not only allows his master to be vilified, or a child his father, but also joins with his slanderers as their accomplice, what shall we say of such treachery? If we associate with the wicked and dissemble in such a way that we seem to approve their godlessness, we surely betray God. So let us not flatter ourselves when men applaud us or cover up our uncleanness.

We are answerable to the one who will condemn us twice over if we seek to mask his truth by our hypocrisy and empty sham. That, in sum, is what this text has to teach us.

Finally there is the word 'sobriety'. This, as has been said, adds nothing new to God's law, but illustrates what sort of holiness and uprightness is meant. For if we lack self-control we cannot yield to God when he sends us afflictions in order to discipline us. If we merely pined away on earth, beset by many miseries and troubles, would we be able to worship our God and praise his name without the restraint and sobriety of which Paul speaks? And if we ran amok like stampeding cattle, with a passion for dancing, coarse songs and scandals of that kind—if all was chaos, how, I ask, could anyone be content to live peaceably with his wife without putting someone else's marriage at risk? If offence is given, if dissolute, uncontrolled behaviour is condoned, if the opportunity is there, debauchery and adultery are sure to flourish, and faithfulness and decency among men will disappear. It will be an endless free-for-all where brutality, theft, extortion and brigandage will go unchecked. So the term 'sobriety', like Paul's earlier mention of patience, adds nothing to the law. The apostle simply intends us to see how God is to be obeyed. We are to cast aside all that is superfluous in this world, so that God may quietly manage and govern us.

Next, it is said that, as we live pure and sober lives, *we await the blessed hope and the appearance of the great God and of our Saviour Jesus Christ*. God, that is, puts us to the test while we are here on earth. He desires to see what we are like. Hence this life is like a continual conflict in which God does not leave us idle, but tries us so as to have sure proof of the fear and honour which we bear him. Now this is most useful, since all of us, we know, complain that God does not give us what we wish but does the very opposite; we

want him to lead us as we ourselves would like, and to let each of us be his own master.

Paul therefore declares that during this transitory life it is right that God should train us for his service, and should test our attitude toward him. With the passage of time, however, we grow weary. Thus we are taught to await the hope of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we would be steadfast in serving God we ought not to concern ourselves with the present state of the world. Rather we should look to the hope which is given to us, that God's Son will come to judge the world. Observe, then, in the first place, that God desires to test his faithful people by allowing them, throughout their life, to be troubled and harassed and to pass through many afflictions. When untoward events occur God seems to have forsaken them, and even to be their enemy. Be sure, however, that he acts with good reason, and that by these means we have to be tried.

When we are given gold or silver we need to know whether it is genuine, and when we are in doubt we do not hesitate to test it by fire. Is not our faith, as Peter says, more precious than all the perishable metals which are tested with such care (1 Pet. 1:7)? Accordingly, so noble a thing as our faith should stand in awe of God and should thus be well and truly tried. Such is the purpose of the afflictions which God sends us. He does not want us to seek our own advantage, but intends us to serve even the ungrateful who, in return for the good we try to do them, repay us with evil. God has ordered events this way, and he is right to do so. That is the first thing to bear in mind.

Think also of the shortness of our life lest we lose heart, for we know how feeble we are. Even those who have shown some desire to dedicate themselves to God and who have taken a few steps-

forward, think that they are entitled to halt in mid-course when they are wearied. 'Will it always be like this?' they ask. We do not reflect on the frailty of our life. If someone has only a short way to go he takes heart; however exhausted he feels and however weak his legs may be, he limps on until he reaches home. And even if a man has travelled for ten or twelve days, when nearing his destination he cheers up and is emboldened to continue to the end. So when we see that we are not far from the goal which we must reach, why should we not be encouraged to press on, especially when the Holy Spirit himself urges us?

Still, it is not enough to recognize that life is short and fleeting, that our course will soon be done and that therefore we need not faint. We must also look to the hope to which we are called. Why? The reason we are not keen to dedicate ourselves to God is that we see no benefit for ourselves, no tangible gain. If only God were there to cheer us on! Now God does not wait for us to serve him first before he blesses us. Nevertheless he does not want to make life in this world so easy for us that we risk falling asleep. We remember that he has said that those who are interested only in present things have already received their reward (Matt. 6:2, 5, 16). Our Lord on the other hand bids us fix our sights on the kingdom of heaven. This life is full of many anxieties and troubles which surround us on every side. All the sufferings which we endure are so many jabs of the spur by which God goads us, in order to draw us to himself, to turn our thoughts to heavenly things and to withdraw us from this world.

That is why Paul speaks particularly here of hope. What he suggests is that we should not be surprised if men are more than cool when it comes to serving God. That is because their eyes are fixed on earthly things which are their sole concern. Instead of contemplating the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ we turn away; the world holds us in its thrall, dazzles us with its seductions and robs us

of all sense. Let us learn, then, that the one true way to serve God is to pass swiftly through this world, conscious that God has placed us on earth on the condition that we journey as strangers and do not make our nest here. And although he may grant us periods of rest we must continue on, as we look to him and to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is certain that until we reach that goal, however grand we may appear to be, all within us is simply vanity.

The first rule of a well-ordered life is to understand that God has not arranged for us to lodge here forever; he wants us to reach out to him in the certainty of the blessed coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus to the word 'hope' Paul adds 'the appearance of the glory of the great God and of our Saviour Jesus Christ'. Paul appears to say: 'My friends, we are not meant to aim as if by chance at the kingdom of heaven, in the vague hope that we may reach it. We know who has made this promise to us. God is trustworthy, so let us rely on his faithfulness.'

That is one thing to note. For the rest, we have a firm assurance and guarantee. How could it be otherwise? Remember that our Lord Jesus Christ came into the world. Is it a thing of small importance that the everlasting God became as nothing, assuming our human nature and suffering death—a shameful death in men's eyes, an accursed and damnable one in God's? Thus did the Son of God, the head of the angels, the fount of life, the living image of God to whom all glory and majesty belong, come down to be made like us, and to carry all our infirmities except for sin. True, there was no spot in him, but he was subject to heat and cold and every other feeling. In a word, he took all our human weaknesses and was finally cursed by God, not on his own account but as the bearer of our sins. God's curse fell on his head and he became the chief debtor so that we might be discharged. Do we think, then, that God, having done such things, will allow his death and passion to be fruitless if we believe in

him, or that he, having been crucified and being now in heaven, will abandon us who are his members? His death and passion are meant to have their full effect.

We are sure to be buffeted by feelings of mistrust, and to say: 'How can this be? We do not see God's Son: he is hidden from us, yet we know him to be our Saviour.' How pointless would it be if he did not now appear in his glory! His death and passion would be no more than a performance which he had put on! What would God gain by altering the course of nature so as to come down to earth, taking the form of a sinner—though a sinner he was not—and appearing in the flesh, if he refused to know us any longer? Why should he let all that slip away while we received no benefit at all? Let us then embrace the salvation which he obtained for us, so that we may have assurance that Christ our Lord will appear, though now we do not see him. Remember also that Paul warns the Colossians not to be surprised if today we languish in the world and gain nothing by serving God. For believers are distressed when they see the wicked prospering, while they themselves are hard pressed. 'Where,' they ask, 'is God? He has forgotten us!' Paul, however, counsels us to bear all things patiently, because, as he says, our life is not in us but in our Lord Jesus Christ (Col. 3:3).

Now Jesus Christ is in the glory of God his Father until he is revealed to us at the last day. So, says Paul, do not be dismayed if your life is hidden and if you seem to be like trees in winter. When the leaves fall the wood seems dry and dead, but life continues to exist within. Let us then receive our Lord Jesus Christ and fully commit ourselves to him, knowing that our life is enclosed in his. And since he is not yet revealed, let us wait with patience and let us not fret if we have to languish amid much misery and affliction.

Paul, having spoken of this present age which he elsewhere describes as a fleeting form (1 Cor. 7:31), brings us back to our Lord Jesus Christ and exhorts us to persevere in hope. Therefore for believers steadfastness is all about hope, for it is hope that nourishes our faith. What then is the difference between faith and hope? By faith we lay hold of God's promises, never doubting that he will fulfil them. Yet it is not enough to have believed in God once and for all. Faith must be constantly sustained, which is possible thanks to hope. Thus hope acts as faith's guide so that it does not fade like something that is time-bound and subject to decay; it persists to the very end. It is true that in the meantime we will have many battles to fight. We must, I say, fight if we would maintain hope, and not faint or fall away from it.

We might well be discouraged by such teaching if we were not firmly convinced that, since Jesus Christ who is our life has yet to appear, our life is safely hidden in him, and although we cannot see him the eyes of faith are open. We know whose hands hold the pledge that we have made. Supposing a man were exposed in his own house to the danger of fire, hostile attack or robbery, but had a safe place somewhere else or had a friend whom he could trust. If he gave him his treasure for safe-keeping, he would not run back every minute of the day to inspect it or to sort through it piece by piece; he would rest content. Such a man would be happy to leave all he had in the hands of his friend, because even after a year he would still trust him. It is the same with God. He keeps careful watch over our salvation, which if left to us would be greatly at risk. The devil would soon snatch it away, but God has his eye on it and keeps it safe. He is its guardian. How then can we be said to honour him if we do not trust him to keep it firm and secure?

A person to whom something is entrusted and who fails to protect it is guilty of theft—theft of the worst and vilest kind, since trust has

been abused. Do we therefore think that God can be accused of faithlessness, seeing that, having taken charge of our salvation, he has repeatedly promised to accomplish it? So whenever we are tempted to lose heart, or whenever we feel slow and sluggish, let us learn to look to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and to rely on the promised salvation which will be ready for us. This is how we should apply Paul's teaching.

We note that he speaks of 'the glory of the great God and of our Saviour Jesus Christ'. Now it is important not to separate God the Father from his Son. The apostle plainly teaches that God will appear in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, as when he says that God will then be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28). We must be careful not to follow those who have denied the deity of Jesus Christ and who think of him as some newly made god. That was how it was with that odious man who was punished in this city. He readily confessed that Jesus Christ was God, but maintained that he had not always been God, but had assumed his divine essence at the creation of the world, and that God the Father had made him pass through an 'alembic', as he called it; then, when he was born into the world, he appeared as God. There you have a deity assembled in great haste! [24] A number of people have held this view, and like the heretics of old have armed themselves with this verse. 'Oh,' they cry, 'here we have mention of a great God, and then comes Jesus Christ. So it follows that Jesus Christ is a lesser, subordinate God!' Such people, I say, make a mockery of holy Scripture, for Paul insists that we must think of God's majesty in terms of Jesus Christ alone. As he says in another place: 'In him all deity is enclosed' (Col. 1:19; 2:9). In that verse he uses a graphic term to help us more easily understand the infinite essence which is in God, [25] and to make our thanklessness more abhorrent if we imagine God to be other than he is in Jesus Christ.

Accordingly Paul declares that at Christ's coming we will see God in all his greatness. But why does he speak of God's greatness? Because at present it is diminished by our ignorance and our lack of trust. It is to our shame that we are so dim-witted! True, with our lips we readily declare that God is great, incomprehensible and so high as to confound all thought. This we are happy to confess, yet all the while we treat him with contempt. No one trusts him, and he can wring no obedience from us that would honour his majesty. Men ignore his heavenly kingdom and eagerly grasp at the smallest chance of personal gain. We openly defy God and take no account of his promises in the gospel. In short, men are so wilful that they want only to drag God down, and if we were not so complacent we would see that our whole life tends that way.

Thus until God draws us to himself, our nature seeks only to cheapen his glory and even, if that were possible, to extinguish it completely. But if, says Paul, we cease to care for things present and to entertain other worldly motives, we will see God's greatness. Not that God himself will be greater, for as we know he neither grows nor diminishes in himself: it is only that then we will see him with different eyes. So let us make sure that none of us is put to shame. As for the wicked, they will certainly behold him despite themselves, and will see no other great God than him who is our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. For, as we noted in the verse already quoted, he is so joined to God his Father that in him dwells all the fullness of deity. Come what may, the wicked and the reprobate will behold this great God and they will be utterly lost. Let us, for our part, resolve to contemplate by faith God's greatness. Men will try hard to blot it out and in their arrogance they will defy God, ridicule his gospel and so trumpet their successes that those who walk meekly will appear as nothing in comparison. There will be hypocrites who disguise themselves and who seek only to cover up God's glory. Though we see such things, we should nevertheless gaze with the spiritual eyes of faith on the

greatness that is in God, until at length we see him face to face and are transformed into that glory of which we already bear some trace, since God reigns within us by his Holy Spirit. Such is the tenor of this passage. The rest we will consider at a later time.

Now let us cast ourselves down before the face of our good God, acknowledging our faults and begging him to make us feel them more keenly, and in feeling them so to hate them that we draw ever closer to him and grow in his fear. May we learn to free ourselves from this world and from the many entanglements which hinder our obedience. May we always fix our eyes on Jesus Christ, knowing that as he appeared once to offer himself as a sacrifice, so too he will come with all the benefits of his death and passion, taking us to himself and confirming the salvation which is revealed to us in him, that it may be fulfilled in us who are members of his body.

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