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Grace.

A NEW TESTAMENT STUDY.

BY THE REV. JAMES WELLS, D.D., GLASGOW.

V. Grace with Us.

GRACE is essentially a man-regarding thing. As all rivers run to the sea, so grace flows forth towards men. For grace is possible only where there are sins to be forgiven and sorrows to be consoled.

Probably the fullest statement of the experience of grace is found in 1. Cor. xv. 10: 'But by the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.' Every particle of good in him the apostle ascribes to the grace of God, and he shows a great fear lest he should seem for one moment to do any injustice to it. His words exclude every suggestion of merit or self-praise, and every hint of salvation by works or ceremonies. Grace is the marrow, the whole secret of apostolical Christianity.

One of the greatest questions for the pastor and the evangelist is, How, precisely, does the grace of God become ours? How does it enter and master the soul? Some one has well said, 'Grace, like force, acts along the line of least resistance.' Self-righteousness in any of its forms shuts out grace, or, at least, the full experience of it; for exceeding grace appeals to our exceeding need, and is therefore not received by the self-sufficing. 'God giveth grace to the humble.' Many, it is to be feared, miss the good grace brings because they mix it up with merit, works, ceremonies, etc. A careful study of the New Testament shows us that grace is an exclusive idea, and that it should be first, midst, and last in the Christian life. To mix here, is to adulterate and destroy. If you mix two colours, the poetess says, you lose both, and get a third distinct from either. Christians are defined as the receivers of grace, not as those who have received it—*οἱ λαμβάνοντες* (Rom. v. 17): receivers who are ever in the act of receiving, just as some men are called receivers of wrecks or customs, because that is their daily and only employ. Hence the divine simplicity and catholicity of the gospel; for all genuine grace-receivers, whatever else they

may be, are undoubtedly Christians. And they receive nothing but grace: grace in exchange for grace—*χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος* (St. John's Gospel, i. 16): new grace in exchange for the old. The law of spiritual health is like the law of physical health, which is fresh air in exchange for the air we have used. Air is both in the lungs and around us as a measureless zone of blessing. Thus Christian experience should be fresh and satisfying, as God adds grace to welcomed grace. And this grace is never received apart from Christ. The secret of the lives of the first Christians is given in St. John's Gospel (i. 14): 'We beheld His glory . . . full of grace and truth.' They beheld it as the men of their day beheld in the theatre (*ἑθεασάμεθα*) the creations of the highest genius. The word means to brood continuously with deep delight and without distraction upon some much-loved object, till it reveals all its excellences, and enlarges the contemplating mind to something like its own dimensions. This is how students of the masterpieces of art are trained. By such quiet, receptive meditation, the Christian becomes like what he beholds: beholding, he is 'changed into the same image' (2 Cor. iii. 18). Great Christians thus nourish their spirits upon grace. 'I will be forever a debtor to free grace,' was the confession of Ralph Erskine.

Can it be reasonably doubted that one of the most urgent needs of the modern Church is a revival of the apostolic conception of the free, exclusive, all-sufficient, triumphant grace of God? Near the close of his life, Dr. Dale, of Birmingham, expressed his regret that the preaching of grace was not so common among English Nonconformists as it used to be, and strongly urged that greater attention should be given to the subject. He also said that had he to begin life again, his preaching would not be less ethical, but it certainly would be more evangelical. The preaching of grace lends itself most readily to the uses of evangelism, consolation, and inspiration. Probably many of the themes we handle in the pulpit perplex our

hearers ; but grace is not one of these. For it is one of the simplest of ideas. Even a little child can understand a gift in the hand, the love in the heart that offers the gift, and the joy the gift brings to the receiver. He can understand that he is to come empty-handed, and, like a beggar, receive the gift from the full hand of God. And how alluring is grace!—enough for all, free to all, offered to all. These riches are no miser's hoard to be doled out grudgingly ; they are all for giving away ; they have been brought by Christ to your door ; they will all be lost unless they are used by sinners like you ; they are all yours now for the taking ; and if you have them not, the blame must be all your own—such presentations of grace are level to the humblest capacity. The early preachers seem to have spread out before their hearers all the fulness of grace, and with that sympathetic tone which we call unction, and then practically to have said, 'Such is the grace we offer you in the name of God : perish then if you can, perish if you dare.'

Christian biography shows that many a man has been surprised into the kingdom when the true conception of grace first flashed into his mind ; the new light brought with it the new life.

Grace is gladness (*χάρις* from *χαίρειν*). The frequent exposition of manifold grace should therefore tend to infuse into our Christian life that spiritual joy which was the distinguishing note of primitive Christianity. Nothing yields a deeper delight than divine abundance placed at the disposal of the needy.

The apostle was constantly met with the objection that his preaching of grace was opposed to morality. It led men, it was urged, to say, 'Let us continue in sin that grace may abound.' This objection reveals to us the intensity with which he preached the doctrines of grace. He teaches us to find in grace the great storehouse of moral and spiritual dynamics. What we most need is a great creative power. Culture, fear, self-interest, and suchlike motives supply all we need for virtue except the power to practise it. Conscience by itself is not enough ; for it is a judicial rather than a creative faculty : it does not generate the expulsive power of a supreme affection. But grace supplies an adequate and undecaying motive ; for it masters the heart it enters, and begets *gratitude*, that is, as was shown in a previous article, the *gratia-habitus*, the *grace-*

habit, which grace produces in every consenting soul. Nine times is *χάρις* rendered 'thank' or 'thanks' or 'thankworthy' ; and the word for thanksgiving is *εὐχαριστέω*, that is, to be well graced. The words for grace and gratitude are the same (as in our *grace before meat*, and in the Italian word for thanks, *grazie*), because gratitude is the heart's response to grace. It is grace in us, the sense of infinite favours received. This is, as all Christendom shows, incomparably the mightiest force at work among men. Where is there any other wonder-working power in the least like grateful love responding to the redeeming love of God ? This has produced millions of the grandest lives our planet has yet witnessed. Indeed, all civilized nations admit that grace is the mightiest force in the world ; for they reckon their time from the birth of Christ, and call each year a 'year of grace,' an *annus Domini*. It is thus confessed that the revelation of grace in Christ is the greatest epoch in the world's history.

The inspiring, creative power of grace is further revealed by the many uses of the word. For example, the fruit of grace in the heart is called 'a grace.' It is meet that the lovely daughter should bear the mother's name, as she bears her likeness. When we call men 'gracious' and 'graceful,' and speak of 'the graces of the Christian character,' we acknowledge that grace is the mould of character as well as the spring of action. The meaning of these phrases is, that grace 'graces' the character by creating actions which have a joy-giving beauty, the Christian's heart and character being subdued to that he daily works in. The same idea explains the New Testament use of the adjective *καλός*, which is found in nearly all the passages where our English version has the word 'good.' Plato very closely united 'the good' and 'the beautiful'—the Bible makes them one ; for the ethically beautiful is the splendour of the good. Again, among the works of men nothing is counted more beautiful than a perfect poem. A Christian, in his ideal, is God's *poem*—*αὐτοῦ γὰρ ἔσμεν ποίημα* (Eph. ii. 10) : a piece of divine workmanship adorned with every grace.

Grace as an ideal is the pith of the apostle's appeal to the Corinthians for a liberal collection. Christ's grace, he says in effect, is the source, and should be the model, of yours ; you live on the charity of Christ, and should therefore show Christlike charity to the poor : Christlike both in

its spirit and in its bountifulness. In its spirit ; for God loveth a *hilarious* giver—*ἡλαρόν δότην* (2 Cor. ix. 7), that is, one who gives with the God-like gladness of grace. And your charity should be like Christ's in its bounty ; for your 'abounding' to your poor brethren should have some resemblance to God's 'abounding' to you. The medallion should be like its mould. Your character should be an impression the yielding heart has received from the grace of the Great Giver. The very genius of grace, in man as in God, is to find joy in giving joy to others.

The same conception lies at the foundation of all missionary appeals. Grace in you is to work after its kind ; it is to create generous thought and feeling, a Christlike outgo and outflow towards the

unlovely and the ill-deserving ; it is to pour itself forth to them in the divine fashion ; with a reversed ambition, with real chivalry, you are to side with the down-trodden and find attractions in the least attractive, and have divine joy in conveying to them the best of blessings. A temper and attitude agreeing with grace—that is the perfection of the mission spirit at home or abroad.

Further, the apostolic exhortations about social and civic life have this as their sum, that we are to breathe the spirit of grace into all our relations with our fellows.

The New Testament study of grace makes it plain that one of the most urgent needs of all spiritual teachers is a soul-bath and a life-bath in the grace of God.

Recent Foreign Theology.

Professor Nowack's 'Die Kleinen Propheten.'

PROFESSOR NOWACK, now of Strassburg, has been known for many years past as a lucid and accomplished writer on subjects relating to the Old Testament. His first work, published in 1875, was an exceedingly interesting and instructive brochure of 55 pp., entitled *Die Bedeutung des Hieronymus für die alttestamentliche Kritik*, in which he investigated the character of Jerome's translation of the Old Testament, and demonstrated the manner in which it was often dependent upon the older Greek versions, especially that of Symmachus. In 1880 he published a very full commentary on Hosea ; and in 1883 rewrote, for the *Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch*, the commentaries on Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, which, in the first edition, had been done by Bertheau and Hitzig respectively. In 1887-88 he laid biblical students under even a greater obligation, by bringing up to date—and also, as was sometimes necessary, by condensing,—Hupfeld's standard commentary on the Psalms. But his master-work hitherto has been his *Lehrbuch der Hebräischen Archäologie* (1894), which by its lucid and comprehensive treatment of both the secular and the religious antiquities of Israel, supplied a widely-

felt need, and is invaluable to all serious students of the Old Testament.

The present commentary on the Minor Prophets forms the most recent addition to the *Handkommentar zum alten Testament*, edited by Professor Nowack himself, the same series to which, for instance, Duhm's *Isaiah* and Budde's *Job* also belong. At the top of the page is given the editor's own translation of the Hebrew text ; underneath stand the notes, critical and exegetical. The book of each prophet is preceded by an introduction, explaining its historical and theological significance, and discussing critical questions connected with its authorship or date. The Minor Prophets present many problems and many difficulties—some textual, others exegetical, others historical. The reader who uses Professor Nowack's volume will find all these stated and discussed with perfect fairness and moderation of statement, with lucidity and completeness, and never at immoderate length (witness, for example, the treatment of the question of Hosea's marriage, pp. 27-30). The notes especially are models of terse and exact exegesis. The book will be eminently serviceable to students. The last systematic commentary on these prophets, written upon critical lines, was that of Hitzig, published in 1863 (for Steiner's revision of this, published in