

Return to [Journal Index Menu](#) | Go to [Main Menu](#)

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A Voice from the Past: GRACE REIGNS¹

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"The Gospel of the glory of the blessed God!"³

"Please, show me Your glory," was the prayer of Moses; and God answered, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."⁴ God's highest glory displays itself in sovereign grace, therefore it is that the Gospel of His grace is the Gospel of His glory.

Let us take heed then that we preach grace. *He who preaches a mixed gospel robs God of His glory, and the sinner of his hope.*⁵ They for whom these pages are intended, need not be told that salvation is only by the blood; but many there are who preach the blood of Christ, without ever rising to the truth of grace. Dispensational truth, as it is commonly called, is deliberately rejected by not a few; and yet without understanding the change the death of Christ has made in God's relationships with men, grace cannot be apprehended.

It is not that God can ever change, or that the righteous ground of blessing can ever alter, but that the standard of man's responsibility depends on the measure and character of the revelation God has given of Himself. God's judgments are according to pure equity. They must have strange thoughts of Him who think it could be otherwise. In the Epistle to the Romans we have the great principle of His dealings with mankind. "[He] will render to each one according to his deeds; eternal life to those who by patience

continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God."⁶

But is the standard of well-doing the same for all? Shall the same fruit be looked for from the wild olive as from the cultured tree? from the mountain side, in its native barrenness, as from the vineyard on the fruitful hill? Far from it. The first two chapters of the Epistle to the Romans are unmistakable in this respect. The Gentile will be judged according to the light of nature and of conscience, neglected and resisted; the Jew, by the revelation of God entrusted to him. St. Paul's sermon in Athens is no less clear as regards the condition of the heathen. As he said at Lystra,⁷ they were not left without a witness, in that God did good, and gave rain and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness. By such things, he declares again in another place,⁸ God's eternal power and Godhead are clearly seen, so that they are without excuse. And so here,⁹ God left the heathen to themselves, not that they should forget Him, but that they should seek Him, even though it were in utter darkness, so that they should need to grope for Him—"to feel after Him, and find Him." And, though there was ignorance of God, He could wink at the ignorance and give blessing notwithstanding, for "He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."¹⁰ Moreover, this is still the case of all whom the witness of the Holy Ghost has not yet reached. If it be asked whether any have, in fact, been saved thus, I turn from the question, though I have no doubt as to the answer.¹¹ There is no profit in speculations about the fate of the heathen; their judgment is with God. But there is profit and blessing untold in searching into His ways and thoughts towards men, that we may be brought in adoration to exclaim, "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"¹²

But to resume: "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness."¹³ And the change

depends on this, that God has now revealed Himself in Christ, and therefore, ignorance of Him is a sin that shuts men up to judgment. See the Lord's sad utterance in John 15:24, as a kindred truth. Indeed, the whole Gospel of St. John is a commentary on it. Darkness had reigned, but God did not hold men accountable for darkness; it was their misfortune, not their fault. But He did hold them accountable to value and obey the little light they had, "the candle set up within them," and the stars above their head—those gleams of heavenly light, which, though they failed to illumine the way, might at least suffice to direct their course. But now, a new era dawned upon the world, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."¹⁴ The Light had entered in; the darkness was past, the true Light was shining. To turn now to conscience or to law, was like men who, with the sun in the zenith, nurse their scanty rushlight, with shutters barred and curtains drawn; like men who cast their anchor because the daylight has eclipsed the stars. The principles of God's dealings was the same, but the measure of man's conduct was entirely changed. It was no longer a question of conscience or of law, but of the Only-begotten in their midst. It was no quirk or quibble, but the solemn, earnest truth, by which the blessed Lord Himself replied to the inquiry, "'What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?' Jesus answered and said to them, '*This* is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.'¹⁵ The question was a right one, and the answer enforced the same unchanging principle, that the light they had was the measure of their responsibility. The same great truth is no less plainly stated in the Nicodemus sermon.¹⁶ This was the condemnation, not that men's deeds were evil, though for these too there shall be wrath in the day of wrath, but that, because their deeds were evil, they had brought on themselves a still direr doom; light had come into the world, but they had turned from it and *loved* the darkness.¹⁷

But this is not all; even yet, the reign of grace had not begun. Grace was there truly, for "grace came by Jesus Christ,"¹⁸ but, like Himself, it was in humiliation; it had yet to be enthroned. Grace was there. No adverse principle came in to influence His ways and words; but though pure and unmixed, as it must ever be, it was restrained. He had a baptism to be baptized with, and how He was distressed till it was accomplished!¹⁹ While there was a single claim outstanding, a single tie unbroken, grace was hindered,

though it could not be alloyed.

But now was about to come the world's great crisis—the most stupendous event in the history of man, the only event in the history of God! He had laid aside His glory, and come down into the scene. At His own door²⁰ He had stood and knocked, but only to find it shut in His face. Turning thence, He had wandered an outcast into the world His power had made, but wandered there unknown. "His own did not receive Him;"²¹ "the world did not know Him."²² As He had laid aside His glory, He now restrained His power, and yielded Himself to their guilty will. In return for pity, He earned but scorn. Sowing kindnesses and benefits with a lavish hand, He reaped but cruelty and outrage. Manifesting grace, He was given up to impious law without show of mercy or pretence of justice. Unfolding the boundless love of the mighty heart of God, He gained no response but bitterest hate from the hearts of men.

The Son of God has died by the hands of men! This astounding fact is the moral center of all things. A by-gone eternity knew no other future:²³ an eternity to come shall know no other past. That death was this world's crisis.²⁴ For long ages, despite conscience outraged, the light of nature quenched, law broken, promises despised, and prophets cast out and slain, the world had been on terms with God.²⁵ But now a mighty change ensued. Once for all, the world had taken sides. In the midst stood that cross in its lonely majesty: God on one side, with averted face; on the other, Satan, exulting in his triumph. The world took sides with Satan: "[His] precious life [was in] the power of the dog,"²⁶ and there was none to help, none to pity.

There, we see every claim which the creature had on God forever forfeited, every tie forever broken. Promises there had been, and covenants; but Christ was to be the fulfiller of them all. If a single blessing now descends on the ancient people of His choice, it must come to them in grace.²⁷ Life, and breath, and fruitful seasons freely given, had testified of the great Giver's hand, and declared His goodness; but if "seedtime, and harvest, and the changing year, come on in sweet succession" still, in a world bloodstained by the murder of the Son, it is no longer now to creation claims we owe it, nor yet to Noah's covenant,²⁸ but wholly to the grace of God in Christ.

In proof of this I might cite prophecies and parables, and appeal to the great principles of God that are the basis of Gospel doctrine, as above both parable and prophecy. Nay, I might leave it to men themselves, as Christ did, to decide between themselves and God. But I rather turn again to that solemn utterance of the Lord, in view of His lifting up upon the tree: "Now is the judgment of this world."²⁹

"[These things the] angels desire to look into."³⁰ And if angels were our judges, what would be our doom! For ages they had both witnessed and ministered the goodness of God to men. But yesterday the heavens had rung with their songs of praise, as they heralded the Savior's birth in Bethlehem: "On earth peace, goodwill toward men."³¹ Goodwill! And this was what had come of it! Peace! And this was what men turned it to! What thoughts were theirs as, terror-struck, they beheld that scene on Calvary! Crucified amid heartless jeers, and cruel taunts, and shouts of mingled hate and triumph! Buried in silence and by stealth; buried in sorrow, but in silence. He who hears in secret, heard the stifled cry from the broken hearts of Mary and the rest, and the smothered sobs that tore the breasts of strong men bowed with grief—the last sad tribute of love from the little flock now scattered. But as for the world, no man's lamentation, no woman's wail was heard! They had cried, "Away with Him, away with Him!"³² and now they had made good their cry: the world was rid of Him, and that was all they wanted.

Angels were witnesses to these things. They pondered the awful mystery of those hours when death held fast the Prince of Life. The forty days wherein He lingered in the scenes of His rejection and His death—was it not to make provision for the little company that owned His name, to gather them into some ark of refuge from the judgment-fire, so soon to engulf this ruined world? And now, the gates lift up their heads, the everlasting doors are lifted up, and with all the majesty of God, the King of Glory enters in.³³ The Crucified of Calvary has come to fill the vacant throne, the Nazarene has been proclaimed the Lord of Hosts!

But, mystery on mystery! The greatest mystery of all is now the mystery of grace. *That throne is vacant still.* Those gates and doors that lifted up their heads for Him are standing open wide. Judgment waits. That sea of fire that

one day shall close in upon this world to wipe out its memory forever, is tided back by the word of Him who sits upon the Father's throne in grace. When the Son of Man returns for judgment, "*then* He will sit on the throne of His glory."³⁴ When that day comes, how terrible shall be the judgment! Half measures are impossible in view of the cross of Christ. The day is past when God could plead with men about their *sins*.³⁵ The controversy now is not about a broken law, but a rejected Christ. If judgment, therefore, be the sinner's portion, it must be measured by God's estimate of the murder of His Son; a cup of vengeance, brimful, unmixed, from the treading of the "winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God."³⁶

But if grace be on the throne, what limits can be set to it? If that sin committed upon Calvary has not shut the door of mercy, all other sins together shall not avail to close it. If God can bless in spite of the death of Christ, who may not be blest? Innocence lost, conscience disobeyed and stifled, covenants and promises despised and forfeited, law trampled under foot, prophets persecuted, and last and unutterably terrible, the Only-begotten slain. And yet there is mercy still! What a Gospel that would be!

But "the gospel of the glory of the blessed God" is something infinitely higher still. *It is not that Calvary has failed to quench the love of God to men, but that it is the proof and measure of that love. Not that the death of Christ has failed to shut heaven against the sinner, but that heaven is open to the sinner by virtue of that death.*³⁷ The everlasting doors that lifted up their heads for Him are open for the guiltiest of Adam's race, and the blood by which the Lord of glory entered there is their title to approach. The way to heaven is as free as the way to hell. In hell there is an accuser, but in heaven there is no condemner. The only being in the universe of God who has a right to judge the sinner is exalted to be a Savior now.³⁸ Amid the wonders and terrors of that throne, He is a Savior, and He is sitting there in grace. The Savior shall yet become the Judge; but judgment waits on grace. Sin has reigned, and death can boast its victories: shall grace not have its triumphs too? As surely as the sin of man brought death, the grace of God shall bring eternal life to every sinner who believes. *One* sin brought death, but grace masters *all* sin. If sin abounded, grace abounds far more. Grace is conqueror. GRACE REIGNS. Not at the expense of righteousness, but in virtue

of it. Not that righteousness requires the sinner's death, and yet grace has intervened to give him life. Righteousness itself has set grace upon the throne in order that the sinner might have life: "That as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."³⁹ Such is the triumph of the cross. It has made it possible for God to bless us in perfect harmony with everything He is, and everything He has ever declared Himself to be; and in spite of all that we are, and all that He has ever said we ought to be.

I have already referred to St. Paul's allusion to the ancient military triumphs, when writing to the Corinthians.⁴⁰ The word there used occurs again in his Epistle to the Colossians. Having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, "leading them in triumph in Him."⁴¹ In the hour of His weakness, our enemies became His own, and fastened upon Him to drag Him down to death; but, leading captivity captive, He chained them to the chariot-wheels of His triumph, and made a public show of them. Just as Israel stood on the wilderness side of the sea, and saw Pharaoh and his hosts in death upon the shore, it is ours to gaze upon the triumphs of the cross. God there has mastered sin, abolished death, and destroyed him who had the power of death.

God has become our Savior. Our trust is not in His mercy, but in Himself. Not in divine attributes, but in the living God. "GOD is for us;" the Father is for us; the Son is for us; the Holy Spirit is for us. It is God who justifies; it is Christ that died; and the Holy Spirit has come down to be a witness to us of the work of Christ, and of the place that work has given us as sons in the Father's house.

"Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; for Yah, the Lord, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation."⁴²

Rejoice, rejoice, my soul,
Rejoice in sin forgiven;
The blood of Christ hath made thee
whole,
For thee His life was given.

For thee His blood was shed,

On Him thy sins were laid;
 To bear thy guilt He bowed His head,
 And now thy peace is mine.

Rejoice in peace made sure,
 No judgment now for thee;
 Thy conscience purged, thy life secure,
 More safe thou cannot be.

Thy Savior is the Lord,
 Who died to set thee free;
 Thy trust is in His faithful word,
 He liveth now for thee.

Rejoice in joys to come,
 The hope of glory near;
 He'll soon return to take thee home,
 No cause for thee to fear!

Now, by the Spirit sealed,
 Rejoice in God the Lord;
 The mighty God is now thy shield,
 And He thy great reward.

Thy song of triumph raise;
 Exult with heart and voice;
 Oh shout aloud His glorious praise!
 Rejoice, my soul, rejoice!⁴³

Footnotes

¹ This article is Chapter II, 8-19, of *The Gospel and Its Ministry*. The original chapter title, simply "Grace," has been made more specific in light of Sir Robert's words in all capitals on p. (?).

² Colorful and competent barrister, writer, and lay preacher Sir Robert Anderson (1841-1918) deserves to be better known among Bible Christians. Born of devout parents in Dublin, he was educated there at Trinity College. He was skillful in dealing with Irish and Irish-American plots against the British government. Though he retired from the Home Office in 1877, he was called back to service in 1880. At

Scotland Yard, In 1888, the year of the notorious "Jack the Ripper" murders in gaslit London, he became head of the C.I.D. (Criminal Investigation Department). One modern British TV special even suggested Sir Robert as a possible "Ripper" suspect! In light of his life and career, this shows the depths to which anti-Christian bias in the Western media can sink. Anderson preached widely for 50 years in churches and Gospel Halls, and was associated with many Christian societies, such as the Mildmay Conferences, the Evangelical Alliance, and the Prophecy Investigation Society. He was a staunch conservative, and an enemy of "higher criticism." Such classics as *The Coming Prince*, *Daniel in the Critics' Den*, and *The Gospel and Its Ministry* are the products of his pen. Several of Sir Robert's books are still in print, and all are worth procuring. Ed.

³ First Timothy 1:11; *not* "the glorious gospel." (Sir Robert's preferred translation [ERV, 1885] is more literal, but the traditional is not wrong. Elsewhere we have replaced the ERV by the NKJV [1982] for today's readers. Ed.)

⁴ Exodus 33:18-19.

⁵ Italics supplied. Ed.

⁶ Romans 2:6-11; see also John 5:29. Editor's note: Romans 2:6ff. concern the impossibility of justification by works. Compare 2:13 and 4:5. In Romans 2 Paul is confronting the self-righteous legalist who thinks he will be justified by *hearing* the law. Yet Paul insists only a perfect *doer* of the law will be justified (2:13; cf. Gal 3:10). Only by faith in Christ can the ungodly be justified (Rom 4:5).

⁷ Acts 14:8-18.

⁸ Romans 1:20.

⁹ Acts 17:22-31.

¹⁰ Hebrews 11:6.

¹¹ See Acts 10:34-35.

¹² Romans 11:33.

¹³ Acts 17:30-31a.

¹⁴ John 1:14.

¹⁵ John 6:28-29.

¹⁶ John 3:1-21.

¹⁷ John 3:19.

¹⁸ John 1:17.

¹⁹ Luke 12:50.

²⁰ John 1:11, "He came to His own" (eis ta idia hltJen) can scarcely be expressed in English. The French idiom is more apt: "Il est venu chez soi, et les siens ne l'ont point reçu."

²¹ John 1:11.

²² John 1:10.

²³ See 1 Pet 1:20; Rev 13:8.

²⁴ John 12:31, "Now is the judgment of this world" (Nyn krisis esti tou kosmou toutou).

²⁵ Editor's note: It is not clear what is meant here. Based on the next paragraph, it may refer to temporal blessings upon the saved and the lost. In any case, before the cross, as after it, the way was narrow that led to life and few found it (Matt 7:14). Those who did not believe in the coming Messiah for eternal life—which was most people—were lost.

²⁶ Psalms 22:20.

²⁷ Romans 11 leaves no room to question whether Israel will in fact be blessed hereafter; but even their national blessings they will owe to grace.

²⁸ Genesis 9:11-17.

²⁹ John 12:31.

³⁰ 1 Peter 1:12.

³¹ Luke 2:14.

³² John 19:15.

³³ Psalms 24:7-10.

³⁴ Matthew 25:31; cf. Rev 3:21.

³⁵ For the believer, the question of sin was settled at the cross; for the unbeliever, it is postponed to the day of judgment. "Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Pet 2:24). "The Lord knows how to . . . reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment" (2 Pet 2:9).

The distinction between judgment and punishment is important. The criminal is judged before he leaves the courthouse for the prison, but his punishment has yet to come—it is a consequence of judgment, not a part of it. All unbelievers are precisely on a level as regards judgment. "He who believes in Him is not condemned [the word is *krinw*], but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). Here the moral and the immoral, the religious and the profane, stand together, and share the same doom. But when judgment, in the sense of punishment (condemnation), is in question, there can be no equality; every sentence shall be apportioned to the guilt of each by the righteous and omniscient Judge. See Rev 20:13; Matt 12:36; Luke 12:47-48; Jude 15; and 2 Pet 2:9, already quoted.

³⁶ Revelation 19:15.

³⁷ Italics supplied. Ed.

³⁸ "The Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son" (John 5:22)! "I judge no one," the Lord says again in another place (8:15). "If anyone hears

My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world" (12:47). The day of grace must end before the day of judgment can begin. "The acceptable year of the Lord" must run its course before the advent of "the day of vengeance." Compare Isa 61: 1-2 with Luke 4: 16, 20, and notice the precise point at which the Lord "closed the book."

³⁹ Romans 5:21. Read from v 12. I have sought to epitomize the argument of the passage.

⁴⁰ This is in chapter I of Anderson's book. Ed.

⁴¹ Colossians 2:15.

⁴² Isaiah 12:2.

⁴³ Sir Robert gives no author for this poem nor does he label it "anonymous." Could it be that this Scotland Yard man, like some of the fictional detectives (Dorothy L. Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey and P. D. James's Adam Dalgliesh, for example), had a literary flair? Ed.

Return to [Journal Index Menu](#) | Go to [Main Menu](#)