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A TRIUMPHANT CERTAINTY

C.D. Cole

"And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness" (I John 5:19).

John makes great use of the verb "know". He speaks with certainty—there is no guess work with him. "If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him" (I John 2:29); "And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin" (I John 3:5); "And we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death" (I John 3:14); "And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us" (I John 3:24); "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments" (I John 5:2); "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not" (I John 5:18).

"And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness (the wicked one)." Here we have the human race divided into two groups. There are those who are of God, and there are those who lie in the wicked one. Those who are of God are variously described. They are said to be born again. They are called believers in Christ. They do righteousness. They are kept by Jesus Christ. In some sense they do not sin. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (I John 3:9); "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not" (I John 5:18).

The second group is called the whole world. It is obvious this does not mean every person in the world, because those who are of God are people in the world. This group lies in the wicked one—they are of the devil. They do not love God and do not know God. Some of them had joined the believers but went out from them because they were not of them.

2. Saved people belong to God as the Author of their moral and spiritual life. Lost people have physical life, but considered as moral beings, they are dead in trespasses and sins. The people of God have a kind of life that is everlasting. They have a life that cannot be forfeited, or thrown away. We speak of men throwing away their lives, but the believer cannot throw away his life in the sense of losing salvation. The believer cannot be robbed of his life, for his life is in the Father's hand and no one can pluck him out of the Father's hand.

3. Evidences that we are of God. This is most important. How do we know we are of God? How can we afford to say that we know we are of God? This knowledge is faith knowledge—knowledge based upon the Word of God. It is faith built upon facts:

(1) We know that the Son of God has come. He came to take away our sins. He takes away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. We are not looking for any other Saviour; Christ is our one and only hope. "For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (II Tim. 1:12).

(2) We know that he has given us an understanding. "And we know that the son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is

Let us now examine each group more carefully and prayerfully:

THE GROUP THAT BELONGS TO GOD

1. This group belongs to God in a special and peculiar sense. In one sense every individual belongs to God. God is the Creator and Owner and Judge of all. In God everybody lives and moves and has his being. But our text does not speak of God as Creator, Owner, and Judge, but of God as Saviour. Everybody does not have a Divine Saviour. Our text speaks of spiritual parentage. This group belongs to God as a child belongs to its father.

true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life" (I John 5:20). We do not naturally understand saving truths. "Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures" (Luke 24:45); "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (I Cor. 2:14); "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (II Cor. 4:3,4).

Those who are of God have a saving knowledge of the gospel. They did not get this knowledge from any human teacher. They were taught of God. "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me" (John 6:45). We are taught to believe just like we are taught to love. "But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another" (I Thess. 4:9). Spiritual and saving truths have to be spiritually understood, and they cannot be spiritually understood apart from spiritual teaching and this spiritual teaching is done by the Holy Spirit.

A woman once remarked that she was going to hell and that she was going to have a good time while she could.

THE WHOLE WORLD LIETH IN THE WICKED ONE

1. What is meant by the whole world? It means human society in its original, fallen condition, apart from the grace of God. Christ said to His disciples, "Ye are not of the world even as I am not of the world." "I have chosen you out of the world."

2. The condition of the world in the wicked one is a passive condition. The word "lieth" suggests this. Other translations emphasize this fact. RSV: "The whole world is in the power of the evil

one." The world is not in rebellion against Satan; it is taken captive by him at his will. The world is in rebellion against God but enthusiastically following Satan. Christ said, "Ye are of your father the devil and his lusts (desires) you are doing."

HOW WE GET OUT OF SATAN'S HANDS

1. We do not wrest ourselves out of his hands. This would be self-salvation. We do not get out because we are smarter than others. Salvation is no scholarship prize.

2. We are wrested from Satan's control by the power of God. "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds" (II Cor. 10:4). Let us consider this process or work of God in taking us away from Satan:

(1) It is a moral and not a physical process. The mind and heart and will are involved. These are the faculties operated upon in the delivery. The carnal mind hates God and must be changed to love God. The mind and heart is darkened by sin and must be made to understand.

The heart as the seat of affection must be dealt with. The prodigal had to come to himself. The heart loves the wrong things; it is deceitful and desperately wicked. God alone can give a new heart and a new mind.

The will as the seat of choice makes the wrong choice. But in conversion, God works in us both to will and to do of his good will.

CONCLUSION

These truths ought to have a twofold effect on us as Christians.

1. They ought to humble us. We are not self-made, but grace-made. We did not make ourselves to differ from others. By the grace of God we are what we are as Christians. We are saved from the guilt of sin on the record of Christ, and we are saved from the darkness of sin by the Holy Spirit who hath shined in our hearts to give us the truth of the Gospel.

2. They ought to make us thankful. Humility and gratitude are twin graces.

3. They ought to make us hopeful. If we are of God, we shall one day be with God and like Christ. If we have been called and justified, we may be sure we shall be glorified. He that hath begun a good work shall perform it until the day of Christ. There are no abandoned projects in the field of grace.

4. They ought to challenge us—challenge us to make our calling and election sure.



FRUSTRATING THE GRACE OF GOD

"I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain." Galatians 2:21.

"For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ." Jude 4.

These two texts point to two dangers-- dangers from opposite directions. There is danger of frustrating grace and there is danger of turning grace into lasciviousness. One is the danger of setting grace aside as if not needed; the other is to abuse it by using it in justification of a life of revelry and lustful practices. The one is the danger of Armenianism, a system of salvation by human works; the other is from Antinomianism, a system that denies responsibility by teaching that the sinner may be saved by grace and then wallow in the mire of sin. The genuine child of God wishes to steer clear of both rocks as he sails the sea of life.

FRUSTRATING GRACE

1. What does it mean? It means to set aside grace and make salvation rest upon human merit and goodness. It makes salvation something that the sinner earns in whole or in part. "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt." Romans 4:4. Men frustrate grace by thinking and teaching that men must keep the law of God to be saved. Paul said he did not do that. "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Romans 4:5.

2. Men frustrate grace by trying to become righteous by the deeds of the law. Theoretically, there are two ways for the sinner to become righteous before the law of God. One way is for him to keep the law of God. This way has been closed for every man, for all have broken the law. Suppose the sinner should say, "I want to become righteous by keeping the law." The law puts on its spectacles and says, "Were you born holy, or did you start right?" That question knocks him at the start, for not a man of us started right (Psalms 51:5 says, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.")—we were born with a sinful nature and as soon as we were able to know right from wrong, we did that which was wrong. We followed the bend of our depraved nature. Somebody wants to argue, so we waive the question of whether we started right or not; and, we ask the question whether or not we can perfectly keep the law from now on. If we say, "Yes," then I ask what part of your life is absolutely perfect? Remember one sin is enough to damn us. To be guilty in one point, is to be guilty of breaking the law. Theoretically, the man who keeps the law is righteous before God; but, since all have sinned, then none can be saved that way.

Another way to become righteous is to have the righteousness of Christ credited to our account. This is the only way possible we can become righteous—to be clothed in the righteousness of Christ. Righteousness is based upon obedience and Christ was obedient unto death. Christ didn't need this righteousness for Himself—he was God and under no law—so His obedience and righteousness were for people who were unrighteous. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." Romans 5:19. This righteousness becomes the sinner's by faith—he cannot get it any other way. "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." Romans 10:4.

3. If we could become righteous by our own works, then Christ would have died in vain. This is one reason why I hate self-righteousness so much—it convicts Christ of doing a vain and foolish thing. It makes his death a piece of consummate folly.

To illustrate: B. H. Carroll used to say that when he found a perfectly hardened sinner who thought he could stand on his own record, he took him to Mt. Sinai where he could see the smoke and hear the thunder and let the hell-scare get him. When the hell-scare got him, he would listen to the Gospel.

TURNING THE GRACE OF GOD INTO LASCIVIOUSNESS

What does this mean? It does not mean polluting the principle of grace. It means the doctrine of grace—the teachings about grace—is to teach and behave as though a man could be saved by grace and then practice a life of sin—give reins to his fleshly lusts, and excuse himself on the ground that he is under grace.

The man who is under grace also has grace in his heart and he cannot love sin. The man of grace is not perfect—he does do wrong, but he hates the wrong he does and hates himself for doing it and sorrows over it. And the grace of God in him will not allow him to practice a life of sin—he does not do one tenth as much wrong as he would do without the grace of God.

Men are turning the grace of God into lasciviousness when they give themselves to a life of pleasure, forgetful of Christ and his cause, and do not sorrow and repent.

C. D. COLE

A Child's Worth

We have clocks to tell the time of day

And scales to tell the weight of hay;

But what rule would you employ

To tell the worth of a girl or boy?

Measures there are for silver and gold,

By carats the worth of diamonds are told;

But there is no measure on all the earth

To tell what a boy or girl is worth.

Salvation By Works--A Criminal Doctrine

C. D. COLE

"I do not frustrate the grace of God; for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain." Galatians 2:21.

The idea of salvation by works is a persistent doctrine. It matters not how often it is refuted; it continues to assert itself again and again. It has more lives than the proverbial cat of nine lives. The apostle Paul launched attack after attack upon it, but he was never able to drive it out of the minds of men. To him it was another gospel which is not another. In spite of all the weapons that are used against this doctrine, it is still the popular doctrine.

Salvation by works is a plausible doctrine. To the superficial thinker it seems most reasonable, in fact, the opposite seems dangerous. It is an axiom with many that a good man will go to heaven and a bad man will go to hell.

Salvation by works is natural to fallen humanity. It is the very essence of all false religions. It is the doctrine of every non-Christian religion, as well as of many that wear the name of Christ. Go where you may the natural religion of fallen man is salvation by his own merits. An old divine has well said, "Every man is born a heretic at this point." It is the belief of every man until God opens his eyes to see the truth. "Self-salvation, either by his personal worthiness, or by his repentance, or by his resolves, is a hope ingrained in human nature, and very hard to remove." (C.H.S.)

Salvation by works is the result of ignorance. Men are ignorant of the law of God; they are ignorant of themselves. Otherwise they could not believe such a doctrine. "Brethren my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted

themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." Romans 10:1-4.

Salvation by works is a criminal doctrine. Paul charges the man who holds to it with two crimes. It frustrates the grace of God, and makes Christ to have died in vain.

1. It frustrates the grace of God. The word "frustrate" means to make void or needless. It is clear that if a man is saved by works, he does not need the grace of God. Grace is for lawbreakers and not for law-keepers. Grace is a superfluity where merit can be proved. A man who can go into court with a clear case, knowing that he is innocent does not ask for mercy, but for justice. "Give me justice," he says. "Give me my rights," he demands. It is only when he feels that he is guilty that he puts in a plea for mercy. No lawyer who believes the innocence of his client can be proven, asks him to throw himself on the mercy of the court. Justice is all that an innocent man needs; mercy is the need of the sinner. The man who believes in salvation by works denies the need of grace and mercy.

There are some, who, while not denying the need of grace altogether, make it only a secondary thing. This is only a lower degree of the same crime. According to this theory, the man does the best he can, and the grace of God will make up the rest. This mixes grace and works in salvation, the very thing that the Bible says cannot be done. "And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work." Romans 11:6. You must have salvation wholly because you deserve it, or wholly on the ground of what Christ has done for you. On what ground do you hope for it? If you deserve it, then grace is frustrated, for it is not needed. If you do not deserve it, then you must have it on the ground of grace.

2. The second great crime charged against the man who holds to salvation by works, is that he makes Christ to have died in vain. This is plain enough. If salvation is the result of the good I do, then the death of Christ was not necessary. His suffering was wasted. It makes me mad; I get indignant when I hear a man talking about being saved by what he does.

The doctrine of salvation by works is a sin against all the fallen sons of Adam. If men cannot be saved except by their own works, what hope is left for any sinner? You shut the gates of mercy against mankind; you deny all hope of welcome to the returning prodigal; you deny all prospects of paradise to the dying thief.

It is a sin against the saints; they have no hope except in the blood of Christ. Saints, to be sure, are endeavoring to live holy lives, but their hope of heaven is not based upon their success in doing so; they have a better foundation, even the perfect obedience of Christ. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." Romans 5:19.

It is a sin against the saints in heaven. The doctrine of salvation by works would silence the hallelujahs of heaven. Up there they are singing, "Unto Him that loveth us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." This doctrine would criticize their singing and change it to some such ditty as this:

I didn't need Him;
I didn't need Him;
I lived without sin;
I died without sin.

"What Jesus did, and that alone,
Is faith's delightful plea;
It never deals with sinful self
Nor righteous self, in me."

"Thy works, not mine O Christ,
Speak gladness to this heart;
They tell me all is done;
They bid my fear depart."

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Pastor Al Gormley