

HOW FAR-REACHING WERE THE PRIVILEGES OF GRACE

By W. Edmund Smith

The gradual unfolding of God's eternal plan of salvation for mankind, from the first twilight gleams of revelation, down to the great climactic event of Pentecost, is a most profitable study for every child of God. We are all familiar with the three divisions of the entire scope of revelation designated the Dispensation of the Father, the Dispensation of the Son, and the Dispensation of the Holy Ghost, in which we see gradual progress towards that far-off divine event towards which the whole creation moved. All the promises made to Abraham, and even before his day; all the types and symbols, all the forms and ceremonies, and all the various sacrifices that belonged to the Mosaic ritual—all these had their fulfillment in Jesus the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world; and the outpouring of the Holy Ghost upon the Day of Pentecost changed completely the center of religion that had been in Jerusalem at the Temple, in which priestly prerogative and pomp held sway, to the inner sanctuary of the individual, by which he became the temple of the Holy Ghost, a habitation of God by the Spirit.

These preliminary observations so well known, lead me to ask, what were the spiritual privileges of the believer, not only prior to Pentecost, but long before that, even when the guilty pair were driven from the Garden, and began to propagate the race? There are those who maintain that it was impossible for anyone prior to Pentecost, to have a deep satisfactory experience of grace, by which their inner nature was perfectly adjusted to the will of God, and they quote, "the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of those things, can never, with those sacrifices they offered year by year, continually, make the comers thereunto perfect." Other passages might be quoted to prove that the blood of bulls and goats can never take away sin. Hence all in those earlier dispensations were compelled to grope in darkness; compelled to feed upon shadows that could have little or no substance; compelled to serve God with carnal unregenerated and unsanctified hearts.

Now, we must agree that such a position is true, if we are compelled to limit the working of God's grace to set times and places. I must humbly contend that God in His sovereign power never thus limited himself, but that He honored true repentance, faith, consecration, and obedience in the earliest days; and such a worshipper was able to break through the limitations of forms and ceremonies, to touch God with a living faith that made grace operative in his heart, which enabled him to worship God in spirit and in truth and in the beauty of holiness. Jesus was the Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world, and some souls according to their fidelity to light given, were led into a marvelous experience of grace, while the rank and file lived on a far lower level. The Holy Ghost was in the world then operating on these trusting hearts, but could not come in such a broad sweeping revolutionary power until the plan of salvation had been fully consummated.

Some may ask, how can you prove such a position to be scriptural? I think I can prove it by inferential argument. I can prove it so

conclusively that to take any other attitude would be to completely destroy many of the sermons that brethren, who argue to the contrary, have preached.

First: I hear the preacher say, "When Adam fell the entire race fell in him. 'In Adam's fall we sinned all.' The first child of Adam was born with a corrupt nature—Abel as well as Cain."

Secondly: It was impossible then and is impossible now for a wholly corrupt heart to worship God acceptably, or to live a life pleasing to God. The current cannot rise higher than the fountain head. Or the outward life cannot in the sight of God be better than the inner condition. Men do not gather figs of thistles. While we have no record of crises in the experience of Abel, yet, as he was born under the law of sin and death, the plain inference is that by faith he reached God and grace became wonderfully operative in his heart, by which he was enabled to offer the better sacrifice and to have the testimony that he pleased God.

Again, every holiness preacher, especially, loves to take Enoch as a wonderful example of heart holiness and practical godliness. He "walked with God." How can two walk together unless they be agreed, i. e., unless there be an inner harmony of spirit? We are told that Enoch maintained this relationship and experience for three hundred years, and was finally translated that he should not see death, for before his translation he had this testimony that he pleased God. God took him into the glory world. With an unregenerated and unsanctified nature? No indeed! Nothing unholy could enter heaven. Did God regenerate and sanctify him on the way up? Well, if He could do it then why could He not have done it before? The concrete argument that Enoch was fit for heaven before his translation, is in the fact that he "walked with God."

Again: Let us hear what the psalmist says. Is it not remarkable that even today, the Psalms of David is a favorite feeding ground for those of the deepest spiritual experience! David was feeding on more than shadows when he shouted, "Thou satisfieth the longing soul and fillest the hungry soul with goodness." Again: "Bless the Lord oh my soul and all that is within me bless His holy name; who forgiveth all thine iniquities and who healeth all thy diseases." More, many more passages of the same spirit and import could be quoted to prove that David's prayer—Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow, had been answered.

But I want to give a concrete example, corroborating by personal testimony, and the record of a spiritual crisis. Isaiah was a court preacher, eloquent and popular. A man of God but somewhat under the domination of the great King Uzziah who influenced his preaching. But the king died and then Isaiah saw the vanity of earthly glory and pomp; He had a new revelation of the holiness of God and thereby saw his need of the cleansing power. He confessed his need and humbled his soul; the fire fell and the Spirit witnessed that the work had been done. Who can doubt that this was the entire sanctification of the prophet? Here we have the second work of grace recorded for our instruction in the Old Testament.

And we might go on and tell of all the holy men who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. But I think I have written enough

to prove that even back in Abel's time God answered the prayer of faith. But does it not say in Hebrews, that they without us should not be made perfect? That word perfect has a variety of meanings and can be juggled with terribly when preachers want to avoid an issue. Of course those who were regenerated and sanctified wholly in those far off days were not ethically perfect, or doctrinally perfect as we can be today. Many things God overlooked then, but commands us today to repent. Jacob after his wonderful experience at Jabbok still kept his two wives, and Abraham had other women. But such ethical standards did not hinder them from having perfectly loyal hearts to God, who reserved better things for us in the unfolding of his plan for the more general diffusion of grace.

To sum it up, I think we must conclude that God could not limit the working of his almighty power to the confines of dispensation. He broke through all those limitations to answer the cry of the seeking soul, to regenerate and sanctify wholly; to make that soul meet for the master's use. This He did even for good old Job, who was outside the covenant made with Abraham, and who probably lived before Abraham's day.

I would humbly say to the brethren who would controvert my position that I am sure they must burn up many of their most effective holiness sermons, that follow along the lines I have indicated. Thank God for our glorious privileges today! But as I walk in the way of holiness, I can see the footprints not only of Jesus, but of Abel, Enoch, Abraham and all those Old Testament worthies, who walked by faith and whose faith was answered by a glorious revelation to their roborated by personal testimony, and the of Divine grace—"the expulsive power of a new affection."

Quarterly Meeting

The Quarterly Meeting of District No. 3 convened with the church at North Head, Grand Manan, March 1st-4th.

The opening message was brought by Rev. S. G. Hilyard, from James 1:27. His subject was "Pure Religion."

Friday evening Rev. H. E. Mullen delivered an inspiring message from 1 Kings 6:7.

The business session was held on Saturday afternoon at 2.30, with the vice-president, Rev. S. G. Hilyard, in the chair.

Roll call found the following ministers and delegates present: Revs. S. G. Hilyard, H. E. Mullen, J. A. Owens, G. R. Symonds and Lic. R. L. Sabine. Delegates—Beals, Brother Clayton Alley; Calais, Azelia Cottrell and Mrs. R. L. Sabine; Crawford, Miss Nina Moraisey; Wood Island, Mrs. William Anderson; Seal Cove, Mrs. Leavitt Cronk and Scott Ingersoll; North Head, Mrs. Nathaniel Beal and Mrs. Ralph Beal.

An invitation from the Seal Cove Church for the June Quarterly was accepted.

Resolved a letter of sympathy be sent to the family of the late Eugene Wilcox, of Wood Island.

Resolved that a vote of thanks be extended the North Head Church for their kind entertainment.

On Saturday evening Lic. Ralph L. Sabine brought the message from Acts 24:25.

On Sunday morning the Love Feast was in charge of Brother Clayton Alley, who

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