

~Other Speakers M-R: Thomas Reade:

19. THE SUPERIORITY OF GRACES TO GIFTS

"But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way." 1 Cor. 12:31

"Let love be your highest goal." 1 Cor. 14:1

One man may have great gifts while destitute of saving grace. Another may have great grace, and yet possess few gifts. Which of the two is the most to be desired? The enlightened Christian who knows himself, and who has experienced the power of the Gospel, will not be long in determining. Supernatural gifts, such as "working of miracles," "speaking with tongues," "discerning of spirits," etc., which were bestowed upon some of the first Christians; and a special knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, an eloquence in conveying scriptural truths, and an aptitude to acquire languages which some Christians now possess, only tend to puff up and exalt the gifted individuals, if unaccompanied with the graces of humility, self-denial, and love. Hence gifts may be exercised by people who never will enjoy the glories of heaven.

The Scriptures are clear on this point. "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied (or preached) in your name? and in your name have cast out devils? and in your name have done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, you that work iniquity."

"When Jesus had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease." Among this number was "Judas Iscariot, who later betrayed him." But what did our Lord say of Judas? "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" And what did Peter declare concerning him at the election of another apostle to fill his office? "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which of these two you have chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place." And what place that was, we learn by implication from our blessed Lord. "For I, the Son of Man, must die, as the Scriptures declared long ago. But how terrible it will be for my betrayer. Far better for him if he had never been born!" These words would never have been uttered had Judas' own place been the place where the penitent thief on the cross was to meet Jesus; "Today shall you be with me in Paradise." Judas, like Lot's wife, stands as a monument of God's wrath, and as a warning against false profession.

Grace, however humble be its possessor, though a poor diseased Lazarus, will never be rejected. Grace is the sterling coin of the kingdom, bearing the image of the Sovereign King. When knowledge shall vanish away, when tongues shall cease, and miracles are no longer needed, grace will shine with increased splendor, for glory is but grace perfected. The grace of faith in Christ, love to his name, devotedness to God, activity in his service, self-denial, and spiritual-mindedness, will then receive the smiles of the Great Judge of the living and dead. Oh! that I may daily follow after love, without which all my doings are nothing worth.

Superior gifts make a man more known to the Christian world, and, by some, to be regarded as a kind of oracle. This distinction is highly gratifying to the natural heart; and the more gratifying it is to any one, the more dangerous it becomes to his soul, because spiritual pride is fostered, and self is exalted in the place of Jesus. The graces of the Spirit are of a more silent, unobtrusive nature; they tend to make a man low in his own eyes; they lead him into retirement and spiritual communion with God, and cause him to avoid rather than court the observation of mankind. From hence it is evident that all are not Israel who are of Israel, and that there is no necessary connection between gifts and graces.

The kingdom of God consists not of gifts and ceremonies, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. It is not the able talkers about religion who will be rewarded at the last day, but the humble walkers with Jesus. Many, who are now despised on account of their slender capacities and weak intellectual attainments, or regarded as half Christians, because they cannot win a debate against a witty infidel, or define some mysterious doctrine of Scripture; but whose lives are the most convincing arguments for the power and truth of the Gospel, whose hope is founded on Christ alone, who strenuously oppose all sin, and labor, through the Spirit, to perfect holiness in the fear of God, will receive the plaudit, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your Lord!"

While the gifted, but unsound professors of religion, will be frowned into hell. This, the Great Judge himself has declared; "Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Truly I say unto you, I know you not." "Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away." "Many that

are first shall be last; and the last shall be first." "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment."

It is very desirable to "covet earnestly the best gifts," to increase in wisdom and knowledge, to be able to speak acceptably to others about the things of God; but still, Peter places grace before knowledge; "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," for, adds Paul, "Knowledge puffs up, but love build up."

Lord, I humbly beseech you to give me grace to be faithful. Impart unto me this invaluable blessing experienced by the early Christians, when "great grace was on them all." May the grace of Christ dwell in my heart, destroying sin and the power thereof, and exciting me to childlike obedience to your will; may the light of Truth irradiate my path, and your Spirit guide me along the consecrated way, until I reach the heavenly world, where all is light, and life, and love forever.

"Follow after Love," -delightful exhortation; as if the Apostle had said- follow after happiness and glory; follow after that, which will form your blessedness in time and eternity. "God is love," and "every one that loves is born of God." Come, O my soul, and think upon redeeming love, until all your powers are lost in this ocean of grace, this infinity of mercy. What? did the Great Jehovah condescend to veil himself in human flesh to save rebellious worms from endless woe, and can I, for whom he lived, and bled, and died, feel no concern about my eternal state? no return to Him, of grateful and adoring praise? no hatred of those sins for which he suffered? no fear of hell? no longings after heaven?

Amazing hardness-dreadful insensibility! Lord, take away this heart of stone, and give me a heart of flesh, a heart susceptible of your mercies. Draw me with the cords of love, and bind my wayward affections to your Cross. Give me a weanedness from the world, that while my hands are diligently employed in the way of duty, my heart may be set on things above. Impart unto me a spiritual mind, a constant relish for heavenly employments. Let me live in the spirit of this petition; "May your will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." Create in me a new and contrite heart; a heart deeply convinced of its own depravity, earnestly seeking for pardon of all sin, through the precious blood of Jesus, and daily growing in holiness through the Spirit of His Grace.

Lord, increase my faith, that being united to Christ, I may become a living branch in the true Vine, a member of his mystical body, a sheep of his pasture, a child of his family, a partaker of the divine nature, an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ. Oh! how wonderful are the revelations of your love; how glorious are the privileges of your people. Lord increase my faith to lay hold on this hope set before me in the Gospel of your Son.

Give me, heavenly Father, I humbly beseech you, an earnest desire to do those things which you have commanded, to avoid whatever you have forbidden, and to obtain those blessings which you have promised to every true believer. Give me a single eye to your glory. May your glory be the end and aim of all my actions. Preserve me from all pride and vain-glory; and make me a little child in humility and simplicity, seeking your honor and glory above every other object in the world.

Fill my heart, O God, with gratitude, and my mouth with praise for all your mercy, grace, and love granted to one so vile and worthless. Oh! that I might every moment live for you, think on you, and speak for you; then would my heart be pure, and my conversation be always seasoned with grace, good to the use of edifying. Happy will that period be when all these obtrusive cares of life will have an end, and nothing will be found to interrupt the work of adoration through the ages of eternity. Come, blessed Spirit, prepare me for your abode of glory; wean my heart daily from this wicked world; impress the Savior's image on my soul, that when he shall appear, I may be like him, when I see him as he is.