

GOD'S GRACE AND OUR MISSION

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This morning I am concluding this present series on the doctrines of grace. But we never get away from these doctrines, do we, because, as I have said repeatedly, the doctrines of grace are the Gospel of grace. I have spent eighteen Sundays on these great truths, beginning, as I think most of you know, with the attributes of God, and then dealing with the doctrines themselves, and finally looking at some of the practical aspects of these doctrines. We have seen that the doctrines of grace are designed by God specifically for His glory. They do not leave any ground for any man to glory except in God, and in the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit. This is one reason that we know they are true. Any teaching which exalts man is not of God. We will be able to count our time in these doctrines well spent if we can say with the Psalmist, as he wrote in Psalm 115:1 (I would encourage you to commit that verse to memory), "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake."

Now the doctrines of grace support us in all that we are told to do in Scripture. In other words, they are not just pleasing truths that we delight to go over, but they have a direct and a very practical bearing upon our lives. They support us and encourage us in our obedience to God. The doctrines of grace show us not only why we need to be holy, but how we can be holy. The doctrines of grace encourage faith, daily faith, in the Lord. They will move our hearts to pray as never before. I think this is one way we can be sure that we have come to understand these great doctrines because instead of discouraging prayer, they encourage prayer. And they will give us a great burden to preach the Gospel in order that people might be saved. Serving the Lord Jesus Christ, when you come to understand the doctrines of grace, takes on new meaning and gives us new joy as we begin to see that God is absolutely sovereign in salvation and that He is faithfully working out His purposes which He established before the foundation of the world. Once the Lord has opened our eyes to understand what the grace of God really means, we can never go back to those man-made ways of seeking to serve God which have become so prominent in our day.

As I have been pointing out in this series, there are certain objections which are raised against the doctrines of grace. I have been seeking to deal with some of these in connection with the practical aspects of the doctrines. One I have already mentioned: It is that there are many who say that the doctrines of grace discourage prayer. I think that, as you talk to people who understand these Page
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doctrines, you will see that these doctrines have deepened and strengthened and encouraged their prayer life as never before. God is sovereignly working out His will and His purposes, and He has

given us the privilege of having a part in what He is doing by prayer. I sought to deal with that more specifically last Lord's day.

Another prominent area in which the doctrines of grace come under attack has to do with the subject of missions. Or, to state it another way, this morning I want to deal with the subject of evangelism. Somehow we have separated these two, haven't we? If we tell people about Jesus Christ here at home, that is evangelism. If you get on an airplane and go to another country to tell people about Jesus Christ, that is missions. But actually they are the same. Evangelism is our mission as far as the world is concerned. We cannot do the work of missions without evangelizing. Evangelizing means to preach the Gospel.

One of the biggest mistakes, it seems to me, that we have made in evangelizing the world is that we have overlooked the doctrines of grace. We have failed to take into account what the Lord has said about the human heart. We have failed to realize that God has a work which He is accomplishing, a work which was ordained from the foundation of the world, and that we are to fit into His plan--not ask Him, or expect Him, to fit into our plans. The work of evangelizing the world is God's work. There is nothing that I can see in the Word of God to indicate, as we are so often told, that we are sent out into the world to win just as many people to Christ as we possibly can. Obviously we want to see people turning to the Lord; but, when we understand the doctrines of grace, we see that we are sent out into the world knowing that God has a chosen people who are to be reached with the Gospel of His grace. When people think that the task of the church is just to go out and get as many as they possibly can, then the church resorts to many methods which have no foundation in the Word of God. They work in every possible way to get people to make some kind of a profession of faith. So the church of Jesus Christ is constantly looking for better methods of evangelism instead of seeking to fit into the work that God has planned from the foundation of the world. How many of the Lord's people in these days are really taking the Word of God itself to see how we are to do the work that God has called us to do? Nothing can be more exciting and challenging than for a child of God to have his eyes opened to what the Word of God says about this work of reaching people with the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. THE HOPELESSNESS OF THE TASK

Let me begin to look at the work of evangelism with you this morning by pointing out the hopelessness of the task. Every true Christian realizes that it is difficult to bring people to Jesus Christ. All of us have a natural hesitation, don't we, about talking to others about the Lord Jesus Christ. But have we realized how absolutely hopeless this task is if we are left to our methods and to our abilities to persuade people that they need the Lord? You say, "Why is it hopeless?" It is hopeless because (and we are going back now to think specifically of the first of these doctrines of grace) of the nature of man. This is why it is so extremely important, if we are going to be involved in seeking to bring the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to those who do not know Him, that we are acquainted with the Biblical doctrine of depravity--human depravity, man's total depravity. This means that man is dead in his sins. This means that he is

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incapable of understanding the Gospel. This means that he is at enmity with God. This means that he is in hopeless bondage to his sin and to Satan. Three times the Bible tells us (and the third of these is quoted from the other two references), "There is none that seeketh after God." You find that in Psalm 14, in Psalm 53, and in Romans 3:11. This being true--this is God's picture of the human heart--if we are left to our methods and if the work of evangelism or missions depends upon our ability to persuade people to trust Christ, we are defeated before we start. No work of evangelism can possibly succeed which fails to take into consideration the absolute, total, hopeless depravity of man. Once we understand this, then our hope of seeing people saved is not going to be in our methods. It is not going to be in ourselves, or in our ability to convince people of their need of

Christ. Our hope that people will be saved is going to be in the Lord, and that is where it should be.

Now our failure to recognize the nature of man and our tendency to depend upon our methods, which has become so important to us, explains why so many make professions of faith, but also why so few in comparison are really saved. We have gotten to the point where we take this as really the normal thing. If an evangelist says, for example, that perhaps one percent of the people who make professions of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ actually give evidence in the following days and months and years that there has been a spiritual change in their lives, we are inclined to be thankful for the one percent. Of course, we need to be rejoicing when anybody comes to know the Lord Jesus Christ, but why is it that more is not being said about the possibility that our methods might be wrong when so few really give evidence of the new birth? Our purpose is to get from people an acknowledgment, a confession, that they are trusting the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. And yet, again and again in Scripture we see that salvation is the work of God in the heart, and that God is the only One Who can accomplish this work. If it is to be done effectively, then it has to be done, not according to human methods, but it has to be done in accordance with the Word of God.

Now I want to point out in the time that we have this morning some very, very basic truths with regard to evangelism which I hope will provoke some thought with many of you and help us to understand how this wonderful work of telling people about the Lord Jesus Christ is to be done according to the Word of God. So let's think about the work of evangelism. I hope you will listen carefully and prayerfully, and that the Lord will impress upon all of our hearts this morning the truthfulness of what I want to point out to you from the Word of God.

II. THE WORK OF EVANGELISM

The first is this, and I am going back again to the doctrines of grace: God has an elect people. Election, contrary to what many people would tell you, is not a hindrance to evangelism. It is one of the greatest encouragements to evangelism that we have in the Word of God. God has sent us to reach a people, a specific people, whom He has appointed in every generation to be saved. This choice was made, as we have learned from examining this truth in Scripture, by God in eternity past. It was made on the basis of pure grace. One person is no more deserving of salvation than any other person. As the Word of God says in many places, we are saved by grace:

For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

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We have looked at a number of verses which teach that God has an elect people, but let me give you just two of these by way of review so that you can have it freshly in your mind this morning. 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14, where Paul said,

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul was quite evidently writing, not only to people who had professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but whose lives had given evidence of change. He mentioned the fact that they were not only called by the Gospel, but that the object of this call was ultimately to the obtaining of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. I do not believe that anybody who will face the Scriptures will be able to deny that this is the teaching of the Word of God.

Some time ago I heard one preacher say that election has nothing to do with salvation. I wrote him a letter and I reminded him of this verse. "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." The Apostle Paul very clearly indicated

here that the choice was unto salvation, and that God is the One Who is to be praised because of the salvation of those Thessalonian believers. So God has a people that He has chosen to be saved. God has a plan, and He has called us to have a part in the accomplishment of that work through the preaching of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, I want you to note also that the Word of God teaches that God has power to carry out His plan. This is one reason I began this series with several messages on the attributes of God, or the character of God. Present-day evangelism pictures God as pleading with men to let Him do what He wants to do. It is no wonder that when people are saved they enter into the Christian life with a weakened idea of the sovereignty of God and of the power of God. They have been given that picture. We present God as a weakling, not as the sovereign, omnipotent God that He really is.

To establish the fact that we have an almighty God, I want to take you again to the Word of God. And these are familiar passages of Scripture. I hope that the Lord will impress these words in a fresh way upon your heart.

Remember the words with which the Gospel of Matthew closes: Matthew 28:19, 20. Let me read those two verses before I read the eighteenth verse. He said to His disciples,

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.

We all know those verses, and we hear them repeated often. But it is interesting to see how the Lord began that statement, and how He ended it. In the beginning part of that statement which I did not read to you, Matthew wrote,

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power (this is the word authority) is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Then at the end our Lord said,
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And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (age). Amen. So that not only their authority for going, but their hope that as they went they would be able to reach people with the message of salvation, was because all authority in heaven and earth has been given to the Lord Jesus Christ. And He promised to be with them in their work unto the end of the age.

The other passage is in John 17. Right at the beginning of that high priestly prayer of the Lord Jesus, we read this:

These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.

Now listen:

As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life (not to all flesh, but) to as many as thou hast given him.

You see, if God had chosen to save all men, the Lord Jesus Christ was given authority over all flesh and He could have done just that. But the words of the Lord Jesus Christ specifically say that the Father has given Him power over all flesh so that He could give eternal life to as many as the Father was giving to Him. Who was the Father giving to the Son? The Father is giving to the Son those who have been appointed eternally to obtain salvation. This is not a work that is in doubt. There is no question about the accomplishment of this purpose. God is fully prepared to accomplish what He set out to do, and He has given all authority to the Lord Jesus Christ that this work might be accomplished. Can anyone read these words and then say that God cannot do what He planned to

do? Of course we have sections of Scripture where the people of God are pleading with people to listen to the message and turn to the Lord, but it is never because the Lord is too weak to do what He has planned to do.

Now there is a third point that I want you to see and I hope that this will be an encouragement to you. That has to do with our mission. What is our place in the evangelization of the world? This also is very, very clearly stated in the Word of God. Let me remind you again of some of the passages of Scripture which teach it because the Word gives us our authority for these things that have to do with God's purpose in the world. Mark 16:15 says, and these are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Then, when the Lord Jesus was with His disciples for the last time just prior to His ascension, you remember those very familiar words which He spoke, recorded for us at the beginning of the book of Acts:

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you:
and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea,
and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

As I think I have said before, this is like saying, ". . . both in Portland, and in Oregon, and in Washington, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." The child of God begins where he is--the church of the Lord Jesus Christ begins wherever it is--and there is to be a continually expanding ministry. Our responsibility in every generation is to carry the Gospel of Jesus Christ to every creature unto the uttermost part of the earth. We are responsible to see that every man, woman, and child in our generation hears the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is our mission.

But you may say, "Why, if God has only chosen some to be saved, are we to preach the Gospel to all people?"

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Let me give you three answers to that question, if I may.

First, we are to carry the Gospel to every creature because the Lord has told us to do this. I hope that we understand enough about obedience to the Lord to know that we obey not because we always understand, but we obey because of what the Lord has told us to do. If the Lord says go and preach the Gospel to every creature, then this is what we are to do. This is the command that was given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Secondly, we preach the Gospel to every creature because we do not know who the elect are. You might say to me, "Well, I would never have suspected that you would be one of the elect!" But I am! We cannot tell by looking at each other who the elect are. There are people living in the world today chosen of God, not yet saved, and I am sure that they are not aware of the fact that they themselves are chosen. We are not marked in some way. But we go to all, to reach those whom the Lord has appointed for salvation. There are going to be people from every tongue and tribe and nation gathered among the redeemed--a vast host which no person is going to be able to number. We go to all because we do not know who the elect are.

Thirdly, we go because it is true that "whosoever believeth in Him (in Christ) should not perish, but have everlasting life." Christ died specifically for His chosen ones, yet the death of Christ is sufficient for any and all who will believe. You and I can offer the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in a very meaningful way. It is not an empty offer. It is a sincere offer of salvation to all men. "Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). This is the message of salvation.

So our mission is not to save people, but to proclaim the Gospel, to tell people of the Lord Jesus Christ, to bear witness of Him. We need to be primarily concerned about our message and not our methods. God has commissioned us to go into all the world and preach the Gospel. If we were more

concerned about our message and less concerned about the methods that we might employ, then I am sure that we would see greater blessing.

So the Lord has commissioned us to carry this message of salvation to the uttermost part of the earth. The knowledge that God has a chosen people who are appointed for salvation that God is going to bring to himself is the greatest encouragement that we have that our evangelistic efforts can be fruitful. If it were just left up to ourselves and to our methods, it would be a hopeless task. But thank God we can be assured that the Lord is going to use His Word and bless the ministry of the Gospel as it goes to the uttermost part of the earth.

Now the last thing that I want to mention in this connection is the power of the Word of God.

If you have been attending Trinity Bible Church very long, you have heard many times about the sufficiency of the Word. In fact, if you were in Sunday School this morning, you heard references made to the sufficiency of the Word of God. Somehow the Church has gotten away from this. We have the idea that although we preach and teach the Word, we also need other things in addition to the Word of God in order to make it effective--music, programs, etc. That is the reason that we are always looking for new methods, and why we are interested in things that other Doctrines of Grace -- #18

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churches are doing. So often in our methods we get away from the Word of God itself. But it is very clear in Scripture that God empowers His Word when that Word is being used by the Spirit of God. It is not our methods that God has promised to bless, but our message--the proclamation of the Gospel. There is no sinner on the face of the earth who can withstand the power of the Word of God when it is being used by the Spirit of God. Let me say that again because I believe that this is a truth that we have lost sight of. There is no sinner on the face of the earth who can withstand the power of the Word of God when it is being used by the Spirit of God. Remember that one of the doctrines of grace has to do with the fact that God's grace is irresistible. God's grace is efficacious. God in His grace accomplishes what He has set out to do. God does not save people against their will, but He changes their will so that they want to be saved. What amazing power there is in the Word of God.

I am sure that some of you could say this morning, if you were talking about your own salvation, that someone gave you some verse or some portion of verse from the Word of God, perhaps in a sermon, or in conversation, or in a letter, or perhaps in some other way, and you were not able to shake that off. Therefore, we see that as we go to tell the message of salvation, the power of our message is to be seen in the fact that we are actually using the Word of God. Of all the things that I have had to say to you today in this service, the most important part is the Word of God that I have given to you. Let me give you a couple of verses again to support this.

In Hebrews, chapter 4, and verse 12, you find these words:

For the word of God is quick (an Old English word which means alive, living), and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit (the Word of God penetrates into the deepest recesses of the heart of man), and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

You see, if you are seeking to convince a person that he is a sinner and in need of the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, what are you to do? Argue with him about the things that he has done? NO! God has given us His Word. When we use His Word, and the Spirit of God is blessing His Word, the Word of God is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. The Word pierces the hearts of men, and, as I have said, there is not a sinner on the face of the earth who can withstand the power of the Word of God when it is being used by the Spirit of God. The Word "is living and powerful and sharper than any twoedged sword."

The other verse that I want to give you is a verse that you have heard many, many times from me. If it makes you think of me, that makes me very happy. Isaiah 55, verse 11:

So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

You see, this is even my encouragement this morning when I am giving you the Word of God, when I am reading these verses of Scripture to you. God is accomplishing what He wants to accomplish through His Word, and it is going to prosper in the thing whereto He has sent it. The Word doesn't always accomplish what I want it to accomplish. It accomplishes what the Lord wants it to accomplish. It is through the Word of God that sinners are saved. Peter tells us in 1 Peter 1:23,

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the
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word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

Our mission is to get the Word of God out. Our mission is to proclaim the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our mission is to be witnesses of Him, to tell people Who Jesus Christ is, why Jesus Christ came, and what He accomplished by His death. We are to give them the Word of God, and to explain to them from Scripture the great message of salvation. And as we give out the Word, God is going to use His Word to accomplish His purposes and to providentially lead us to people whom He intends to save.

Now I have spoken all this time and I haven't referred to my text. Let me just summarize in closing because I had this text read mainly because of the emphasis that there is upon the Word of God. Let me mention, in a very brief way, why Paul had so much to say to Timothy about the Word of God in his last Epistle. I am sure most of you are quite familiar with this passage. I have spoken from it a number of times. Will you notice these three things, and then I am through. I will just mention them.

First, Paul told Timothy that there was no need for him to go beyond anything that he had learned, even as a child, from the Word of God. You know, although we grow in our knowledge of the Word, we do not grow beyond the Word of God. Paul said, "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation . . ." (2 Tim. 3:14, 15). In other words he was telling Timothy that he did not need anything but the Word of God if he were going to have the ministry that God want him to accomplish in the world. He was to keep on in the Word of God."

Secondly, Paul said that he wanted Timothy to know that the Word of God was sufficient for the work which God had called him to do.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works
(2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

You know, a man can go to a seminary, or to a Bible School, and he can get all kinds of degrees, but if he doesn't come out of those schools and seminaries with the consciousness in his heart that his qualification for service is not his degree but it is the Word of God, he has really wasted his time going to school. Paul told Timothy that he had all he needed in the Word of God. And so, even today, if we are grounded in the Word of God, then we have all that we need for the work that God has called us to do.

Then the third thing that Paul said was this: He charged him before God and the Lord Jesus Christ to "preach the word." He was to preach the Word even when people did not want to hear it because it would be through the Word that the Lord is going to save those whom He has appointed for

salvation. The Devil wants to get us away from the Word of God. The Devil wants to substitute methods, or programs, or something else--anything but the Word of God! And he wants us to get our eyes upon people. How successful certain people seem to be in the methods that they are employing. But remember, the tool that God has given us, the instrument that God is going to bless, is His Word. Therefore, the parting cry to Timothy and to all succeeding generations from the Apostle Paul as he wrote this last Epistle of his which is a part of the Word of God was,

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Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine (2 Tim. 4:2).

We must never let anybody turn us away from the Word of God because, as Peter said, we are "born again by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever (1 Pet. 1:23). If we are simple enough in our faith to use the Word of God, then the hopeless task becomes gloriously possible because God will be using His Word, accomplishing His purpose, drawing His people to Himself, and seeing His Name honored and glorified as the One Who is carrying out His purposes established from all eternity.