

Early Christmas Service

Titus 3, 4-7

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

GOD'S GRACE RECEIVED MUST BE BESTOWED.

1. This epistle selection inculcates the same principle taught in the conclusion of the Gospel lesson pertaining to contentment, good will and love for our neighbor. The substance of the text is: Why should we be unwilling to do for others what has been done for us by God, of whose blessings we are far less worthy than anyone can be of our help? Since God has been friendly and kindly disposed toward us in bestowing upon us his loving kindness, let us conduct ourselves similarly toward our neighbors, even if they are unworthy, for we too are unworthy.
2. It is necessary to a ready understanding of this epistle that we know the occasion of these words. In the verses immediately preceding, Paul says to Titus, his disciple: *"Put them in mind to be in subjection to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready unto every good work, to speak evil of no man, not to be contentious, to be gentle, showing all meekness toward all men. For we also once were foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another."* Note that Paul here indicates the relation we sustain to God and man. He would have us obedient to magistrates and kind to neighbors. Though our neighbors may be blind, erring and wicked, yet we should be charitable in our judgment and cheerfully endeavor to please them, remembering God's similar attitude toward us when we were as they.
3. The word "appeared," implying the revelation of the Gospel, or Christ's appearance to the whole world, is sufficiently defined in the preceding epistle lesson. Though in that case it refers to the birth of Christ, little depends on the circumstance so far as the meaning of the word is concerned. Paul does not employ here the little word "grace", used there, but he described the God of grace with two other pleasing words - "kindness" and "love." The

first is, in Greek, "Chrestotes" (friendliness), implying that friendly, lovable demeanor which makes the individual attractive and gives his society a gracious influence moving everyone within its circle to love and affection. Such a one is capable of bearing with all men. He is not inclined to neglect any nor to repel with harshness. In him everyone may repose confidence. All men can approach him and *deal with him. He resembles Christ, whom the Gospel portrays as always friendly to everyone, repelling none but gracious unto all.*

4. God, too, shows himself to us through the Gospel as wholly lovable and kind, receiving all, rejecting none, ignoring our shortcomings and repelling no soul by severity. The Gospel proclaims naught but grace, whereby God sustains us and through which he kindly leads us, regardless of our worthiness. This is the day of grace. All men may confidently draw near to the throne of his mercy, as it is written in Hebrews 4, 16. And we read in Psalm 34, 5: "They looked unto him, and were radiant; and their faces shall never be confounded." That is, God will not permit us to ask in vain, or to come unto him and go away empty and ashamed.

5. The second Word is, in Greek, "Philanthropia" (Philanthropy) - love of mankind. Avarice is the love of money. David (2 Sam 1, 26) refers to "the love of women." But naturalists term certain animals - the dog, the horse, the dolphin - philanthropic or humane, because they have a natural love and fondness for man; they adapt themselves to his service as if endowed with reason enabling them to understand him.

6. It is an attitude of love for mankind the apostle here attributes to our God. Moses has done likewise in Deuteronomy 33, 2-3, where he says of God: "At his right hand was a fiery law for them. Yea, he loveth the people." This quotation indicates that God does more than show himself, through the Gospel, with a kindly bearing, desiring to draw men unto himself, and tolerant of their shortcomings; he would give them of himself, would bestow his presence, and he extends his grace and friendship.

7. These two words descriptive of God, "kindness" and "love," are indeed pleasant and consoling. They represent him as offering grace, following us, ready to receive most graciously all who draw near to him and desire him. What more could he do? Note now why the Gospel is termed a gracious, comforting message concerning God revealed in Christ. What can be conceived more gracious to a poor, sinful conscience than what these words convey? Oh, how wretchedly the devil, through the laws of the Pope, has perverted for us these pure words of God!

8. These two words are to be accepted with their full and broad import. No distinction of person, as prevails among men, is to be made: for divine love and kindness is not secured by human merit; it is of God's grace alone and given to all that bear the name of man, however insignificant. God loves not what is characteristic of one person, but of a all. He is partial not to one, but kind to all. Therefore a man's honor is perfectly maintained, and no one can boast of his worthiness, or need despair because of his unworthiness. All mankind

may be equally comforted in the unmerited grace God kindly and humanely offers and applies. Had there ever been a meritorious individual or a work worthy of consideration, it surely would have been found among the doers of "works of righteousness." But Paul rejects especially these, saying, "not by works of righteousness which we have done." How much less reason have we to think the kindness and love of God has appeared in consequence of man's wisdom, power, nobility, wealth and the color of his hair! The grace which cancels all our boasted honor, ascribing glory alone to God who freely bestows it upon the unworthy, is pure as well as great.

9. This epistle instills the two further principles of believing and loving - receiving favors from God and granting favors to our neighbors. The entire Scriptures enforce these two precepts, and the practice of one requires the practice of the other. He who does not firmly believe in God's grace assuredly will not extend kindness to his neighbor, but will be tardy and indifferent in aiding him. In proportion to the strength of his faith will be his willingness and industry in helping his neighbor. Thus faith incites love, and love increases faith.

10. Now we see how utterly we fail to walk in faith when we presume to arrive at goodness and happiness by any other good works than those done to our neighbor. So numerous are the new works and doctrines daily devised, everything like a correct conception of a truly good life is wholly destroyed. But the fact is, all Christian doctrines and works, all Christian living, is briefly, clearly and completely comprehended in these two principles, faith and love. They place man as a medium between God and his neighbor, to receive from above and distribute below. Thus the Christian becomes a vessel, or rather a channel, through which the fountain of divine blessings continuously flows to other individuals.

11. Mark you, the truly godlike are they who receive from God all he offers through Christ, and in return accredit themselves by their beneficence, performing for others the part God performs for them. Psalm 82, 6 is in point here: "I said, Ye are gods, and all of you sons of the Most High." Sons of God are we, through the faith that constitutes us heirs of all divine blessings. But we are also "gods" through the love that makes us beneficent toward our neighbor. The divine nature is simply pure beneficence, or as Paul here says, kindness and love, daily pouring out blessings in abundance upon all creatures; as we everywhere witness.

12. Take heed, then, to embrace the message of these words presenting the love and kindness of God to all men. Daily exercise your faith therein, entertaining no doubt of God's love and kindness toward you, and you shall realize his blessings. Then you may with perfect confidence ask what you will, what your heart desires, and whatever is necessary for the good of yourself and your fellow-men. But if you do not so believe, it were far better you had never heard the message. For by unbelief you make false these precious, comforting, gracious words. You conduct yourself as if you regarded them

untrue, which attitude is extreme dishonor to God; no more enormous sin could be committed.

13. But if you possess faith, your heart cannot do otherwise than laugh for joy in God, and grow free, confident and courageous. For how can the heart remain sorrowful and dejected when it entertains no doubt of God's kindness to it, and of his attitude as a good friend with whom it may unreservedly and freely enjoy all things? Such joy and pleasure must follow faith; if they are not ours, certainly something is wrong with our faith. This act of faith the apostle in Galatians terms "receiving the Holy Spirit" in and through the Gospel. The Gospel is a message concerning the love and mercy of God so gracious as to bring with it to preacher and hearer the presence of the Holy Spirit; just as the rays of the sun bear in themselves, and transmit, heat.

14. How could Paul have presented words conveying more love and graciousness? I venture to assert I have never read, in the entire Scriptures, words more beautifully expressive of the grace of God than these two - "Chrestotes" and "Philanthropia," friendliness and philanthropy. They represent grace not only as procuring for us remission of sins, but as God ever present with us, embracing us in his friendship, ever ready to help us and offering to do for us according to all we desire; in short, as a good and willing friend, to whom we may look for every favor and accommodation. Picture to your imagination a sincere friend and you will have an idea of God's attitude toward you in the person of Christ, though a very imperfect representation of his superabundant grace.

15. Now, if you steadfastly believe, if you rejoice in God your Lord, if you are alive and his grace satisfies, if your wants are all supplied, how will you employ yourself in this earthly life? Inactive you cannot be. Such a disposition of love toward God cannot rest. Your zeal will be warm to do everything you know will be to the praise and glory of a kind and gracious God. At this point there is no longer distinction of works. Here all commands terminate. There is neither restraint - nor compulsion, but a joyful willingness and delight in doing good, whether the intended achievement be insignificant or difficult, small or great, requiring short service or long.

16. Your first desire will be that all men may obtain the same knowledge of divine grace. Hence your love will not be restrained from serving all to the fullest extent, preaching and proclaiming the divine truth wherever possible, and rejecting all doctrine and life not in harmony with this teaching. But take note, the devil and the world, unwilling that their devices be rejected, cannot endure the knowledge of what you do. They will oppose you with everything great, learned, wealthy and powerful, and represent you as a heretic and insane. Mark you, you will be brought to the cross for the sake of the truth, as was Christ your Lord. You will have to endure the extremity of reproach. You must endanger all your property, friends and honor, your body and life, until thrust out of this life into eternity. In the midst of these trials, however, rejoice, cheerfully enduring all. Regard your enemies with the utmost charity. Act kindly, ever remembering you yourself were once as they are

in the sight of God. Faith and love certainly can do it. Note this: the truly Christian life is that which does for others as God has done for itself.

17. Such is the apostle's meaning when he tells us the kindness of God did not appear unto us, or save us, because of our righteousness. His thought is: If we, though unworthy, were received through mercy, to enjoy the favors of God in spite of our great demerits and the enormity of our sins, why should we withhold our favors from others, whose merits have claims upon us? Let us not withhold; no, let us rather be children of God, doing good even to our enemies and to evil-doers: for so God has done, and still does, to us, evil-doers and his enemies. This teaching is in harmony with Christ's (Mt 5, 44-46): *"Love your enemies . . . that ye may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust. For if ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?"*

18. Paul not only forcibly rejects us for our evil deeds, but goes so far as to say, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done." He means the works regarded by ourselves as good - our righteousness in our own eyes and in the eyes of others - but which only render us more unfit to receive God's grace because they are in themselves deceitful and because we commit a twofold sin in looking upon them as good and in relying upon them; an attitude to provoke God's displeasure.

19. Similarly do our enemies, who while in the wrong yet maintain, in opposition to us, their faultlessness, for the most part provoke us to anger. Yet we are not to refuse them kindness. God, solely for his mercy's sake, refused not kindness to us in similar errors, when we foolishly imagined all we did was right. As he dealt not with us according to our imagined righteousness, so should we in return not deal with our enemies according to their merits or demerits, but assist them from pure love, looking for thanks and reward, not from them, but from God. Let this be sufficient for a summary of this epistle.

20. Now let us consider the words Paul employs to define and advocate grace. In the first place he exalts it to the rejection of all our righteousness and good works. We are not to conclude it is a trivial thing he is rejecting here. It is man's best earthly achievement - righteousness. Were all men to concentrate their united efforts to attain wisdom and virtue by their natural reason, knowledge and free will - as we read, for instance, of the illustrious virtues and wisdom of certain pagan teachers and princes, Socrates, Trajan, and others, to whom all the world gives written and oral applause - were all men so to do, yet such wisdom and virtue are, in the sight of God, nothing but sin, and altogether reprehensible. The reason is, they are not attained in the grace of God; the achievers know not God and have not honored him in the effort, for they consider they have wrought by their own abilities. Righteousness is not taught otherwise than by grace, in the Gospel. Paul boasts that he once led a life altogether irreproachable, and superior to the lives of his intellectual equals (Gal 1, 14), wherein he presumptuously thought he did right in persecuting the

Christians who rejected that sort of piety. But after he had learned to know Christ, he declared he regarded his righteousness but filth and refuse that he might be found, not in his own righteousness, but in Christ and in faith, as he further shows in Phil 3, 9 and Gal 1, 14.

21. So he discards all boasted free will, all human virtue, righteousness and good works. He concludes they all are nothing and are wholly perverted, however brilliant and worthy they may appear, and teaches that we must be saved solely by the grace of God, which is effective for all believers who desire it from a correct conception of their own ruin and nothingness.

22. Now, it is essential that we accustom ourselves to interpret rightly the Scripture teaching of two kinds of righteousness. There is a human righteousness, to which Paul here and often elsewhere refers, and a divine righteousness - or divine grace - which justifies us through faith. Paul so expresses it in the conclusion of this epistle: "That, being justified by his grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." You see, the grace of God, and righteousness, become ours; we say "righteousness of God" because he gives it, and "our righteousness" because we receive it. In Romans 1, 17 Paul tells us that the Gospel declares the righteousness of God is obtained through faith; "as it is written, The righteous shall live by faith." And it is stated of Abraham in Genesis 15, 6: "And he believed in Jehovah; and he reckoned it to him for righteousness." So the Scripture conclusion is, no one is justified before God except the believer; witness the quotation just given and that other by Paul from Habakkuk 2, 4, "The righteous shall live by his faith." So faith, grace, mercy and truth are one thing, wrought in us by God, through the Gospel of Christ; as it is written: "All the paths of Jehovah are lovingkindness and truth." Ps 25, 10.

23. We walk in "the paths of Jehovah," and he is in us when we observe his commandments. To be God's, the way must proceed in divine mercy and truth; not in our own ability or strength, for such are, in the eyes of God, ways of wrath and falsehood. He says (Is 55, 9): "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways." In other words, *"Your ways are earthly and ineffectual; you must walk in my heavenly ways if you are to be saved."*

"But according to his mercy he saved us."

24. How are these words, reading as if we were already saved, to pass criticism? Are we not still on earth, in the midst of afflictions? I answer: The statement is made in just this way to emphasize the power of divine grace and the character of faith as opposed to the erring self-righteous, who essay to obtain salvation through their works, as if it were not right at hand. But salvation is not so to be attained. Christ has saved us once for all, and in a twofold manner: First, he has done all that is necessary for our salvation - conquered and destroyed sin, death and hell, leaving no more there for anyone to do. Secondly, he has conveyed all these blessings unto us in baptism. He who confidently believes Christ has

accomplished these things, immediately, in the twinkling of an eye, possesses salvation. All his sins and the reality of death and hell are removed. Nothing more than such faith is necessary to salvation.

25. Take note, God pours out upon us in baptism super-abundant blessings for the purpose of excluding the works whereby men foolishly presume to merit heaven and gain happiness. Yes, dear friend, you must first possess heaven and salvation before you can do good works. Works never merit heaven; heaven is conferred purely of grace. Good works are to be performed without any thought of merit, simply for the benefit of one's neighbor and for the honor of God; until the body, too, shall be released from sin, death and hell. The true Christian's whole life after baptism is but a waiting for the manifestation of the salvation already his. He is certainly in full possession of the eternal life yet concealed in faith. When faith is removed by fulfilment, salvation is manifest in the believer. This takes place at physical death. It is written (1 Jn 3, 2-3): *"Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is. And every one that hath this hope set on him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."*

26. Therefore, let not the work-righteous who disregard faith mislead you, placing your salvation far ahead of you and compelling you to obtain it by works. It is within you, dear friend; it is already obtained. Christ says (Lk 17, 21): "The kingdom of God is within you." Hence the life live after baptism is but a tarrying, a waiting and longing for the manifestation of what is within ourselves, an apprehension of that for which we are apprehended. Paul declares (Phil 3, 12), "I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus"; that is, that he may see the blessings given in the shrine of faith. The apostle is eager to behold the treasure that baptism has granted and sealed to him in faith. In this same third chapter of Philippians Paul says: "Our citizenship is in heaven" - that is, now - "whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory." In Galatians 4, 9, when saying, "Now that ye have come to know God," he recalls the words and adds, "or rather to be known by God." While both these things are in point, there is a difference in their meaning: we are known of God, already apprehended; but we do not yet know and apprehend him. Our knowledge is hidden and withholden in faith. Again, the apostle tells us (Rom 8, 24-25) we are saved in hope; that is, our salvation is not yet manifest. "Hope that is seen is not hope," he says, "for who hopeth for that which he seeth? But if we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." And Christ (Lk 12, 35-36) commands: "Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning; and be ye yourselves like unto men looking for their lord, when he shall return from the marriage feast; that, when he cometh and knocketh, they may straightway open unto him." Paul also said in the preceding epistle lesson (Tit 2, 12-13): *"We should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."*

27. These and similar passages prove we are even now saved and that a Christian should not seek works as a means of salvation. The delusive doctrine of works blinds the Christian's eyes, perverts a right understanding of faith and forces him from the way of truth and salvation. Salvation by grace is implied in the words, "According to his mercy he saved us," and again in the latter part of the lesson where it reads, "that we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." We are heirs - though the fact is unrevealed in faith - and wait in hope for the manifestation of our inheritance.

28. The life of waiting we must live after we are baptized is designed to subdue the flesh and to display the power of grace in the conflict against the flesh, the world and the devil; and thus ultimately to enable us to serve our neighbors, by our preaching and example bringing them also into the faith. Though God might convert men through angels, he desires to accomplish it by human beings - by us, so that faith might be established and completed in a more congenial way through a kindred agency. Were angels constantly to dwell with us, faith would cease here. The instrumentality of angels would not be so congenial as that of our fellow-creatures, whom we are familiar with and understand. If we all were taken to heaven immediately after baptism, who would convert the others and bring them to God by means of the Word and a good example?

29. The fact that we expend so much by reason of purgatory and, forgetful of faith, presume to secure ourselves against purgatory or to liberate us from it by good works, unquestionably indicates we are under the influence of the devil and of Antichrist. We proceed as if our salvation were not already secured but we must gain it in some other way than by faith; and this even though plainly in contradiction of the Scriptures and of the principles of Christianity. He who does not receive salvation purely through grace, independently of all good works, certainly will never secure it. And he who makes his good works serve his own advantage, seeking to profit himself and not his neighbor thereby, performs no good work. All his doctrine is without faith and is such harmful error and deceit that I wish purgatory had never been instituted or introduced into the pulpit, for it is very destructive of Christian truth and true faith. So great has been the devil's influence, nearly all institutions, cloister ceremonials, masses and prayers have reference simply to purgatory, leading us to the pernicious inference that, through works we must improve our condition and secure salvation. So the blessings of baptism and faith must be obscured, and Christians must ultimately become pure heathen.

30. Oh Lord God, what abominable wickedness! When we should, like Christ and Paul, teach Christians to consider themselves, after baptism or absolution, ready for death at any hour and waiting for the manifestation of the salvation already theirs, we by relying on purgatory afford them indolence-fostering security. In such security they consider only this life, deferring and procrastinating in the matter of salvation until they come to their death-beds, there to effect sorrow and repentance and to presume, by ceremonials, soul-masses and bequests, to liberate themselves from purgatory. They will surely become conscious of

their mistake. Now follows: "Through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."

31. How beautifully the apostle in these strong words extols the grace of God bestowed in baptism! He refers to baptism as a washing, whereby not our feet only, not our hands, but our whole bodies are cleansed. Baptism perfectly and instantaneously cleanses and saves. For the vital part of salvation and its inheritance, nothing more is necessary than this faith in the grace of God. Truly, then, are we saved by grace alone, without works or other merit. So, eternally pure love, praise and gratitude for, and honor unto, divine mercy shall possess us; we will not boast of nor delight in our own powers or achievements: as has already frequently and sufficiently been declared.

32. The righteousness of man, however, is a different sort of cleansing, simply a washing of garments and vessels, as recorded of hypocrites in Matthew 23, 25. Externally they appear clean, but internally remain full indeed of filth. Paul terms baptism not a bodily cleansing, but a "washing of regeneration." It is not a superficial washing of the skin, a physical cleansing; it converts the whole nature, destroying the first birth, that of the flesh, with all inherited sin and condemnation. This verse clearly indicates that salvation is not to be secured by works, but is an instantaneous gift. In physical birth we are given, not one member alone - hands or feet - but the entire body and the life; our life operates, not to effect birth, but because we are born. Similarly works do not render us pure and godly or save us: we are first made clean and godly and receive salvation; then we freely perform good works to the honor of God and the benefit of our neighbor.

33. This, mark you, is the true knowledge of the pure grace of God. Thus we learn to know God and ourselves, to praise him and reject ourselves, to seek consolation from him and despair of ourselves. This doctrine is an occasion of much stumbling to them who presume to compel men to seek salvation by laws, commands and works.

34. For the sake of conveying a clearer understanding of this washing and this regeneration, Paul adds the word "renewing," because the individual is a new man, with a new nature. He is a new creature, with an altogether different disposition. He loves in a different way, and speaks, acts and lives in a manner unlike his former self. The apostle says (Gal 6, 15): "For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision" - that is, no work of the Law has significance - "*but a new creature.*" The thought is: It will not do to patch up, or mend, the life here and there with works. An entirely new disposition is necessary; the nature must be changed. Then works will follow spontaneously.

35. Concerning this birth, Christ also declares (Jn. 3, 3): "Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Here we are taught that works will not answer; the individual must himself die and obtain a different nature. This takes place in baptism when he believes, for faith is this renewing. The damned will also be born again in the last day,

but theirs will be a birth without a renewing. They will remain unclean, as here in the old Adamic life. So, then, this washing, this regeneration, makes new creatures.

36. Much is said at various places in the Scriptures relative to the new birth. God refers to his Word and Gospel as the womb ("matricem" and "vulvam") of the new birth: "Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, that have been borne by me from their birth, that have been carried from the womb" (Is 46, 3), or under my heart, as women speak of bearing children. Whosoever believes the Gospel, is conceived and born of God. But more on this subject at some other time.

37. We see how all these sayings overthrow works and presumptuous human mandates, and make clear the nature of faith, how the individual instantaneously and fully receives grace and is saved, works not aiding him in the matter but following as a result. Salvation by grace would be perfectly illustrated were God to produce from a dry log a live, green tree, the tree then to bring forth natural fruit. God's grace is powerful and effective. It does not, as visionary preachers presume to teach, lie dormant in the soul; nor is it an accessory to works, as the paint is an accessory to the wood. No, not so; it carries, it leads, drives, draws, changes. It effects all in man, making itself felt. Though concealed, its works are manifest. Words and works show where it is present, as the leaves and the fruit indicate the nature of the tree.

38. To make faith no more than an aid or ornament to works, as the sophists Thomas and Scotus, and the people, erroneously and perversely do, is a doctrine wherein faith falls far short of its real significance. For it not only aids in the accomplishment of works, but effects them unaided. Indeed, more than that, it changes and renews the whole being. Its object is to alter the character of the individual rather than to accomplish works by him. It claims to be a washing, a regeneration, a renewing, not only of works, but of the whole man.

39. Note, Paul here freely and fully preaches the grace of God. He does not say God has saved us by works. He loudly proclaims that God has saved us by a regeneration and a renewing. To patch up with works is unavailing; conversion of our whole nature is necessary. Therefore, believers must suffer and die before grace can manifest itself and reveal its nature. Observe, David says in this connection: "The works of Jehovah are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein," Ps 111, 2. Who are these, his works? We are, sought out through grace in baptism. We are great works, new works, new born. It is indeed great that man is instantly saved, forever liberated from sin, death and hell. Hence, David says, "They are sought out of all them that have pleasure therein" or desire what God designs to accomplish through them, and - God does all that man desires. But what can man desire more than to be saved, to be delivered from sin, death and hell?

40. Finally: the apostle terms this washing a "regeneration," a "renewing of the Holy Spirit," to fully express the power and efficacy of grace. This washing is a thing so vitally important it must be effected, not by a creature, but by the Holy Spirit. How completely, O

holy Paul, thou dost reject the free will, the good works and the great merits of presumptuous saints! How high thou exaltest our salvation, at the same time bringing it so near to us! yes, even within ourselves. How plainly and purely thou dost preach grace. Let works, then, be here or there, to renew the man, to change the life, is impossible except by the washing of regeneration of the Holy Spirit.

41. That fact is plainly evident in the self-righteous. None are more intolerant, presumptuous, proud and faithless than they. In their old Adamic nature, which they clothe and adorn with good works, they remain intractable, unrenewed and obdurate, hardened and immovable; their evil nature is unchanged. They possess only outward works. Oh, they are a people of pernicious influence, and in the sight of God wholly destitute of grace, though they imagine themselves his nearest friends.

42. Paul's teaching here accords with that of Christ in John 3, 5, where he says, referring to the washing of regeneration: "Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Note here, the water answers to the washing; to be born again, to regeneration and renewing; and the Spirit, to him whom Paul mentions as the Holy Spirit.

43. Note here also the apostle's apparent ignorance of the sacrament of confirmation. He teaches, as does Christ, the giving of the Holy Spirit in baptism; in baptism we are indeed born of the Holy Spirit. True, we read (Acts 8, 17) how the apostles laid their hands upon those who had been baptized, that they might receive the Holy Spirit. This incident has been construed to sanction confirmation, but its real purpose was to invoke the Holy Spirit as external evidence, and the gift of divers tongues for the preaching of the Gospel. But in course of time the ceremony was abandoned. It no longer exists except in ordination or consecration to the ministerial or preaching office. Even there it is deplorably abused. But more of this at some other time. *"Which he poured out upon us richly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour."*

44. Observe, the Holy Spirit is not merely given, but "poured out"; not only that, but "abundantly poured out." The apostle seems unable to sufficiently magnify grace and its works, while we, alas, estimate it so low in comparison to our works. It would be absurd for God to pour out upon us the Holy Spirit in such measure and yet to expect from us, and in us, something whereby we might be justified and saved; as if the superabundant divine works were insufficient.

45. Were such the case, Paul here must have spoken inconsiderately and might justly be accused of falsehood. But so bountifully does he represent to us the measure of grace, clearly no one can rely too much upon the washing of regeneration; it is of unlimited importance. No one can place too much confidence in it; there is always occasion for more. For God has embraced, in the Word and in faith, blessings too great for mortal life to comprehend or to receive were they to manifest themselves. As revelation begins, the individual dies; he passes out of this life, swallowed up in the blessings he now by faith

apprehends in very limited measure. Thus more than abundantly are we justified and saved without works if we only believe. Peter says: "Through Christ he hath granted unto us his precious and exceeding great promises; that through these ye may become partakers of the divine nature." 2 Pet 1, 4. He does not say "will be granted" but "hath granted." And Christ says: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." Jn 3, 16. Notice, all who believe have eternal life. That being true, believers certainly are just and holy without works. Works contribute nothing to justification. It is effected by pure grace richly poured out upon us.

46. "But," you say, "how is it, then, the Scriptures so frequently speak of salvation for them who do good? For instance, Christ says (Jn 5, 29): 'And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment.' And Paul declares (Rom 2, 7-8) that honor and glory are the reward of them who do good; indignation and wrath, of evil-doers. And he makes many similar declarations." I answer: How are these passages to be interpreted? Not otherwise than as they read - without additions: He who does good shall be saved; he who does evil shall be damned. The difficulty lies in our error in judging according to external appearances in the matter of good works. The Scriptures teach not that way, but that no one can do good until he is himself good. He does not become good through works, but his works are good because he is good. He becomes good through the washing of regeneration and in no other way. This is the meaning of Christ's words (Mt 7,17): "Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but the corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit." And (Mt 12, 33): "Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt."

47. True, the self-righteous perform works similar to those of the regenerated; indeed, their works are frequently the more brilliant. They pray, fast, contribute money, erect institutions, make pilgrimages and conduct themselves with great ostentation. But Christ calls their works "sheep's clothing" (Mt 7, 15) wherein move ravening wolves. None of the self-righteous are really humble, mild, moderate and good in their hearts. This fact is revealed when one crosses them and rejects their works. Then they bring forth their natural and identifying fruits: temerity, impatience, arbitrariness, obstinacy, slander and many other evil propensities.

48. Therefore it is true that he who does good shall be saved - his salvation shall be revealed; but he could do nothing good were he not already saved in the new birth. The Scriptures sometimes have reference to the external conduct of the good, and at others to their inner nature that prompts the outward works, teaching present salvation because of the inner nature, and a future salvation if good is done; that is, if the individual remains steadfast, his salvation shall be revealed in the future.

49. The works we performed in our old, unregenerate state, our Adamic nature, the apostle in this lesson rejects when he says "not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves." These may be good works, but not before God, who looks first for personal goodness and afterward for the works. In Genesis 4, 4-5, he had respect first unto Abel, and then unto his offering; and first rejected Cain, and then his offering. Cain's offering, however, was in external appearance good like that of Abel.

50. Paul significantly adds "*through Jesus Christ our Saviour.*" The intent is to shelter us all under Christ, as young chickens are gathered under the wings of the hen. Christ himself says (Mt 23, 37): "*O Jerusalem . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!*"

51. In the phrase above is taught the nature of true, living faith. Such is the character of faith that it is not sufficient to salvation for you to believe in God after the manner of the Jews and many others, upon whom, however, he conferred many blessings and temporal advantages; but it is through Jesus Christ you must believe in God. In the first place, you must not doubt that he is your gracious God and Father, that he has forgiven all your sins and has saved you in baptism. In the second place, you must know, too, that all this has not been effected without cause - without satisfaction having been rendered to his righteousness. There is no reason for mercy and grace to operate upon and in us, to aid us to obtain eternal blessings and salvation. Justice must first be satisfied to the fullest extent. Christ says (Mt 5, 18): "One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law till all things be accomplished." Whatever is promised of the grace and goodness of God must be understood as only for those who perfectly fulfil his commands. He says (Mic 2, 7) in reply to the Jews, when they presumed they were great in the sight of God and continually cried "Peace, peace!" and "Why should God be so angry? Why should his benign Spirit have departed from us?" - he replies, "Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?" No one, therefore, can attain God's abundant grace unless he shall have rendered full satisfaction to God's commands.

52. Now, enough has been said to show our works of no value in God's sight, and ourselves unable to fulfil the least of his commands, to perform a single work. How much more impossible is it, then, for us to render full satisfaction to his justice and become worthy of his grace! Even though we were able to keep all his commandments and to make full satisfaction to his justice, yet we would not for that reason be worthy of his grace and of salvation. He would not be under any obligation to confer them upon us. He might require it all as obligatory upon his creatures, who must serve him. Whatever he grants is of pure grace and mercy. This Christ clearly taught in the parable in Luke 17, 7-10: "*But who is there of you, having a servant plowing or keeping sheep, that will say unto him, when he is come in from the field, come straightway and sit down to meat; and will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself,*

and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank the servant because he did the things that were commanded? Even so ye also, when ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do."

53. Now, if through grace and not of necessity heaven is given to those who do all they are under obligation to do; if to such - provided, such there be - heaven is given not by merit but through divine and gracious promises like that of Matthew 19, 17, "If thou wouldest enter into life, keep the commandments": shall we then presume upon our wretched good works? Why extol them as if their nature and not the pure promise, the gracious Word of God, makes them worthy of the kingdom of heaven?

54. In the first place, God has given a Being to fully satisfy divine justice for us all. In the second place, he has, through this same Being, poured out his grace and his rich blessings. So, then, notwithstanding grace is received by us without price and without merit on our part - indeed, in spite of great demerit and unworthiness - yet it is not bestowed without cause and deserved merit somewhere. As Paul teaches (Rom 5, 18), we fell into sin not of our own act or deserving, it being born in us from Adam in our natural birth; and on the other hand, in the new birth we enter into grace and salvation through Christ, without our merit or works.

55. Hence the apostle is careful in every place where he mentions grace and faith to add "through Jesus Christ," that no one may be able to say, "I believe in God and am satisfied with that." No, beloved friend, your belief must include a knowledge of how and through whom you believe. You must know that God requires you to fulfil all his commandments, to satisfy his justice, before he accepts your faith unto salvation; and that though you were able to render full satisfaction you would still have to await salvation through grace alone, and not receive it on account of any duties you perform, but rather your pride and presumption must fall to the ground before God.

56. Observe the advantages you have in Christ. Through him grace and salvation are conferred upon you, he having rendered full obedience to all the commandments of God, and satisfied God's justice, in your stead and for you. Grace and salvation are conferred upon you because he is worthy. This is true Christian faith. No faith is sufficient but the Christian faith, the faith that believes in Christ and accepts solely through him the two principles - satisfaction of divine justice, and the gracious bestowal of eternal salvation. Paul, speaking of Christ (Rom 4, 25), says, "Who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification." Not only was he given to put away sin and to fulfil the commandments of God, but also to render us worthy, through him, of possessing righteousness and of being children of grace. Again, Paul says of Christ (Rom 3, 25), "Whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood." It is not just "faith" but "faith in his blood." With his blood, and in our nature, he has rendered full satisfaction

and become for us a throne of grace. We receive absolution and grace at no cost or labor on our part, but not without cost and labor on the part of Christ.

57. We must, then, shelter ourselves under his wings (Mt 23, 37) and not fly afar in the security of our own faith, else we will soon be devoured by the hawk. Our salvation must exist, not in our righteousness, but, as I have often said, in Christ's righteousness, which is an outspread wing, or a tabernacle, to shelter us.

58. Our faith and all we may have received from God is insufficient to salvation, wholly inadequate, unless faith rests beneath the wings of Christ and firmly trusts that not we but he can render, and has rendered, full satisfaction to the justice of God for us; and that grace and salvation are not conferred upon us because of our faith but because of the will of Christ. The pure grace of God, promised, procured and bestowed upon us in Christ and through Christ, must be perfectly recognized. This is the teaching implied in John 14, 6, "No one cometh unto the Father but by me." Christ's sole effort in the whole Gospel is to draw us out of ourselves into himself; he spreads out his wings and calls us together beneath their shelter. To emphasize the grace of Christ is also Paul's design in the conclusion of this lesson, where he says: *"That, being justified by his grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying."*

59. He does not say "justified by our faith" but "justified by the grace of Christ." Christ alone has favor with God. No one but he has done the will of God and merited eternal life. In view of the fact that he did it not for his own sake but for ours, all believers should be so perfectly one with Christ that all he has done for them will, through him and his grace, be regarded as if the believer himself had accomplished it. See what an inexpressibly beneficent thing Christian faith is - what inconceivably great blessings it brings to all believers!

60. Let us learn from this epistle how precious is the Gospel that proclaims these benefits, and what injury and destruction of souls they effect who silently ignore the Gospel and preach the works of the Law, yes, their own human doctrines. Guard, then, against false preachers and also against false faith. Rely not upon yourself, nor upon your faith. Flee to Christ; keep under his wings; remain under his shelter. Let his righteousness and grace, not yours, be your refuge. You are to be made an heir of eternal life, not by the grace you have yourself received, but, as Paul says here, by Christ's grace. Again, it is said in Psalm 91, 4, "He will cover thee with his pinions, and under his wings shalt thou take refuge." And in the Song of Solomon 2, 14, "O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the steep place." That is, in the wounds of Christ the soul is preserved. Observe, true Christian faith does not take refuge in itself, as the sophists dream, but flees to Christ and is preserved under him and in him.

61. It has been sufficiently stated that we are heirs of eternal life in hope, and that grace, regardless of works, instantaneously confers salvation, inheritance and all; yet, as said, "in

hope.” They are not revealed until death. Then we shall see what, in faith, we have received and possess.

THE ARMOR OF THIS EPISTLE.

62. This epistle lesson forcibly and in express terms contends against all humanly-devised righteousness, as well as against all human powers and free will. These are plain words, ”Not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy he saved us.” In fact, the words of the whole lesson oppose the righteousness of man. Paul attributes all efficacy to the washing of regeneration, to the renewing of the Holy Spirit, to Jesus Christ and his grace. In the face of such thunderbolts, how can there remain in us the least trace of presumption?

63. It matters not how brilliant may be secular and ecclesiastical laws; how attractive the station of priests, monks and nuns; how dazzling the titles of gentlemen of honor and ladies of uprightness, even if the wearers of them could raise the dead: without faith in Christ all is vain. Such hypocrisy as that just mentioned blinds and misleads the whole world, and obscures for us the holy Gospel and the Christian faith. These brilliant works and attractive stations of men assist as little in procuring our salvation as do the works of beasts or the common trades of mankind. Indeed, they perniciously obstruct salvation. Therefore, you should guard against wolves in sheep's clothing, and learn to cleave to Christ in true and firm faith. Amen.

