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The Grace of God

by T. Austin-Sparks

Transcribed from a message given in July 1955.

In the letter of Paul to Titus, the letter to Titus chapter 2. I take the first part of the last verse of chapter 2 in order to throw back to what has just been said: "These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority". *These things...* speak, exhort, reprove, with all authority. And so we look to see what "*these things*" are; and we go back to verse 11: "The grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a people for His own possession, zealous of good works."

Three things in that paragraph: the *gift* of grace; the *goal* of grace; the *method* of grace. "The *grace* of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men." And you have to link with the first statement, the last: "*that* He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a people for His own possession, zealous of good works". Why did the grace of God appear unto all men, bringing salvation? Not just that they should be saved, and then rest upon the fact that they are saved people and nothing more matters, but *that*, that He might redeem unto Himself a people for *His own possession* - something more than *their* possessing salvation through grace.

The *goal* of grace is that *He* should have a people for His *own* possession. The kind of people for His own possession are here defined. We will not dwell upon the characteristics and features of that people. You see the various words and statements on both sides: the negative side - "from... from..." the various things that are said *from* which this people for His own possession are to be redeemed, and the things which they are to deny. That's the negative side, but it's very positive as a negative

statement - something that *must* be; it *must* be. Grace demands character! Character is what God must have for His own possession; it's a *kind* of people.

I think, dear friends, that perhaps one of the great needs of our time is to recover the *greatness of the cost of grace*. Grace has been made a little too cheap. It is the greatest word in our vocabulary, but it has become perhaps one of the cheapest words, the word most easily used because it is the common and all-inclusive word of the Christian vocabulary - but oh, what grace has cost and therefore what really does lie behind our being redeemed, and a people for God's own possession. You will not misunderstand the use of the word, I think that this passage suggests that this people should be a spiritual 'aristocracy' (that word can be used, of course, in a very wrong sense), but it means a people of *high* character, of *high* dignity, who have looked at these things mentioned on the one side and said: "No, no more of that. No more of that, I have done with that; it belongs to a low level of life." And have looked on the other side, and said: "Now, *this* is the standard which God has set and that's my standard, by the grace of God." You see because the grace of God is not only that favour which is unmerited, it is a *demand*, it is a *call*, it is an *energy*, it is something by which we are able to rise to a very high level of spiritual character - a people *for His own possession*. Grace has come, but grace by its costliness makes great demands, very great demands. And the end is this: "Who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity - redeemed from *all* iniquity - and purify unto Himself a people for His own possession, zealous of good works." The gift of grace, the object of grace!

The way or *the method* of grace, what is it? It is in this one word at the beginning of verse 12. In the Authorised version the word is translated: "*teaching* us to the intent that...". In the Revised Version it is: "*instructing* us...". Perhaps you wonder what the difference is between 'teaching' and 'instructing'. Well, there is a difference, but the revisers were seeking a word which would convey a little more than the word 'teaching'. You look back to chapter 1 and verse 11 and you have it like this: "Whose mouths must be stopped; men who overthrow whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake". Now, that word 'teaching' is an altogether different word from the one in verse 11 of chapter 2. It's not the same Greek word. The first word in chapter 1 means what we mean by teaching: telling people things, telling people things. But this word here in chapter 2 and verse 12 is another word altogether, and it's the same word as is translated in Hebrews 12 three times, chapter 12 of the letter to the Hebrews: "whom the Lord loveth He *chasteneth*. It is for *chastening* that ye endure... they verily for a few days *chastened* us as seemed good to them, but He for our profit". That word 'chasten' and 'chasteneth' is the same Greek word as is here interpreted or translated: 'instructing' us.

Now, everybody can see the difference between 'teaching', that is, telling people things, and 'chastening' them. Chastening is something very much more active isn't it? And so here the *method* of grace is 'instructing', 'chastening', 'child-training' us - child-training us to the intent that.... Now, you see, grace leads us into trouble or grace leads us into *discipline*. Grace brings us into a difficult school. It's grace! Oh, what a different idea of grace! From, "Well, grace is grace and you receive the gift of grace, and everything is alright, and you never need worry about things any more, and you are just going to heaven, and everything is going to be beautiful - it is all of grace you see, it's all of grace! And in grace, we have everything, and we need not give another thought to it at all!" But here it says that grace has come to *discipline* us, to bring us into a *school*, that is in the school of grace. Ah, but we don't often think of it like this in this hard school, in this discipline, in this child-training, in this chastening; we often think this is anything but the grace of God, and we mean the graciousness of God! We have got to just adjust ourselves to this - get our minds changed about this. It is just as much Divine grace toward us to perfect us, as it is to begin the work of salvation. It's just as much a part of the grace of God not to let us off when we are wrong, but to bring us up short, and

if needs be to do it, to do it very strongly, and seemingly unkindly. It's just as much a matter of Divine grace to do that as it is to bring us into salvation.

It's grace, dear friends, after all, it's the grace of God. You and I do have to learn this lesson because, you see, for young Christians sometimes, when things begin to get a bit difficult and the early blossom on the tree of their beginning of the Christian life - all so beautiful - when that begins to be torn off by rough winds, and there is nothing but apparent nakedness left, and it all seems now to have lost its glamour, this Christian life, and they pass into difficult times, the temptation is to think that this is not the grace of God; this is not the grace of God, this cannot be grace. And the devil will tell you that you have fallen from grace - not at all!

Do believe it, young Christian, when the times become difficult in your Christian life, it's all of grace that it should be so! No one wants to be weak, and flabby and sickly as a Christian; one who cannot stand up to anything at all; one who must have everything so nice and comfortable in order to go on being a Christian. Well, if you looked at others like that, you wouldn't admire them at all; you wouldn't think that that was really after all much good. Well, that's how we look at other people, let us remind ourselves that God's grace is at work to make us able to stand up and be strong, to go through, and it is grace; and this can only be learned in a hard school. The people whom God wants for His own possession are people like that, who really can stand their ground in adversity, who really can hold on when there's a tremendous shaking about; who can show grace in their own lives when everything is ungracious around them.

The Lord wants two things in the Christian life, two things which He has written so visibly in creation and yet which two things it is so difficult to combine in human character. They are perfectly combined in the Lord Jesus, and conformity to His image will be conformity to Him in these two respects, the most difficult combination: beauty and strength. Strength and beauty! In our family worship this morning we read the psalm in which that phrase occurs, "Strength and beauty are in His temple". Study the temple again, and see. *Strength* - massive pillars, mighty foundations, strong walls. But look at the beauty of the carvings, the fruit, everything. Strength and beauty: look at it in creation: the massive mountains, the very embodiment of strength; and nestling at its foot, the beautiful wild flowers... so tiny and yet so superb and wonderful. Strength and beauty in combination throughout all creation. God has said this is His mind. And grace can make that combination; but it takes grace, you know, for us to be strong, to be *strong* and yet to be beautiful. A lot of grace is wanted for that combination. And some people are inclined to be too strong, and there's not the beauty and the loveliness, and the kindness, and the gentleness and the graciousness. On the other hand, some people are all for the artistic and that other side; and as I used the word just now, there is flabbiness about them; they are not strong. No, a combination of these things in a people for His own possession.

So here, instructing, or teaching, you see, is the school of grace. The Headmaster of the school of the Christian Life is one who is full of sympathy on the one side, but full of sternness on the other, as occasion requires, but there is a perfect balance in Him; and His Name is Grace! Don't think of grace as something that is only soft. Grace can be very stern. But do not think of grace as always and only making exacting demands; grace is full of sympathy.

Think, then, "on these things..." these are the things... I have curtailed them very considerably because of the time, but here they are. "*These things* speak...". The word is "talk about"; "*These things* talk about and *exhort*...". And exhort: "Come along now, come along...". See, exhort: "Look here, look here, you're having a bad time I know, a bad time... and you are inclined to think the Lord is against you, and this is not what you were led, or led yourself to expect in the Christian life. Now,

come along, the Lord is only after something stronger, something deeper. You can never have the fruit until the blossom has gone. And it takes terrible winds to get rid of the blossom, in order to bring on the fruit. Come on now!" That's exhorting.

"These things speak... exhort... *reprove*?" Oh, is that a right word to use in the same sentence as the word 'grace'? Reprove? With all authority? Yes, it's all grace. The Holy Spirit is like this, because He is called the Spirit of Grace. The Spirit of Grace, He can be stern with all His sympathy. He can be full of sympathy and yet quite stern. He has, after all when we think about it, some difficult children to deal with; and what difficult children we are! We are. But grace... in the combination of sympathy and strength, will make us a people for His own possession.