

Pastoral Letter January 2013

Grace and Glory

What wonderful words these are: grace and glory! Each is magnificent on its own, yet together they amount to the very pinnacle of God's sovereign provision for us, his people, in the gospel. Individually they appear constantly throughout Scripture; side by side they are to be found in Psalm 84:11. 'For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows grace and glory. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly'.

It is appropriate, for this first pastoral letter of a new year, to meditate upon this divine pairing, grace and glory. Between them, these two words (with all that they stand for and all that they contain) sum up the whole of Christian experience. Years ago I remember taking them as a text at the funeral of a Christian, and remarking that the Lord, having first given her grace, had now given her glory. Our entire life on earth, to be followed by our entire life in heaven, is gathered up in these two words.

The first word may be rendered 'grace' or 'favour'. The second word may be rendered 'glory' or 'honour'. Matthew Henry, as always, has a delightful way of expressing things. He writes, the first word indicates 'both the goodwill of God towards us and the good work of God in us'; while the second word indicates 'the honour which he now puts upon us in giving us the adoption of sons, and that he has prepared for us in the future in the inheritance of sons'.

Now put them together. An old couplet goes like this: 'Two golden links of one celestial chain, Who owneth grace will surely glory gain'. C H Spurgeon remarks, characteristically, that 'the little conjunction 'and' is a diamond rivet binding the present with the future: grace and glory always go together. God has married them, and none can divorce them'.

What is grace? The favour of God to his people.
What is it? Glory begun below.

What is glory? The honour God bestows upon his people.
What is it? 'Grace in its Sabbath dress, grace in full bloom, grace like autumn fruit, mellow and perfected' (CHS again).

Grace in this world is a preparation for glory in the next – and there can be no glory in the next without grace in this. No grace, no glory. Glory in the next world is the perfection (or consummation) of grace in this. Glory is, if you like, the fullness of grace. Unconditional election (grace) and final perseverance (glory) are here, all-in-one! Let it be firmly believed and richly experienced among us that there are none upon whom God bestows his saving, comforting, preserving, sanctifying, fructifying grace upon whom he will not also bestow his glory. Putting that same thing the other way round: the Lord God will never deny glory even to just one of his people upon whom he has freely bestowed his grace.

This is good news, don't you agree? The very news to commence the new year on, and the very news to continue the year on. We have received grace. We are promised more grace, continual and all-sufficient supplies of grace. And glory is secured for us. All this is from God, in and through his beloved Son, our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. 'The men of grace have found glory begun below; Celestial fruit on earthly ground from faith and hope may grow ... Then let our songs abound, and every tear be dry; We're marching through Immanuel's ground to fairer worlds on high'.