**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**ROMANS-009**. **ACCESS INTO GRACE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand."*

*Romans 5:2*

I may be allowed to begin with a word or two of explanation of the terms of this passage. Note then, especially, that also which sends us back to the previous clause, and tells us that our text adds something to what was spoken of there. What was spoken of there? The peace of God which comes to a man by Jesus Christ through faith, the removal of enmity, and the declaration of righteousness. But that peace with God, which is the beginning of everything in the Christian view, is only the beginning, and there is much to follow. While, then, there is a progress clearly marked in the words of our text, and access into this grace wherein we stand is something more than, and after, the peace with God, mark next the similarity of the text and the preceding verse. The two great truths in the latter, Christ's mediation or intervention, and our faith as the condition by which we receive the blessings which are brought to us in and through Him, are both repeated, with no unmeaning tautology, but with profound significance in our text--By whom also we have access--as well as--the peace of God--access by faith into this grace. So then, for the initial blessing, and for all the subsequent blessings of the Christian life, the way is the same. The medium and channel is one, and the act by which we avail ourselves of the blessings coming through that one medium is the same. Now the language of my text, with its talking about access, faith, and grace, sounds to a great many of us, I am afraid, very hard and remote and technical. And there are not wanting people who tell us that all that terminology in the New Testament is like a dying brand in the fire, where the little kernel of glowing heat is getting covered thicker and thicker with grey ashes. Yes; but if you blow the ashes off, the fire is there all the same. Let us try if we can blow the ashes off.

This text seems to me in its archaic phraseology, only to need to be pondered in order to flash up into wonderful beauty. It carries in it a magnificent ideal of the Christian life, in three things: the Christian place, access into grace; the Christian attitude, wherein we stand; and the Christian means of realising that ideal, through Christ and by faith. Now let us look at these three points.

**I. The Christian Place.**

There is clearly a metaphor here, both in the word access and in that other one stand. The grace is supposed as some ample space into which a man is led, and where he can continue, stand, and expatiate. Or, we may say, it is regarded as a palace or treasure-house into which we can enter. Now, if we take that great New Testament word grace, and ponder its meanings, we find that they run something in this fashion. The central thought, grand and marvellous, which is enshrined in it, and which often is buried for careless ears, is that of the active love of God poured out upon inferiors who deserve something very different. Then there follows a second meaning, which covers a great part of the ground of the use of the phrase in the New Testament, and that is the communication of that love to men, the specific and individualised gifts which come out of that great reservoir of patient, pardoning, condescending, and bestowing love. Then there may be taken into view a meaning which is less prominent in Scripture but not absent, namely, the resulting beauty of character. A gracious soul ought to be, and is, a graceful soul; a supreme loveliness is imparted to human nature by the communication to it of the gifts which are the results of the undeserved, free, and infinite love of God.

Now if we take all these three thoughts as blended together in the grand metaphor of the Apostle, of the ample space into which the Christian man passes, we get such lessons as this. A Christian life may, and therefore should, be suffused with a continual consciousness of the love of God. That would change everything in it. Here is some great sweep of rolling country, perhaps a Highland moor: the little tarns on it are grey and cold, the vegetation is gloomy and dark, dreariness is over all the scene, because there is a great pall of cloud drawn beneath the blue. But the sun pierces with his lances through the grey, and crumples up the mists, and sends them flying beneath the horizon. Then what a change in the landscape! All the tarns that looked black and wicked are now infantile in their innocent blue and sunny gladness, and every dimple in the heights shows, and all the heather burns with the sunshine that falls upon it. So my lonely doleful life, if that light from God, the beam of His love, shines down upon it, rises into nobility, and flashes into beauty, and is calm and fair and great, as nothing else can make it. You may dwell in love by dwelling in God, and then your lives will be fair. You have access into the grace; see that you go there. They tell us that nightingales sing by the wayside by preference, and we may have in our lives, singing a quiet tune, the continual thought of the love of God, even whilst life's highway is dusty and rough, and our feet are often weary in treading it. A Christian life may be, and therefore should be, suffused with the sense of the abiding love of God.

Take the other meaning of the word, the secondary and derived meaning, the communication of that love to us, and that leads us to say that a Christian life may, and therefore should, be enriched with continual gifts from God's fullness. I said that the Apostle was using a metaphor here, regarding the grace as being an ample space into which a man was admitted, or we may say that he is thinking of it as a great treasure-house. We have the right of entrance there, where on every side, as it were, lie ingots of uncoined gold, and masses of treasure, and we may have just as much or as little as we choose. It is entirely in our own determination how much of the wealth of God we shall possess. We have access to the treasure-house; and this permit is put into our hands: Be it unto thee even as thou wilt. The size of the sack that the man brings, in the old story, determined the amount of wealth that he carried away. Some of you bring very tiny baskets and expect little and desire little; you get no more than you desired and expected.

That wealth, the fullness of God, takes the shape of, as well as is determined in its measure by the magnitude of, the vessel into which it is put. It is multiform, and we get whatever we desire, and whatever either our characters or our circumstances require. The one gift assumes all forms, just as water poured into a vase takes the shape of the vase into which it is poured. The same gift unfolds itself in an infinite variety of manners, according to the needs of the man to whom it is given; just as the writer's pen, the carpenter's hammer, the farmer's ploughshare, are all made out of the same metal. So God's grace comes to you in a different shape from that in which it comes to me, according to our different callings and needs, as fixed by our circumstances, our duties, our sorrows, our temptations.

So, brethren, how shameful it is that, having the possibility of so much, we should have the actuality of so little. There is an old story about one of our generals in India long ago, who, when he came home, was accused of rapacity because he had brought away so much treasure from the Rajahs whom he had conquered, and his answer to the charge was, I was surprised at my own moderation. Ah! there are a great many Christian people who ought to be ashamed of their moderation. They have gone into the treasure-house; stacks of jewels, jars of gold on all sides of them--and they have been content to come away with some one poor little coin, when they might have been rich beyond the dreams of avarice. Brethren, you have access to the fullness of God. Whose fault is it if you are empty?

Then, further, I said there was another meaning in these great words. The love which may suffuse our lives, the gifts, the consequence of that love, which may enrich our lives, should, and in the measure in which they are received will, adorn and make beautiful our lives. For grace means loveliness as well as goodness, and the God who is the fountain of it all is the fountain of whatsoever things are fair, as well as of whatsoever things are good. That suggests two considerations on which I have no time to dwell. One is that the highest beauty is goodness, and unless the art of a nation learns that, its art will become filthy and a minister of sin. They talk about Art for Art's sake. Would that all these poets and painters who are trying to find beauty in corruption--and there is a phosphorescent glimmer in rotting wood, and a prismatic colouring on the scum of a stagnant pond--would that all those men who are seeking to find beauty apart from goodness, and so are turning a divine instinct into a servant of evil, would learn that the true gracefulness comes from the grace which is the fullness of God given unto men.

But there is another lesson, and that is that Christian people who say that they have their lives irradiated by the love of God, and who profess to be receiving gifts from His full hand, are bound to take care that their goodness is not harsh and crabbed, as not only dull fools suppose it to be, but as it sometimes is, but is musical and fair. You are bound to make your goodness attractive, and to show that the things that are of good report are likewise the things that are lovely.

**II. And so, now, turn to the second point here, viz. the Christian attitude.**

The grace wherein ye stand; that word is very emphatic here, and does not merely mean continue, but it suggests what I have put into that phrase, the Christian attitude.

Two things are implied. One is that a life thus suffused by the love, and enriched by the gifts, and adorned by the loveliness that come from God, will be stable and steadfast. Resistance and stability are implied in the words. One very important item in determining a man's power of resistance, and of standing firm against whatever assaults may be hurled against him, is the sort of footing that he has. If you stand on slippery mud, or on the ice of a glacier, you will find it hard to stand firm; but if you plant your foot on the grace of God, then you will be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. And how does a man plant his foot on the grace of God? simply by trusting in God, and not in himself. So that the secret of all steadfastness of life, and of all successful resistance to the whirling onrush of temptations and of difficulties, is to set your foot upon that rock, and then your goings will be established.

Jesus Christ brings to us, in the gift of life in Him, stability which will check the vacillations of our own hearts. We go up and down, we yield when pressure is brought to bear against us, we are carried off our feet often by the sudden swirl of the stream, and the fitful blast of the wind. But His grace comes in, and will make us able to stand against all assaults. Our poor natures, necessarily changeable, and sinfully vacillating and weak, will be uniform, in the measure in which the grace of God comes into our hearts. Just as in these so-called petrifying wells, they take a bit of cloth, a bird's nest, a billet of wood, and plunge it into the water, and the mineral held in solution there infiltrates into the substance of the thing plunged in, and makes it firm and inflexible: so let us plunge our poor, changeful, vacillating resolutions, our wayward, wandering hearts, our passions, so easily excited by temptation, into that great fountain, and there will filter into our flexibility what will make it firm, and into our changefulness what will give in us some faint copy of the divine immutability, and we shall stand fast in the Lord and in the power of His might.

Further, in regard to this attitude, which is the result of the possession of grace, we may say that it indicates not only stability and steadfastness, but erectness, as in opposition to crouching or bowing. A man's independence is guaranteed by his dependence upon, and his possession of, that communicated grace of God. And so you have the fact that the phase of the Christian teaching which has laid most stress on the decrees and sovereign will of God, on divine grace in fact, and too little upon the human side--the phase which is roughly described as Calvinism--has underlain the liberties of Europe, and has stiffened men into the rejection of all priestly and civic domination. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty, and if a man has in his heart the grace of God, then he stands erect as a man. Ye are bought with a price; be ye not the servants of men. The Christian democracy, the Christian rejection of all sacerdotal and other domination, flows from the access of each individual Christian to the fountain of all wisdom, the only source of law and command, the inspirer of all strength, the giver of all grace. By faith ye stand. Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free.

**III. Lastly, and only a word; we have here the Christian way of entrance into grace.**

I have already remarked on the emphasis with which, both in my text and in the preceding clause, there are laid down the two conditions of possessing this grace, or the peace which precedes it: By Christ--through faith. Notice, too, that Jesus Christ gives us access. Now that expression is but an imperfect rendering of the original. If it were not for its trivial associations, one might read instead of access, introduction, by whom we have introduction into this grace wherein we stand. The thought is that Jesus Christ secures us entry into this ample space, this treasure-house, as some court officer might take by the hand a poor rustic, standing on the threshold of the palace, and lead him through all the glittering series of unfamiliar splendour, and present him at last in the central ring around the king. The reality that underlies the metaphor is plain. We sinners can never pass into that central glory, nor ever possess those gifts of grace, unless the barrier that stands between us and God, between us and His highest gifts of love, is swept away.

I recall an old legend where two knights are represented as seeking to enter a palace, where there is a mysterious fire burning in the middle of the portal. One of them tries to pass through, and recoils scorched; but when the other essays an entrance the fierce fire sinks, and the path is cleared. Jesus Christ has died, and I say it with all reverence, as His blood touches the fire it flickers down and the way is opened into the holiest of all, whither the Forerunner is for us entered. He both brings the grace and makes it possible that we should go in where the grace is.

But Jesus Christ's work is nothing to you unless your personal faith comes in, and so that is pointed to in the second of the clauses here: By faith we have access. That is no arbitrary appointment. It lies in the very nature of the gift and of the recipient. How can God give access into that grace to a man who shrinks from being near Him; who does not want access, and who could not use the grace if he had it? How can God bestow inward and spiritual gifts upon any man who closes his heart against them, and will not have them? My faith is the condition; Christ is the Giver. If I ally myself to Him by my faith, He gives to me. If I do not, with all the will to do it, He cannot bestow His best gifts any more than a man who stretches out his hand to another sinking in the flood can lift him out, and set him on the safe shore, if the drowning man's hand is not stretched out to grasp the rescuer's outstretched hand.

Brethren, God is infinitely willing to give the choicest gifts of His love to us all, to gladden, to enrich, to adorn, to make stable and erect. But He cannot give them unless you will trust Him. It pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell. That alabaster box is brought to earth. It was broken on the Cross that the house might be filled with the odour of the ointment. Our faith is the only condition; it is only the condition, but it is the indispensable condition, of our being anointed with that fragrant anointing. He, and He only, can give us the fullness of God.