

Pride Catechized and Condemned

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"For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"

[1 Corinthians 4:7](#)

PRIDE GROWS APACE like other ill weeds. It will live on any soil. In the natural heart it flourishes, springing up without sowing, and growing without watering; and even in the renewed heart it all too readily takes root when Satan casts abroad a handful of its seed. Of all creatures in the world the Christian is the last man who ought to be proud; and yet, alas, we have had mournful evidence both in past history and in our own observation, and worst of all in our own personal experience, that Christian men may become lifted up, to their own shame. Paul set himself very earnestly to deal with this disease when he saw it raging among the Corinthians. He felt it needful to do so, for it was leading to other mischiefs of the most disgraceful kind. Pride and self-conceit had led the members of the church in Corinth to choose for themselves distinct leaders, and to arrange them selves under separate banners: the followers of this man thinking themselves better than the followers of that. Thus the body of Christ was divided, and all sorts of ill feeling, jealousy, emulation and envy sprang up in the church of God where all ought to have been mutual helpfulness and loving unity. Paul therefore earnestly, and with great wisdom, assailed the spirit of pride.

Paul was well aware of one fact, namely, that pride is shallow and superficial. It cannot endure honest questioning, and so Paul tried it by the Socratic method, and put it through a catechism. He puts three questions to it in this verse, and these three all called upon his friends to go a little lower in their contemplation of themselves than their pride had before allowed them to go. Pride said, "I have such and such gifts"; but Paul replied, "what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" Thus he digged deeper and undermined pride. The receipt of those gifts from God it had forgotten altogether; therefore, by bringing that fact to mind the apostle took pride right under the root, and that is always the best way to destroy a weed. To cut off the green top, and leave the crown of the root so that it may spring up in the next shower, or the next sunshine, is of no avail; but to go deep down and tear up the root is effectual: this Paul did with pride by reminding the vainglorious Corinthians that the gifts which they possessed were no ground of glory, because they had received them as alms from the charity of God.

Another truth is also illustrated by Paul's procedure, namely, that pride is always inconsistent with the true doctrine of the gospel. You may use this test concerning any preaching, or teaching that you meet with: if it legitimately and logically leads a man to boast of himself, it is not true. Our chemists use litmus to discover the presence of acid in any liquid submitted to them, for the paper then takes a reddish tint; and you may use this as your test, that when a doctrine makes you red with pride it contains the acid of falsehood. That which puffs up is not of God, but that which lays the man low, and exalts Jesus Christ, has at least two of the tokens of truth. That which glorifies man cannot have been revealed by God, for he has said that no flesh shall glory in his presence. Such teaching may appear very lustrous with affected holiness, and very fascinating, with pretended spirituality, and there may be much in your fondest desires which inclines your heart towards it, as there always is in the novelties of the present day, but try it whether it be of God by the test which is here suggested. If with a sleek hand it brushes your feathers the right way, and makes you feel "What a fine fellow I am," you ought at once to flee from it. The very fact that it flatters you should be to you like a fog horn to warn you of danger. Say to every doctrine which fosters pride, "Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou savourest not the things that be of God and of truth, or thou wouldst not speak so well of me."

My object this morning shall be to attempt to do with our own pride what Paul sought to do with that of the Corinthians, namely, to go a little deeper than we generally go when measuring our own abilities; and then I shall try to use the silver spade of the doctrines of grace, so that this hemlock of pride may be taken up by the roots. Looking at the text I notice, first, *a question to be answered with ease*—"Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" secondly, *a question to be answered with shame*—"Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" and then, thirdly, I shall occupy your attention a few minutes with *other questions which these questions suggest*. May the Holy Spirit graciously bless the word.

I. In a two-fold form the apostle gives us A QUESTION TO BE ANSWERED WITH EASE. There may be some who would be puzzled with these questions, but I do not suppose there are any such people present; at any rate, there are no such members of our church. When we are asked, "Who maketh thee to differ from another?" our answer is immediately, "God by his grace has made us to differ" and if we are asked, "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" we reply, "We have nothing but our sin; for every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights."

We are the more glad to hear Paul say this, because he was what is nowadays styled a "self-made" man. It very frequently happens that a man who makes himself has very great respect for his maker. Is it not natural that he should worship his creator? Paul was a man who, as far as the Christian church is concerned, at any rate, had forced his way up without aid from others. He began in that church with no respect, but under very much suspicion.

The brethren had heard that he persecuted the saints, so that at first they would scarce receive him; his name was a terror rather than a pleasure, but Paul, with that high spirit, that consecrated ardor, that indefatigable industry, that wondrous courage of his, backed, of course, by the grace of God, came to the front until he could honestly claim, without egotism, that he was "not a whit behind the very chief of the apostles, though," said he, "I be nothing." Paul was a man who had not been borne upon the crest of the wave into an eminent position, he did not wake up one morning and find himself famous, but he had put forth all his powers in the struggle of life, and labored with persistent energy year after year. When he persecuted the saints of God he did it ignorantly, in unbelief, and thought he did God service; and all his life long for him to know a thing to be right was to strive after it. He had been kept from self-seeking and deceit, he had been an intensely active, strong-minded, high-souled man, and he had done a grand life-work by which the church is still affected; and yet Paul himself had nothing whereof to glory. His testimony to his own indebtedness to God's grace is so plain, and given so many times over, that we cannot mistake it. He says distinctly, "By the grace of God I am what I am." He counted his own righteousness as worthless, and only desired that he might be found in Christ, arrayed in the righteousness which is of God by faith. Do we address to-day any self-made man, as the world calls men who have risen from the ranks? Have you taken credit to yourself, dear friend, for your success in life? Do you plume yourself upon your having risen by your own exertions"? Then cease from such boasting, and in the spirit of the apostle ask yourself the question, "Who maketh thee to differ, and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?"

Our question is easy to answer, whether it be applied to natural gifts or to spiritual ones. There is a tendency to boast in *natural gifts*, but if questioned concerning them we must give the self-evident answer that any natural gifts we possess are not to be set to our credit, but were bestowed on us by God. Some gifts come to us as the result of *birth*, and of course in that matter we had no hand. It may be we were born of Christian parents, and that pedigree is one for which we shall always be thankful: we had sooner number our parents with the saints of God than with the peers of the realm: but truly, brethren, we should be foolish to boast of godly ancestors, for we had not the choosing of them Children of pious parents, you cannot look with disdain even upon those who are basely born, for you did not cause yourselves to be born any more than they did.

From their birth some derive physical strength. It always seems to me to be a very insane thing for a man to glory in his animal force, for there can be no merit in it; yet there are some who do so. In the strength of those brawny limbs of theirs, and those powerful muscles, some vaunt themselves abundantly. Though the Lord taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man, yet some count it a very wonderful thing that they can outleap or outrun their fellows. O athlete, though thou be strong as Samson, or swift as Asahel, what hast thou that thou hast not received? Hadst thou been born with a tendency to consumption, or with some

other hereditary weakness, couldst thou have prevented it? And now that thou art strong, art thou to be praised for that any more than a horse or a steam engine?

The same is true of beauty of person, which too frequently is the cause of vanity. Beauty is often a snare on this account. What if thy features be delicately chiselled, what if thine eyes are bright as the morning, and thy countenance fair as the lily, what if there be a charm in thine every glance; what hast thou in all these for which to praise thyself? Jezebel also was fair to look upon, and is she to be praised? Is not thy beauty the gift of God? Bless thy Creator for it, but do not despise those who are less comely, for in so doing thou wilt despise their Maker. How often do we hear a laugh raised behind their backs against persons who are somewhat grotesque, or it may be deformed, but God made them, and who is he that shall dare to taunt the Maker with what he has done? What hast thou, O thou fairest among women; what hast thou, O thou comeliest among the sons of men, but what thou hast received? Cease, then, those mincing airs and tossings of the head.

The same is true with regard to the rank which comes of birth. Some men are born according to heraldic arrangements noble. In what way is a new-born babe noble? Can true nobility arise out of anything but personal character? They are, however, born with the repute of nobility, and are at once regarded with respect. Are they not our future rulers? Through no deed or desert, or talent or heroism of their own, some are as it were by accident, or rather by the sovereign ordinance of providence, placed above others, wherefore then should they glory in what is so purely a matter of gift? O thou who art great and honorable amongst men, what hast thou but what thou hast received? Walk in lowly gentleness, and live with true nobility of character, and so make thy rank a blessing.

Brethren and sisters, how much all of us owe in the matter of birth for which we sometimes take to ourselves credit. We have never fallen, perhaps, into the grosser immoralities, but should we not readily have done so if we had been huddled together in chambers where decency struggles for existence, or been compelled to take our walks abroad where blasphemy and vice contend with law and order, and are not to be subdued? If the worst of examples had been before us instead of the best, what might we not have become? We have sinned enough as it is, but very much of the fact that we have not sinned more must be laid rather to the account of our having commenced life under favorable circumstances than to any meritorious conduct of our own. In this respect, what have we that we did not receive? You have been honest, thank God for it: but you might have been a thief if your father had been so. You have been chaste and modest, be glad of it: you might not have been so had you been encompassed with other surroundings. You are at this time respected and reputable, and you carry on business in an upright manner; had you been as poor as some, you might have been tempted to as dirty transactions as they are chargeable with. In these common matters of morality we cannot tell how much we owe to birth, and how little to ourselves.

Certainly self-applause ceases as we hear the question, "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?"

In the matter of *talent* there are very great differences. One man will very soon make his way in the world where others fail. Put him where we will, he will make his fortune; and his friends laughingly say that if he were transported to the desert of Sahara he would sell the sand at a profit. But who gave him that talent? What has he that he has not received? Another can study an art or a science and become proficient in it in a short time; as a boy he is a leader at school, and as a man he is eminent in his sphere; still, are not his wisdom and insight gifts from heaven? Another man has the gift of eloquence, and can speak well, while his fellow has the pen of a ready writer. In either of these gifts a man may take so much content as by-and-by to become vainglorious, but the truth taught in our text ought always to prevent that folly. "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" That which God gave to thee he might have withheld, and the man whom thou despisest might have had thy gifts: he would have been foolish to despise thee if thou hadst been without them, and thou art foolish now to despise him.

What differences there are, too, as to what men are helped to make of themselves by *education*. Now-a-day there is a better opportunity of education for all ranks and conditions of men, for which I am earnestly thankful, and hope that true religion will be connected with the advantage; but all boys trained in the same school do not leave it equally educated. One is quick, and another dull; one manages to place himself foremost, and another is doomed to be in the rear. Whether the difference be in the original conformation of the man, or be the result of different teaching, the result must alike be subject for thankfulness to God, for whether it be natural talent or excellent education, both are received.

Equally so is it with *wealth*. I may address some one to whom God has given large substance; but, my dear friend, in the course of the accumulation of that substance you have had plenty of evidence that "it is God that giveth thee power to get wealth." There was a time when you had little enough, and it was a singular providence which put you in the way of rising. There have been times, too, when a little turn of the scale would have sent you into bankruptcy, but the markets went the other way, and you were made. You have seen others who were ahead of you in the race of prosperity left far behind, and though God has prospered you I know there have been anxious moments when you have had to lift up your eyes to the Most High, and beseech him by his tenderness and mercy to help and deliver you. Well, inasmuch as this wealth is a blessing if you know how to use it rightly, ascribe the possession of it to God, who has made you his steward. Do you tell me that you have had a keener eye and exercised more industry than others, as well as a better judgment? True, but who gave you the judgment, and who gave you the health with which to be industrious? Many another man has been as industrious, and yet has failed; many another has been as willing to work, but he has been disabled by sickness; many another man has had as keen an eye, but alas,

his judgment has been baffled by misfortune; another man began life with as clear a brain as you, but now he is confined in the asylum and you still are in possession of all your faculties. O sirs, never sacrifice to your own net and drag, and say, "We brought up these treasures from the deep"; but bless God who gave you all that you have of earthly things, for what have you that you have not received? I would that you felt more than you do that you are only stewards, that your possessions are lent to you to be used for God's glory and the good of others, and neither to be squandered nor hoarded for yourselves.

But now, brothers and sisters, this is very emphatically true as to *our spiritual gifts*, and I invite you to consider this truth—"What hast thou that didst not receive?" There has long been a great doctrinal discussion between the Calvinists and the Arminians upon many important points. I am myself persuaded that the Calvinist alone is right upon some points, and the Arminian alone is right upon others. There is a great deal of truth in the positive side of both systems, and a great deal of error in the negative side of both. If I was asked, "Why is a man damned?" I should answer as an Arminian answers, "He destroys himself." I should not dare to lay man's ruin at the door of divine sovereignty. On the other hand, if I were asked, "Why is a man saved?" I could only give the Calvinistic answer, "He is saved through the sovereign grace of God, and not at all of himself." I should not dream of ascribing the man's salvation in any measure to himself. I have not found, as a matter of fact, that any Christian people care seriously to quarrel with a ministry which contains these two truths in fair proportions. I find them kicking at the inferences which are supposed to follow from one or the other of them, and sometimes needlessly crying to have them "reconciled;" but the two truths together, as a rule, commend themselves to the conscience, and I feel sure that if I could bring them both forward this morning with equal clearness I should win the assent of most Christian men. At this time, however I have to confine myself to the statement that all the grace we have is the gift of God to us, and I trust none will, therefore, suppose that I deny the other side of the question. I believe assuredly that we have nothing good in us but what we have received. For instance, we were dead in trespasses and sin, and we were quickened into spiritual life: my brethren, did that life spring out of the ribs of death? Did the worm of our corruption beget the living seed of regeneration? It were absurd to think so. God be praised for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sin, which led him to quicken us by his grace. We have been forgiven our great sins—wholly forgiven; through the precious blood of Christ we have been made clean. Did we deserve it? Does any man who professes to be a Christian say for a single moment that he deserved the ransom paid by Christ, and deserved the pardon of his sin? It would be monstrous blasphemy even to imagine such a thing. Oh no; "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." God forgave us freely; there could not possibly have been any quality in sin which could

have called forth forgiving love. He had mercy upon us because he would have mercy upon us; not because we could claim anything at his hand.

Everything, dear friend, that makes you to *differ from the common sinner* is the gift of God's grace to you. You know it is. You have faith in Christ: yes, but did not the Holy Spirit work it in you? Do you not cheerfully subscribe to the doctrine that faith is of the operation of God? You have repentance of sin, but was the repentance natural to you? Did you not receive it from him who is exalted on high to give repentance? Is not your repentance his gift? "Truly," one will say, "but then the same gospel was preached to others as to us." Precisely so. Perhaps the very sermon which was the means of your conversion left others as they were. What made the difference then? Do you reply, "We willed to believe in Jesus." That is true; an unwilling faith would be no faith: but then who influenced your will? Was your will influenced by some betterness of nature in you so that you can claim credit for it? I for one reject with abhorrence any such an idea. Do you reply, "Our will was influenced by our understanding, and we chose what we knew to be best." But then, who enlightened your understanding? Who gave you the light which illuminated your mind, so that you chose the way of life? "Oh," say you, "but our hearts were set towards salvation, and the hearts of others were not." That also is true, but then who set your heart that way, who was the prime mover? Were you or God? There is the question, and if, my dear brother, you dare affirm that in the matter of your own salvation you were the prime mover I am at a loss to understand you, and I hope there are few of your creed. Jesus is not Alpha to you. You do not love him because he first loved you. You were evidently not converted, or turned at all, but you turned yourself. You are not a new creature, but are your own new-creator. Do you look to see the same thing in others? Why, then, do you act as you do? Why do you pray the Lord to turn others if you believe that he did not turn you? Do you pray the Lord to convert your children? Why do you do it? If it is left entirely to them to be the prime movers, why pray to God about them? "Ah," says one, "God must treat all alike." I ask again, why do you pray for your children? You ask God to do a wrong thing in blessing your children in preference to other people, if it be true that he is bound to treat all alike. When you go practically to work these sentiments do not hold water. The man who knows that the Holy Spirit was first in his operations upon the mind, and who calls Christ Jesus the Alpha and the Omega of his salvation, is the man who can fairly go to the Lord, and pray for the conversion of this man or that; and he too is sure to give God all the glory of his salvation, and magnify and bless the grace of the Most High.

Perhaps, my dear brother, there is a difference *between you and other saints*. I am sure there is reason for some saints to eclipse others, for some professors are very poor things indeed. Well, brother, you have a great deal more faith than others; where did you get it? If you received it from anywhere but from God, you had better get rid of it. Dear brother, you have more joy than some, and possibly you feel ashamed of your fellow Christians who are

so doubting and sad: beware that you do not become vain of your joy, and remember, that if your joy is true joy you received it of the Lord. Are you more useful than others? You cannot help looking at certain professors who are idle, and wishing that you could stir them up. I know I do; I would put a sharp pin into their downy cushions if I could: but for all that who gives us activity, who gives us usefulness, who gives us zeal, who gives us courage, who gives us everything? If you, dear friend, get into such a condition that you begin to whisper to yourself, "I have improved my gifts and graces at a very noble rate, and am getting on exceedingly well in spiritual things," you will soon have to come down from your high places. If you register yourself A 1 at Lloyd's I will not sail with you, brother, for I fear your proud barque will tempt the tempest. I would rather sail with some poor Christian man whose weather-beaten vessel would go to the bottom if Jesus were not on board, for I am persuaded he is safe. "Blessed is the man that feareth always." Blessed is the man who lies low at the foot of the cross, and who, concerning everything that he has, whether temporal or spiritual, ascribes all to the Giver of all Good.

Now we must pass on briefly to think of the second point.

II. HERE IS A QUESTION TO BE ANSWERED WITH SHAME. "If thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" If any of us have fallen into vain glory, and we all have more or less done so, let us answer this question with confusion of face. Brother, sister, have you gloried in anything you have received? Then bethink you how wrongly you have acted, for you have robbed God of his honor. To glory in man is altogether inconsistent with glorying in God. Depend upon it every particle of praise we take to ourselves is so much stolen out of the revenues of the King of kings. Will a man rob God? Will a redeemed man rob God? Will a poor sinner snatched from between the jaws of death and hell by undeserved mercy, rob God? Lord have mercy upon us.

When we boast we also leave our truthful position, and every Christian ought to be ashamed to stand anywhere but in the truth. When I confess myself to be weak, helpless, and ascribe all I have to grace, then I stand in the truth; but if I take even the remotest praise to myself, I stand in a lie. The Lord have mercy upon us if we have dared to act falsehood in his presence.

Let us remember, too, that whensoever we prize ourselves highly we are sure to esteem our Lord less. Do you see any spiritual beauty in yourself? Then it is because you do not know what true beauty is? Do you say, "I am rich and increased in goods"? Then you know nothing, or very little, of what true wealth is. You have mistaken gilt for gold, and rags for raiment. I counsel thee buy of Jesus gold tried in the fire, and fine linen wherewith thou mayest be clothed. Depend upon it our judgment is very much like a pair of scales: if Christ goes up self goes down; and if self rises Jesus falls in our esteem. No man ever sets a high price upon self and Christ at the same time.

"The more thy glories strike mine eyes

The humbler I shall be,"

is a rule without exception.

Besides, if you and I have gloried in what we possess we have undervalued our fellow Christians, and that is a great sin. They are very dear to Jesus, and he accounts even their deaths precious. "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones that believe in me"; but if we over-estimate ourselves the natural consequence is that we under-estimate others. Have I ever thought, "I am a rich man; and these poor people, though good Christians, are nobodies compared to me: I am of far more consequence to the church"? Have I conceived, because I have a measure of talent, that those holy men and women who cannot speak for Christ are of no great account? Or have I, because I happened to be an old, experienced Christian, snuffed out the young ones, and said "They are only a pack of boys and girls"? Is this the way to speak of those who were bought with the blood of Christ, and are members of Christ's body? It will not do for us to despise the meanest saint. I believe there are many who are now pushed into the background and shoved into any hole and corner whom Christ looks upon with special delight, and will place first when he comes. Verily I say unto you, "There are first that shall be last, and there are last that shall be first."

Besides, all this honoring of ourselves generally puts us off from the right course as to our gifts, and makes us forget that these things are only lent us, to be used for our Master. It is required of stewards that they be found faithful, not that they vaunt themselves and deck themselves in their Master's goods. We have too much to do to afford to boast. Look at yonder young soldier who has just received his armor and his helmet. He has just entered the service. Look with what pleasure he sees his comely face reflected in his breastplate; how much he admires his plume, he thinks how grand he shall look in such gear. My dear fellow, all this while you have forgotten that to wear these things in the thick of the battle, where they will bear the dint of the sword, is what awaits you, and you do not consider that, not your gallant appearance, but your valour is what we want to see. When a man exalts himself because of what he possesses he does not act as a soldier of the cross should do.

Here we will insert an illustration or two. There is a tendency in some to exalt themselves because God has placed them in *office*. They are ministers, deacons, elders, superintendents, or something. What mighty airs they give themselves! "Honour to whom honor is due"☒ they seem to have learned the text by heart, and to have seen a personal reference in it. Have you never seen the footmen of princes when they are playing the great man? What wonders of nature and art they often are. I was admiring one of them the other day, with all the reverence due. The vision of his pomp quite staggered me, for he was so gorgeous to look upon. I feel sure that his royal master was nothing like so striking, and certainly could not have been more pompous or aristocratic. While I was looking on with due wonder and reverence, somebody cruelly remarked, "What a flunkey!"☒ a most irreverent observation, and yet very natural. My brothers, whenever you and I, because we have our best clothes on, and are

ministers, or deacons, or elders, act as if we were very great men, somebody or another is sure to call us flunkies too; not perhaps exactly in so many words, but in language to the same effect. Do not let us expose ourselves to such contempt, and if ever we have done so, let us be rebuked at once by the thought of what we have seen in others.

Some persist in boasting about their experience. This also is vanity. Suppose a man here, who is a great pedestrian, has been over the Alps and traversed Europe; here is his walking stick, and it boasts, "I am the most traveled walking stick in creation, I have smitten the craggy brows of the Alps and bathed myself in the Nile." "Well," says one, "but wherever you have gone you have been carried by a power beyond yourself." So let the man who boasts in experience remember that in the paths of peace he has gone nowhere except as the Lord's hand has borne him onward; he has been nothing but a staff in God's hands, and while he should be grateful he should never be proud.

I was in a beautiful garden the other day, upon the rocks, where the choicest of flowers and tropical plants are growing: while all around the rocks are bare, with scarce a trace of vegetable life. Now, suppose that garden were proud, and boasted of its fruitfulness. The answer would be, "Every basketful of earth had to be carried up to you, and you would not bear fruit now if it was not for the stream of water that is turned on, and tracked through many little mazes, and brought to the root of each plant you bear; you would be a rock again in a few months if you were left to yourself; therefore let the former of the garden rejoice in his work, but the garden itself may not glory." That is what the most fruitful believer would be if God let him alone—a barren rock, a wilderness.

Suppose I address some Christian who is happy, and joyous, and cheerful, and has such dainty bits sent home to him out of the promises, such precious words from Scripture applied to his heart. Dear friend, are you apt to think that there is something specially good about you because you get all these remarkable enjoyments? Then let me disabuse your mind. It is your weakness which gets you these favors. When you are living in a hotel you will remark that certain persons have their dinners sent upstairs. What for? Oh, that is because they are ill. If you are well you must go down to the *table d'hôte* with the rest; but if you are ill they will send it upstairs, and pay you extra attention. These very comforts that God gives you ought to make you enquire whether there is not something amiss with you, and instead of thinking you are strong and well you should search and see if there is not some weakness which the Lord in his mercy intends to remove by the double comforts which he gives to you. Nothing in the world ought to be a cause of self-exaltation; nothing that our God gives us ought to make us think highly of ourselves. Lower down, brother, lower down, and so you will rise. The way to heaven is downhill, not uphill. As Christ went down to the grave that he might come up again and fill all things, so must you go to the cross, and down to the grave of self and be buried with Christ, and learn the meaning of your baptism, and

make it true that you are buried with him to all the world, and to yourself also, for so only can you rise into the fullness of the new life.

III. OTHER QUESTIONS WHICH THESE QUESTIONS SUGGEST shall now, in the third place, occupy our attention. What are they?

The first is this. *Have I ever given to God his due place in the matter of my salvation?* A question that I may very well put, for I recollect when I was converted to God, and truly converted too, but I did not know that it was the work of the Spirit in my heart; I did not understand that it was the result of special grace. I had heard the gospel generally preached, but I had not learned the peculiar doctrines of grace; and I recollect very well sitting down and thinking to myself, "I am renewed in my mind, I am forgiven, I am saved: how came that about?" and I traced it to this, that I had heard the gospel, but as I knew that many never had an opportunity of hearing it, I saw special grace in my having had the opportunity to hear it. But then I said, "There are others who have heard it, but it was not blessed to them: how came it to be blessed to me?" and I cogitated for awhile whether it could be something good in me that made the gospel useful to me, for if so I deserved to have the credit of it. Somehow the grace which God had given me made me fling that theory to the winds, and I came to this conclusion, "It must be God that made the difference," and having got that one thought into my mind, the doctrines of grace followed as a matter of course. Only by experimentally knowing that there has been a special work of grace in your own soul, will you be likely to place the Lord where he should be in your creed, for some provide a very inferior place for the Lord in the matter of their salvation. With them man is very great, and God is made little of; but true theology makes God the very sun of the system, the center, the head, the first, and chief. Have *you* done so? If not, correct your views, and get a clearer view of the gospel of grace. May the Holy Spirit help you therein. To know the doctrines of grace will be much to your comfort, will tend to your stability, and will also lead you to seek the glory of God.

The next question is this, Have I this morning the spirit of humble gratitude? How do I feel? Do I take God's mercy as a matter of course, and view my own gifts without thankfulness? Then I act like the brutes that perish, but let me pray this morning that humble, lowly gratitude may daily rule my spirit. Such gratitude will make you cheerful, it will make you earnest, it will in fact be an atmosphere in which all Christian graces will grow by the blessing of God's Spirit.

Next, seeing I have been a receiver, what have I done towards giving out again? It cannot have been intended that I should receive and never give out, for if that be the case there is a sad lot for me. You know they used to make, and do still make, in the North of England, earthenware saving boxes for the children. You can put what you like in, but you cannot get it out any more until you break the box; and there are persons of that sort among us. Some have died lately, and their estates have been reported in the Probate Court. There was

plenty put in to them, but you could never get anything out, and consequently they had to be broken up. I only hope when they were broken up the gold and silver went the right way. What a pity to be like money boxes, to be of no good until you are broken up. One would like to get and give at the same time. We ought not to be as a stagnant pond, a Dead Sea, which receives from rivers all the year round, but gives forth no stream in return, and so becomes a stagnant, putrid lake. Let us be like the great lakes of America, which receive the mighty rivers and pour them out again, and consequently keep fresh and clear.

The next question is—Since what I have had I have received by God's grace, might I not receive more? Come; brothers and sisters, with regard to gracious things I want you to be covetous. Covet earnestly the best gifts. If you have had faith, why should you not have more? If God gave you hope, joy, experience, why not more? You are not straitened in him, you can be only straitened in yourself. Try to remove those hindrances, and ask the Lord to give you more grace.

One other question—If all that Christians have they have received, sinner, why should not you receive as well as they? If it were true that Christians got these good things out of themselves, then you, poor sinner, might despair, for you know you have no good thing in you; but if the best of saints, the best Christian in heaven, has not anything but what he received, why should not you receive? To receive, you know, is never a difficult thing. I warrant you that out of all the people in London there is not a man but what could receive. Try it on the present occasion. Let it be a thousand pounds, and see how many among us would be unable to receive. If there be a person about who would not receive, I tell you who it is—it is the man who thinks himself so rich that he does not care to have any more. Even so the proud, self-righteous Pharisee cannot receive; but you poor, good-for-nothing, empty sinners can receive; and here is the mercy—"to as many as *received* him, to them gave the power to become the sons of God, even to as many as believed on his name." Open that empty hand, open that empty heart: God grant they may be opened now by his own divine Spirit, and may you receive, and then I know you will join with us in saying, "Of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—[Psalm 103](#) and [1 Corinthians 4](#).

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—103 (Vers. 1.), 233, 235.