

Text: Heb. 13:25

Title: "Grace in Hebrews"; Part 2.

Time: 12/4/2016 am

Place: NBBC

Intro - We sang this morning that God's grace is amazing, and so it is. Perhaps no one understood the depth of that truth better than this hymn's author, John Newton. If I were to ask you which is the most enduring hymn ever written in the history of English hymnody, I think many would pick this hymn, "Amazing Grace." I know I would. What is it that enables a man to write a hymn like this? I think the power of this hymn comes in part from its use of the word *I*. The author of the hymn is not describing God's grace from afar. He is sharing what it had done for him.

One of the things Newton says in this regard is, "How precious did that grace appear, the hour I first believed." Newton remembered that hour happening when he was 23 years of age on a slave-trading ship called *The Greyhound*. It had been a difficult 16 years since his godly mother passed away when he was 7 years of age. She had worshipped with the Puritan dissenters in England, and she was careful to bring her young son with her to learn of Christ and salvation.

After her death, Newton was raised by his sea-captain father. After years of giving himself to the life of debauchery and lust available at sea, he found himself on *The Greyhound* returning from Brazil with a load of slaves. By that time, he had become such a blasphemer that even hardened seamen thought him extreme. In his later years, Newton would call himself "the Old African Blasphemer," a label he knew he well deserved. On this latest voyage, he had

narrowly escaped death after falling overboard during a drunken party.

During that same trip, *The Greyhound* encountered a storm that nearly destroyed her. Newton spent all night bailing and pumping water from the vessel, thinking that it would be his last. One author described this dark hour this way: “All the while he reviewed his life: his former professions of religion, the extraordinary twists of past events, the warnings and deliverances he had met with, his licentious conversation, and his mockery of the Gospels.’

“At first Newton was convinced that he had sinned too much to have any hope for God's forgiveness. Yet when the storm did not recede and he really felt he would soon meet his God, he at last clung to Scriptures that taught God's grace towards sinners, and he breathed his first weak prayer in years. As he was later to recall it, this was ‘the hour he first believed’” [CT (Issue 81, 2004)].

That night was the night this prayer of the author of Hebrews was answered in the life of John Newton, “Grace be with you all. Amen.” That amazing grace saved a wretch like him. He once was lost, but after grace he was found. He once was blind, but after grace he could see. Grace taught his heart to fear, and grace his fears relieved. He could remember the hour that grace first looked very precious to him, the night he first believed. Can we?

We are reviewing grace in the book of Hebrews as we answer that question, because what this book has said about grace tells us what our lives will be like when this prayer at the book's end is answered for us. If grace is with us, six things will be true. Last time we saw that we must be saved by grace (2:8-10, 14-15), that we must pray for grace (4:15-

16), and that we must obey the Spirit of grace (10:28-30). If grace is going to be with us, we must be saved by it, we must be in prayer for its daily help, and we must respond to it in obedience to the Holy Spirit. Three usages of the word *grace* remain in the book, and they give us three other truths about the role of grace in our lives.

I. We must not fall short of grace (12:14-17).

Ill: Newton told the story of a younger friend of his named Job Lewis, with whom he had served on a Royal Navy man-o'-war vessel. It was during that period of his life, his early twenties, that Newton had decided to cast off all remaining restraints of his early upbringing with his mother. He managed to convince Lewis to do the same with him. Years later, now a saved man and captain of his own ship, Newton hired Lewis to join his crew. Lewis's character had degenerated, however, to the point that Newton had to let him go. Not long afterwards, he heard of his once-friend's death of fever from other sailors. It was said that Lewis died in a desperate rage, screaming that he was going to hell, and yet unwilling to call to God for mercy. Newton lived for years with great regret over the way he had influenced this younger friend.

Appl: Job Lewis was a man who fell short of the grace of God. If grace is to be with us, we certainly must not fall short of the grace of God. But our text says more than that. It challenges each of us to make sure that we never have to live with the regret that John Newton lived with due to the negative influence he had on his friend's life. We do this by following two commands – be at peace with men, and follow after God's holiness (v. 14). The verb *looking diligently* (v. 15) is *episkopōō*. It means *to oversee*. The idea is that this is something that each of us needs to take responsibility for,

namely that our lives never make someone into a Job Lewis or an Esau.

Appl2: What we must avoid especially in this regard is the root of bitterness mentioned here, which can spread rapidly and cause spiritual destruction. That word *bitterness* is a term associated in the NT with the way we use our tongues. Our tongues are by nature filled with this bitterness: “Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness” (Rom. 3:14). And that was before social media!

And so we have to guard against this natural tendency to ruin and destroy with the use of our tongue: “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth [or be tolerated in your tweets and on your Facebook page], but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor” (Eph. 4:29-5:2).

This is so important for us as we think of our responsibility to make disciples. Especially as we care for believers who are younger in the Lord than we, we have to make sure that our tongue administers grace to them rather than bitterness. Satan uses with such skill the bitterness of complaining and sarcasm and criticism and anger and impatience that comes from our lips at times. Do we know a younger believer that is in danger of falling short of the grace of God because of something we said or failed to say? We must not fall short of grace, and we must accept the responsibility to help them not fall short of it either.

II. We must show grace in our worship (12:28-29).

III: I love that verse in "Amazing Grace" that says, "Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved."

Appl: That balance between fear and fears relieved is what worshipping the God of grace is all about. If grace is with us, we will seek to worship God with this balance. That is really the theme of Hebrews 12. We read about the fear relieved in vv. 18-24. As born-again, blood-washed, children of God, when we sin we no longer fear Mount Sinai. We never have to worry about the condemnation of God's law upon us, for Christ paid that penalty for us on the cross. When we sin we come to Mount Zion, with our standing in Christ fully in tack, owning our claim to the sprinkled blood which speaks better things than the blood of Abel. The blood of Abel cries from the ground for retribution on the sinner. The blood of Jesus cries from the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." By grace we worship this morning as those whose fears have been relieved.

Appl2: But grace also teaches our hearts to fear as we worship this morning, and so we have vv. 25, 28-29. It turns out that offending God's grace is actually worse than offending God's law. We who are the recipients of such grace understand that, and it causes us to worship the God of grace in a way that He would find acceptable, not in the way that we want to do it. We will use the truth of the songs of John Newton this morning to help us worship our God, but we will not use those of Ozzie Osborne. Grace has taught our hearts to fear. We dread offending the One who gave us so very much that we do not deserve.

III. We must be strengthened by grace (13:9-14).

III: John Newton's first pastorate was in Olney, England. He began his ministry there at the age of 39 and served the Lord faithfully for 15 years. In 1799 he published a hymnal he called the *Olney Hymns*, which included "Amazing Grace." Prior to that publication, however, the townspeople were beginning to tire of their pastor. He had preached against the sinful excesses of one of their favorite holidays called "Guy Fawkes Day," and while celebrating that day many of the townspeople threatened to burn Newton's house down. They were dissuaded only by money paid by Newton to bribe them to leave him and his family alone. After that incident, he felt that the parish he served was increasingly troubled with spiritual apathy and deadness. During this period, he complained to a friend that his people had become "sermon-proof." Soon, he left Olney for a pastorate in London, where the Lord richly blessed and used him for many years.

Appl: What happened to the church of Olney was happening to the Hebrew churches of Palestine when this letter was written to them. They were in danger of being carried away by varied and strange teachings, and not coincidentally, those teachings would take them back to the comfortable life they had as members of the mainstream apostate Judaism of their day. This inclination to fall away from the Lord is a part of our flesh which is still very active and influential in our lives. We tire of the difficulty of the reproach of Christ, of having to be on the outside of the camp. What can strengthen us under these circumstances?

The grace of God strengthens us. That grace comes from an altar, from which we must often eat and nourish our souls (v. 10). That altar is the cross of Calvary, where Jesus suf-

ferred for our sins (vv. 12-13). So the food that feeds and strengthens our souls by grace to be faithful is Christ Himself. We are strengthened to the degree that we are dwelling on Him and going to Him. Newton's hymn speaks of this strengthening and sustaining grace:

"Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

"The Lord has promised good to me,
His Word my hope secures;
He will my Shield and Portion be,
As long as life endures."

Conclusion: Will He be that to us? The prayer is "Grace be with you all." Has that prayer been answered in our lives, as it was in the life of John Newton? Over the fireplace in his study in Olney, Pastor Newton placed a plaque in large letters that testified that the grace of God had been with him. It contained two simple verses: "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable (Isa. 18:4), BUT Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee (Deut. 15:15)." "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me."

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching