

Future Grace

July 2011

Holiness is the habit of being of one mind with God, according as we find His mind described in Scripture. It is the habit of agreeing in God's judgement -- hating what He hates -- loving what He loves -- and measuring everything in this world by the standard of His Word. He who most entirely agrees with God, he is the most holy man. – J.C. Ryle

Doubtless, every true Christian's heart gives hearty approval to Ryle's definition of holiness. For most of us, personal holiness is something we desire but struggle to attain.

We just finished a lengthy sermon series influenced greatly by Pastor John Piper's book, *Future Grace*. In the opening pages of the book Piper asserts that sin gets its power where the pleasure it offers is prized over delight in God. Think about that for second in relationship to your own struggles with sin. Our ultimate fight is for delighting in God and a battle for what we truly prize, so that faithfulness is not just in praising God in all things but glorifying him by prizing Him. With this principle in mind John Piper encourages us to delight in a God who loves to bless us and learn to trust in "future grace". Trusting our God is treasuring and God it shows how worthy we find Him and it the act of trust has the power to strengthen weak faith, to personalize unconditional grace, and give us victory in the battle with unbelief.

We cannot pay God back for the grace He has given, but we must delight in it, and allow the knowledge of it to trickle down to the core of our souls. To walk with God is not a series of dutiful steps of obedience to pay God back for his grace; rather it's a heart bursting journey with a completely faithful and loving Father who enables us to take each step by the grace. Every step taken simply for the sake of obedience leads you deeper in debt and further from God's grace. But obedience to and labor for the Lord stirred by love and built upon trust draws us deeper into a divine partnership with God. As Paul says, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" ([1 Cor 15:10](#)).

Backward oriented gratitude is not the power source for obedience. In other words, we don't look back in time to the cross and to our initial conversion experience to empower us to obey God. Rather, we look forward to the hope we have in God; we exercise faith in the promises of God for future blessing to find momentum in obedience. We look forward to the future grace we expect to receive. "You can't run your car on gratitude for yesterday's grace," – says John Piper. We need to daily exercise fresh acts of faith in the grace of God for each new day's challenges. Christian obedience is a "work of faith" ([1 Thess 1:3](#); [2 Thess 1:11](#)) or the "obedience of faith" ([Rom 1:5](#)); never do we read about the "work of gratitude" or the "obedience of gratitude."

When you are faced with temptation to sin; when you are in the heat of battle with sin, take the promise of God and stab it to death. Faith severs the root of sin. Sin has power by promising a better tomorrow (or at least a better this evening) and by promising superior satisfactions. But true faith is of such a nature that it severs the root of sin by embracing a better future and providing a deeper satisfaction. The future grace of God is the deeper satisfaction and the better

future. When you live by faith in future grace, the power of sin is broken by the power of a superior satisfaction and a better future.

Thomas Chalmers was a great pastor, seminary professor, and leader in the Free Church of Scotland in the 19th century. He mentored men like Robert Murray McCheyne and Horatius Bonar (the hymnwriter), and he preached a landmark sermon entitled, "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection." It is a wonderful sermon in which he points out how we never lose our hold on one love until a new love comes along. He says that the only way to dispossess the heart of an old affection is by the expulsive power of a new one. The point is that there is no better way to overcome a bad desire than to push it out with a new one. It is in prayer that we summon the divine help to produce in us that new desire for God.

A person never really gets over a crush until a new love comes along. Our hearts can be drawn from one affection to another, but they will never lose their longing to cling to something. This is why John Calvin said that our hearts are like idol factories. We will worship something. We *will* love something and until a new more beautiful, more believable, love comes along, we will inevitably cling to idols! But the Gospel comes to us and it brings an expulsive power—the expulsive power of a new affection. A new affection comes in, as we see Jesus as more beautiful and believable and it drives out these other affections! It is in worship, through the preaching, the singing, and the sacraments, that our hearts are drawn from other "beauties" as our eyes are opened to see Jesus for who He really is.

Sinclair Ferguson applies Chalmers' biblical perspective to our own struggles today with expelling worldliness (unholiness). He writes:

Sometimes we make the mistake of substituting other things for it. Favorites here are activity and learning. We become active in the service of God and in seeking position within the church (we gain the positions once held by those we admired and we measure our spiritual growth in terms of position achieved); we become active evangelistically and in the process measure spiritual strength in terms of increasing influence; or we become active socially, in moral and political campaigning, and measure growth in terms of involvement. Alternatively, we recognize the intellectual fascination and challenge of the gospel and devote ourselves to understanding it, perhaps for its own sake, perhaps to communicate it to others. We measure our spiritual vitality in terms of understanding, or in terms of the influence it gives us over others. But no position, influence, or involvement can expel love for the world from our hearts. Indeed, they may be expressions of that very love.

Others of us make the mistake of substituting the rules of piety for loving affection for the Father: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!" Such disciplines have an air of sanctity about them, but in fact they have no power to restrain the love of the world. The root of the matter is not on my table, or in my neighborhood, but in my heart. Worldliness has still not been expelled.

It is all too possible, in these different ways, to have the form of genuine godliness (how subtle our hearts are!) without its power. Love for the world will not have been expunged, but merely diverted. Only a new love is adequate to expel the old one. Only love for Christ, with all that it

implies, can squeeze out the love of this world. Only those who long for Christ's appearing will be delivered from Demas-like desertion caused by being in love with this world.

How can we recover the new affection for Christ and his kingdom that so powerfully impacted our life-long worldliness, and in which we crucified the flesh with its lusts?

What was it that created that first love in any case? Do you remember? It was our discovery of Christ's grace in the realization of our own sin. We are not naturally capable of loving God for himself, but in discovering this about ourselves, and in learning of the Lord's supernatural love for us, love for the Father is born. Forgiven much, we love much. We rejoice in the hope of glory, in suffering, even in God himself. This new affection seemed first to overtake our worldliness, then to master it. Spiritual realities—Christ, grace, Scripture, prayer, fellowship, service, living for the glory of God—filled our vision and seemed so large, so desirable that other things by comparison seemed to shrink in size and become bland to the taste.

The way in which we maintain "the expulsive power of a new affection" is the same as the way we first discovered it. Only when grace is still "amazing" to us does it retain its power in us. Only as we retain a sense of our own profound sinfulness can we retain a sense of the graciousness of grace.

Many of us share the question the famous hymn writer William Cowper asks: *"Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord? Where is the soul-refreshing view of Jesus and his word?"* Our goal in walking with God, in being faithful before God is therefore first and foremost a quest to discover how sinful we really are (not in new endeavors of sin, but in fresh realizations of just how much sin is wrapped around everything we do and think). It would be sad if the deepest analysis of our Christianity was that it lacked a sense of sin and of grace. That would suggest that we knew little of the expulsive power of a new affection. But there is no right living, no real faithfulness and no real joy that lasts without it.

Walking Along Side You in the Pilgrimage of Faith,

Pastor Todd

To read more about the expulsive power of refined affections and how to trust in future grace read Piper's Book - <http://www.amazon.com/Future-Grace-John-Piper/dp/1590521919>