

CHAPTER 9

THE SECOND GREAT MOTIVE UNFOLDED.

I COME now to the second motive, namely, that we may find mercy and grace to help in time of need; or, we shall find mercy and grace to help, if we come as we should, to the throne of grace.

In this motive we have these three things:

That saints are likely to meet with needy times while they are in this world.

That nothing can carry us through our needy times but more, or a continual supply of, mercy and grace.

That mercy and grace are to be had at the throne of grace, and we must fetch them from thence by prayer, if we would, as we should, go through these needy times.

For the first of these, That saints are likely to meet with needy times, or, with such times as will show them, that they need a continual assistance of the grace of God, that they may go rightly through this world. This is, therefore, a motive that weareth a spur in the heel of it, a spur to prick us forward to supplicate at the throne of grace. This needy time is in other places called the perilous time, the evil day, the hour and power of darkness, the day of temptation, the cloudy and dark day.

And, indeed, in the general, all the days of our pilgrimage here are evil, yea, every day has a sufficiency of evil in it to destroy the best saint that breatheth, were it not for the grace of God. But there are also, as I have hinted, particular specious times, times more eminently dangerous and hazardous unto saints: as,

There are their *young* days; the days of their youth and childhood in grace. This day is usually attended with much evil towards him or them that are asking the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward. Now the devil has lost a sinner; there is a captive has broke prison, and one run away from his master: now hell seems to be awakened from sleep, the devils are come out — they roar, and roaring they seek to recover their runaway. Now tempt him, threaten him, flatter him, stigmatize him, throw dust into his eyes, poison him with errors, spoil him while he is upon the potter's wheel; any thing to keep him from coming to Jesus Christ. And is this not a needy time? Doth not such a one need abundance of grace? Is it not of absolute

necessity that thou, if thou art the man thus beset, shouldst ply it at the throne of grace, for mercy and grace to help thee in such a time of need as this is?

To want a spirit of prayer now, is as much as thy life is worth. O, therefore, you that know what I say, you that are broke loose from hell, that are fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before you, and that do hear the lion roar after you, and that are kept awake with the continual voice of his chinking chain, cry as you fly! yea, the promise is, that they that come to God with weeping, with supplication, he will lead them.

Well, this is one needy time: now thy hedge is low, now the branch is tender, now thou art but in the bud. Pray that thou be' est not marred in the potter's hand.

The time of *prosperity* is also a time of need; I mean, of thy spiritual prosperity. For, as Satan can tell how to suit temptations for thee in the day of thy want, so he has those that can entangle thee in the day of thy fullness. He has his spiritual wickednesses in the high and heavenly places. He can tell how to lay a snare for thee in the land of Canaan, as well as in the wilderness; in thy time of receiving good things, as well as in thy hungry and empty hours. Nay, such times seem to be the most dangerous, not in themselves, but through the deceits of our heart. Hence Moses gives this caution to the children of Israel, that when God had given them the promised land, and vineyards, and wells, and olive trees; and when they had eaten and were full, "Then," says he, "beware, lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." And again, he doubleth this caution, saying, "When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he has given thee. Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: lest when thou hast eaten and art full, (and thou in all good things art increased,) then thy heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." All this may be applied spiritually. For there are, as I said, snares laid for us in our best things; and he that has great enjoyments, and forgets to pray for grace to keep him humble then, shall quickly be where Peter was, after his knowledge of the Lord Jesus by the revelation of the Father.

Another needy time, is a time when men are low *and empty as to worldly good*. This time is full of temptations and snares. At this time, men will, if they look not well to their doings and goings, be tempted to strain courtesies, both with conscience and with God's word, and adventure to do things that are dangerous, and that have a tendency to make all their religion

and profession vain. This holy Agur was aware of; so he prayed, “Let me not be rich and full, lest I deny thee: let me not be poor, lest I steal, and take the name of God in vain.” There are many inconveniences that attend him that is fallen into decay in this world. It is an evil day with him, and the devils will be as busy with him as the flies are with a lean and scabbed sheep. It shall go hard but such a man shall be full of maggots; full of silly, foolish, idle inventions, to get up, and to abound with fullness again. It is not a time now, Satan will say, to retain a tender conscience, to regard thy word or promise, to pay for what thou buyest, or to stick at pilfering, and filch from thy neighbor. This Agur was afraid of; therefore he prayed that God would keep him from that which would be to him a temptation to do it. How many in our day have, on these very accounts, brought religion to a very ill savor, and themselves unto the snare of the devil, and all because they have not addicted themselves to pray to God for grace to help in this time of need, but rather have left off the thing that is good, and given up themselves to the temptations of the devil, and the subtile and ensnaring motions of the flesh.

Another needy time is the day of *persecution*. This is called, as was hinted before, “the hour of darkness,” “the cloudy and dark day.” This day, therefore, is full of snares, and of evils of every kind. Here is the fear of man, the terrors of a prison, of loss of goods and life. Now all things look black; now the fiery trial is come. He that cannot; now pray; he that now applieth not himself to God on the throne of grace, by the priesthood of Jesus Christ, is like to take a fall before all men upon the stage; a foul fall — a fall that will not only break his own bones, but also the hearts of those that fear God and behold it. Come therefore, boldly to the throne of grace, that ye may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Another time of need is, that time wherein thou *changest thy condition* and interest into a new relation. For here also the snares and traps lie waiting for thee. There is a hopeful child goes to service, or to be an apprentice; there is a young man and a young maid entered into a married condition, and though they pray before, yet they leave off to pray then. Why, these people are oftentimes ruined and undone. The reason is, this change is attended with new snares, with new cares, and with new temptations; of the which, because through unwatchfulness they are not aware, they are taken, drawn to perdition and destruction by them.

Many in my short day have gone, I doubt, down to the pit, this way, that have sometime been to appearance the very foremost and hopefulest in the place where they have lived. O how soon has their fire gone out — have their lamps forbore to burn! How quickly have they lost their love to their ministers, by whom they were illuminated, and to the warmest Christians,

through communion with whom they used' to be kept awake and savory! How quickly have they found them out new friends, new companions, new ways and methods of life, and new delights to feed their foolish minds withal! Wherefore, O, thou that art in this fifth head concerned, come boldly to the throne of grace, that you may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Another time of need *is*, when the generality of *-professors are decayed*; when the custom of fancies and fooleries have taken away all gravity and modesty from among the children of men. Now pray, or thou diest; yea, pray against those decays, those vain customs, those foolish fancies, those light and vain carriages that have overtaken others, else they will assuredly knock at thy door, and obtain favor at thy hand; the which if they do, they will quickly bring thee down into the dirt with others, and put thee in peril of damnation as well as they.

7. Another time of need is, the time of *guilt contracted*, and of the hiding of God's face. This is a dangerous time. If thou now shalt forbear to pray, thou art undone; for the natural tendency of guilt is to drive a man from God. So it served our first father; and oftentimes when God hides his face, men run into desperation, and so throw up all duties, and say, as he of old, Why should I wait upon the Lord any longer? Now thy great help against this is prayer — continuing in prayer. Prayer wrestleth with the devil, and will overthrow him; prayer wrestleth with God, and will overcome him; prayer wrestleth with all temptations and makes them fly. Great things have been done by prayer, even by the prayer of those that have contracted guilt, and that have by their sins lost the smiles and sense of the favor of God.

Wherefore, when this needy, this evil time has overtaken thee, pray; come boldly to the throne of grace, that you may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

The day of *reproach and slander* is another time of need, or a day in which thou wilt want supplies of grace. Sometimes we meet with such days wherein we are loaden with reproaches, slanders, scandals, and lies. Christ found the day of reproach a burdensome day unto him; and there is many a professor driven quite away from all conscience towards God, and open profession of his name, by such things as these. Reproach is, when cast at a man, as if he was stoning to death with stones. Now ply it hard at the throne of grace to bear thee up, or thou wilt either miscarry, or sink under ground by the weight of reproach that may fall upon thee.

Another time of need is that wherein a man's *friends desert* and forsake him, because of his gospel principles or of those temptations that attend his profession. This is a time that often happeneth to those that are good. Thus

it was with Christ, with Paul, with Job, with Heman, and so has been with many other of God's servants in the day of their temptations in this world; and a sore time it is. Job complained under it; so did Heman, Paul and Christ. Now a man is as forlorn as a pelican in the wilderness, as an owl in the desert, or as a sparrow upon the house top. If a man cannot now go to the throne of grace by prayer, through Christ, and so fetch grace for his support from thence, what can he do? He cannot live of himself. Wherefore this is a sore evil.

Another time of need is the day of *death* — when I am to pack up all to be gone from hence, the way of all the earth. Now the greatest trial is come, excepting that of the day of judgment. Now a man is to be stripped of all but that which cannot be shaken. Now a man grows near the borders of eternity; now he begins to see into the skirts of the next world; now death is death, and the grave the grave, indeed. Now he begins to see what it is for body and soul to part, and what it is to go and appear before God. Now the dark entry, and the thoughts of what is in the way from a death bed to the gate of the holy heaven, come nearer the heart than when health and prosperity do compass a man about. Wherefore this is like to be a trying time, a time of need, indeed. A prudent man will make it one of the great concerns of his whole life, to get, and lay up, a stock of grace for this day, (though the fool will rage and be confident,) for he knows all will be little enough to keep him warm in his soul, while cold death strokes his hand over his face, and over his heart, and is turning his blood into jelly: while strong death is loosing his silver cord, and breaking his golden bowl. Wherefore, I say, this motive weareth a spur on his heel, a spur to prick us on to the throne of grace for mercy, and grace to help in the time of need.

But, secondly, I come now to the next thing, which is, To show, that nothing can carry us through our needy times, but more, or a continual supply of, mercy and grace. This the text fully implies, because it directeth us to the throne of grace, for mercy and grace for that very end. And had there been any thing else that could have done it, the apostle would have made mention of it, and would also have directed the saints unto it. But forasmuch as he here makes mention of the needy time, and directs them to the throne of grace for mercy and grace to help, it followeth that mercy and grace, and these only, can help us in the evil time.

Now this mercy and grace are to be distinctly considered.

1. Mercy; for by it we have through Christ the continuation and multiplication of forgivenesses, without which there is no salvation.
2. Grace, for by it we are upheld, supported, and enabled to go through our needy times, as Christians; without which there is no salvation

neither. The first, all will grant; the second is clear. “If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.”

Mercy is that by which we are pardoned, even all the falls, faults, failings, and weaknesses that attend us, and that we are incident to, in this our day of temptation. And for this mercy we should pray, and say, “Our Father, forgive us our trespasses.” For though mercy is free in the exercise of it to us-ward, yet God will have us ask, that we may have; as he also saith in this scripture, “Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy.” Here, then, we have one help, and that is, the mercy of God is to be extended to us from his throne through Jesus Christ, for our pardon and forgiveness in all those weaknesses that we are attended with in the needy or evil times; and we should come to God for this very thing. This is that which David means when he says, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” And again, “When I said, My foot slippeth; thy mercy, O Lord, help me up” — set me clear and free from guilt, and from the imputation of sin unto death, by Christ:

Nor can any thing help where this is wanting; for our parts, our knowledge, our attainments, or our graces, cannot so carry us through this world, but that we shall be guilty of that that will sink us down to hell, without God’s pardoning mercy. It is not the grace that we have received can do it, nor the grace that is to be received that can do it: nothing can do it but the pardoning mercy of God; for because all our graces are here imperfect, they cannot produce a spotless obedience. But where there is not a spotless obedience, there must of necessity follow a continuation of pardon and forgiveness by mercy, or I know what will become of the soul.

Here, therefore, the apostle lays an obligation upon thee to the throne of grace, namely, that thou mayst obtain mercy, a continuation of mercy; mercy as long as thou art like to live this vain life on the earth; mercy that will reach through all thy days: for there is not a day, nor a duty — not a day that thou livest, nor a duty that thou dost — but will need that mercy should come after to take away thy iniquity. Nay, thou canst not receive mercy so clearly, as not to stand in need of another act of mercy to pardon weakness in thy no better receiving the last. We receive not our mercies so humbly, so readily, so gladly, and with such thankfulness as we should; and therefore, for the want of these, have the need of another and another act of God’s sin-pardoning mercy, and need shall have thereof, as long as evil time shall last with us.

But is not this great grace, that we should thus be called upon to come to God for mercy? Yea, is not God unspeakably good, in providing such a throne of grace, such a sacrifice, such an High Priest, and so much mercy for us, and then to invite us to come with boldness to him for it? Nay, doth not his kindness yet further appear by giving us items and intimations of needy times, and evil days, on purpose to provoke us to come to him for mercy?

This, then, shows us, as also we have hinted before, that the throne of grace, and Christ Jesus our High Priest, are both provided upon the account of our imperfections, namely, that we who are called might not be, by remaining weaknesses, hindered of, but obtain, eternal inheritance. Weaknesses, such weaknesses remain in the justified, and such slips and failings are found in and upon them, as called for a course of mercy and forgiveness to attend them.

Farther, this also intimates, that God's people should not be dejected at the apprehensions of their imperfections; I say, not so dejected, as therefore to cast off faith and hope, and prayer. For a throne of grace is provided for them, to the which they may, they must, they ought continually to resort for mercy, sin-pardoning mercy.

As we are here to obtain mercy, so we are here to find *grace*. They that obtain mercy, shall find grace; therefore they are put together. "That they may obtain mercy, and find grace;" only they must find mercy first; for as forgiveness at first goes before sanctification in the general, so forgiveness afterwards goes before particular acts of grace for further sanctification. God giveth not the Spirit of grace to those that he has not first forgiven by mercy, for the sake of Christ. Also, so long as he as a Father forbears to forgive us his adopted, so long we go without those further additions of grace that are suggested in the text. But when we have obtained mercy to forgive, then we also find grace to our renewing. Therefore he saith first; "obtain mercy," and then, "find grace."

Grace, here, I take to be that grace which God has appointed for us, to dwell in us, and that by and through the continual supply of which we are to be enabled to do and suffer, and to manage ourselves in doing and suffering according to the will of God. "Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear." So again, "He giveth more grace: wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." The grace therefore that is meant, is grace given, or to be given; grace received, or to be received; grace, a root, a principle of grace, with its continual supplies for the perfecting of that salvation that God hath designed for us.

This was that which comforted Paul, when the messenger of Satan was sent to buffet him: it was said unto him by Christ, “My grace is sufficient for thee.” As if he should say, ‘Paul, be not utterly cast down, I have wherewithal to make thee stand, and overcome; and that is my grace, by which thou shalt be supported, strengthened, comforted, and made to live a triumphant life, notwithstanding all that oppress thee.” But this came to him upon his praying “For this I prayed to God thrice,” saith he. So again, “God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.” Thus you see, that by grace, in these places is meant that Spirit and those principles of grace, by the increase and continual supply of which, we are inwardly strengthened, and made to abound to every good work.

This, then, is the conclusion: That as there is mercy to be obtained by us at the throne of grace, for the pardon of all our weaknesses; so there is also grace there to be found that will yet strengthen us more, to all good walking and living before him. He giveth more grace; and thus they receive, one time or another, abundance of grace that shall reign in life by one Jesus Christ.

This then teaches us several things, some of which I will mention: as,

That nature, as nature, is not capable of serving God; no, not nature where grace dwells, as considered abstract from that grace that dwells in it. Nothing can be done aright without grace; I mean, not a part or piece of gospel duty. “Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably.” Nature, managed by grace, seasoned with grace, and held up with grace, can serve God acceptably. “Let us have grace” — that is, seek for, and find grace to do so; for we cannot do so but by grace. “By the grace of God, (says Paul,) I am what I am: and his grace, which was bestowed on 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.”

What can be more plain than this beautiful text? For the Apostle doth here quite shut out nature — sanctified nature, (for he indeed was a sanctified man,) and concludes that even he, as of himself, did nothing of all the works that he did; but they were done, he did them, by the grace of God that was in him. Wherefore, nature — sanctified nature, as nature, can of itself do nothing to the pleasing of God the Father.

Is not this the experience of all the godly? Can they do that at all times which they can do at some times? Can they pray, believe, love, fear, repent, and bow before God always alike? No. Why so? they are the same men, the same human nature, the same saints. Aye, but the same grace, in the same degree, operation, and life of grace, doth not so now work on that man, that

nature, that saint; therefore, notwithstanding he is what he is, he cannot do at all times alike.

Thus, therefore, it is manifest, that nature, simply as such, is a great way off doing that which is acceptable with God. Refined, purified, sanctified nature, cannot do but by the immediate supplies, lifts, and helps of that Spirit and principle of grace by the which it is so sanctified.

As nature, even where grace is, cannot, without the assistance of that grace, do any thing acceptably before God; so grace received, if it be not also supplied with more grace, cannot cause that we continue to do acceptable service to God. This also is clear by the text For he speaketh here to them that have received grace; yea, puts himself into the number, saying, Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may find grace to help in time of need. If grace received would do, what need of more? What need we pray for more? What need we go to the throne of grace for more? This very exhortation saith it will not. Present supplies of grace are proportioned to our present need, and to help us to do a present work or duty. But is our present need all the need that we are like to have, and the present work all the work that we have to do in the world? Even so the grace that we have received at present, though it can help us to do a present work, cannot, without a further supply, help us to do what is to be done hereafter. Wherefore, the Apostle saith, that this continuing to do, was through his obtaining help, continued help, of God. "Having, therefore," saith he, "obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great," etc. There must be a daily imploring of God for daily supplies from him, if we will do our daily business as we should.

A present dispensation of grace, is like a good meal, a seasonable shower, or a penny in one's pocket, all which will serve for the present necessity. But will that good meal that I ate last week, enable me, without supply, to do a good day's work in this? Or will that seasonable shower which fell last year, be, without supplies, a seasonable help to the grain and grass that are growing now? Or will that penny that supplied my want the other day, I say, will the same penny also, without a supply, supply my wants to-day?

The same, I say, may be said of grace received. It is like the oil in the lamp, it must be fed, it must be added to, and there shall be a supply. "Wherefore he giveth more grace." Grace is the sap, which from the root maintaineth the branches: stop the sap, and the branch will wither. Not that the sap shall be stopped where there is union, not stopped altogether; for, as from the root the branch is supplied, so from Christ is every member furnished with a continual supply of grace, if it doth as it should. "Of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace."

The day of grace is the day of expense: this is our spending time. Hence we are called pilgrims and strangers in the earth; that is, travelers from place to place, from state to state, from trial to trial. Now, as the traveler at a fresh inn is made to spend fresh money; so Christians, at a fresh temptation, at a new temptation, are made to spend afresh, and need a new supply of grace. Great men, when, and while, their sons are travelers, appoint that their bags of money be lodged ready, or conveniently paid in at such and such a place, for the suitable relief of them; and so they meet with supplies. Why, so are the sons of the Great One, and he has allotted that we should travel beyond sea, or at a great distance from our Father's house: wherefore, he has appointed, that grace shall be provided for us, to supply, at such a place, such a state, or temptation, as need requires. But, withal, as my lord expecteth his son should acquaint him with the present emptiness of his purse, and with the difficulty he hath now to grapple with; so God our Father expects that we should plead by Christ, our need at the throne of grace, in order to a supply of grace. "Let us, therefore, come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

Now, then, this shows the reason why many Christians, that are indeed possessed of the grace of God, do yet walk so oddly, act so poorly, and live such disorderly lives in the world. They are like to those gentlemen's sons that are of the more extravagant sort, that walk in their lousy hue, when they might be maintained better. Such young men care not, perhaps, scorn to acquaint their fathers with their wants, and therefore, walk in their threadbare jackets, with hose and shoes out at heels; a right emblem of the uncircumspect child of God.

This also shows the reason of all those dreadful falls and miscarriages that many of the saints sustain. They make it not their business to watch to see what is coming, and to pray for a supply of grace to uphold them. They, with David, are too careless, or with Peter, too confident, or with the disciples, too sleepy, and so the temptation comes upon them, and their want like an armed man.

This also shows the reason why some that, to one's thinking, would fall every day, for that their want of parts, their small experience, their little knowledge of God's matters, do seem to bespeak it; yet stand, walk better, and keep their garments more white, than those that have, when compared with them, twice as much as they. They are praying saints, they are often at the throne of grace, they are sensible of their weakness, keep a sight of their danger before their faces, and will not be contented without more grace.

And this leads me, in the third place, to show you, that were we wise, and did we ply it at the throne of grace, for grace, as we should, O, what spotless lives might we live! We should then have always help in time of need; for so the text insinuates. “That we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in (every) time of need.”

That is that which Peter means, when he says, “And besides all this,” that is, besides your faith in Christ, and besides your happy state of justification, “giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if these things be in you and abound,” that is, be continually supplied with a supply from the throne of grace, “they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore, the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things, ye shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

The greatest part of professors now a-days take up their time in contracting guilt, and asking for pardon, and yet are not much the better. Whereas, if they had but the grace to add to their faith, virtue etc. they might have more peace, live better lives, and not have their heads so often in a bag as they have. “To him that ordereth his conversation aright, will I show the salvation of God:” to him that disposeth his way aright. Now this cannot be done without a constant supplicating at the throne of grace, for more grace. This then is the reason why every new temptation that comes upon thee so foils, so overcomes thee, that thou wilt need a new conversion to be recovered from under its power, and the guilt that cleaves to thee, by its overshadowing of thee.

A new temptation, a sudden temptation, an unexpected temptation, usually foils those that are not upon their watch, and that have not been before with God to be inlaid with grace proportionable to what may come upon them.

“That ye may find grace to help in time of need.” There is grace to be found at the throne of grace, that will help us under the greatest straits. “Seek and ye shall find.” It is there, and it is to be found there; it is to be found there of the seeking soul, of the soul that seeketh him. Wherefore I will conclude as I did begin; “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”