
SERMON II.

THE

EXCELLENCY OF SAVING FAITH,

BY

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2 Pet. i. 1.

—To them that have obtained like precious faith with us.

1 John iii. 23.

And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.

THE apostle, having treated of obedience to the commands of God, as an evidence of our being heard and accepted of him, lest we should be deceived in a matter of so great importance, informs us in our text, of the nature of that obedience, which is an evidence of our being accepted; It is the obedience of faith.—*This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.*

Christ. Faith itself is an obedience to a divine command ; and all that obedience which flows from faith, and that only, will prove our sincerity. No mere outward forms whatsoever will constitute a real character of grace. This is his commandment, as though it were the only command, it being the Christian compend of all the commandments. The excellency of the grace and duty of faith is the great object exhibited in these words—*Of the grace and duty of faith*, we say ; for as it is bestowed, it is a grace ; as commanded, it is our duty. The excellency of it appears from its being, as it were, a summary of all the other commands ; as well as from its immediate object, the name of the LORD JESUS CHRIST ; or his person and mediation, and whatsoever as mediator he makes himself known by. On these accounts it is an invaluable gift of heaven to all that have obtained this precious favour of the Lord.

II. I proceed, in the second place, to illustrate the *excellency* of saving faith.

I. The superior excellency of saving faith appears from its being the *mean* of interesting us in Christ, and all the blessings of his purchase. Through faith we are acquitted of an obligation to eternal punishment, and receive a firm title to all the blessings of grace and everlasting glory—*Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.* By faith we become heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ ; *for ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.* All the ends of the earth are invited to look unto Christ, *and be saved.* But faith is the eye that beholds his fulness, and the glory of the precious blessings contained in the promise. Christ is tendered to us as the gift
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of God, and eternal life in him; and faith is the hand that takes hold of the gift and appropriates it to ourselves. God has so constituted the new covenant plan of life, that the moment we are united to Christ by faith, we are freed from the curse of the broken law, and received as favourites and children of his family. O believers! could I, in law-threatenings, set hell and destruction naked before your eyes; could I let you hear the groans, and see the flames, from which you are saved through faith—Could I in gospel-promises lay open the third heaven, to let you hear the Halleluias, and see the shining ranks, with which you shall shortly mingle—Or could I disclose to you the unfearchable riches of Christ, and all the searchless treasures of grace and glory, to which by faith you have received an indefeasible title—Each of your hearts must cry out with wonder and praise; How precious is the gift I have received of the Lord! O ye expectants of glory! see that ye live as the heirs of such blessings.

2. The excellency of faith appears from the glory of *its object*, *God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself*—Or the glory of God, shining *in the face of Jesus Christ*, is its precious object. I doubt not of the propriety and necessity of means to give a display of the divine perfections to intelligent creatures. *For the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.* And whosoever are wise to observe the good and righteous acts of providence, *even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.* But redemption is the masterpiece of all the divine workmanship. In this plan of peace and good will to men, *Glory to God in the highest* is proclaimed with loudest accents. And not only is the glory of God in the highest illustrated by this saving plan; but from it ariseth, in the highest degree, the happiness of rational creatures—Not the happiness of men only, but
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even of holy angels themselves, who needed not a Saviour, because they never had transgressed : For the knowledge and enjoyment of God are necessary to happiness. The more of his glory is known, the fuller the enjoyment of him : And the more full the enjoyment, the greater must be the happiness resulting from it. But in Christ, all the moral perfections of Jehovah harmonize, and are most clearly displayed. In the groans of an expiring Saviour, inflexible justice shines with infinitely brighter and stronger evidence, than in all the flames of Sinai, or the more terrible flames of Tophet. Eternal love flows strongest and sweetest in his blood : *Herein is love, not that we loved him, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.* And where would mercy have had a medium of discovery, had it not been for the despised cross of Christ ? Mercy which is *over all his works.* And is not Christ crucified emphatically called the *power of God and the wisdom of God*, for the salvation of all who believe on him ? Law and justice required satisfaction, not only adequate to the infinite malignity of sin, and the infinite claims of justice upon the sinner ; but that this satisfaction be made in the same nature in which the offence had been given. An angelic offering would not be accepted for a human offence. But were it accepted, and united with the sacrifice of all the human race, the offering would have been infinitely beneath the claims of justice. The whole race of men, with all the angelic host, must have sunk down under the guilt of sin into everlasting perdition. But all these claims are fully answered by the sacrifice of Christ. For the infinite dignity of the divine nature stamped an infinite worth on what he did and suffered in his human nature, on account of its union with the divine nature in his sacred person. Now law and justice triumph in the salvation of guilty sinners by the propitiation of Christ : For hereby they

they receive more honour than they could receive by the sufferings of all the creatures to eternity! A stroke of wisdom this infinitely out-reaching every conjecture of created intelligences! All their projects, during eternal ages, to satisfy justice and save the sinner, would have perished in the very embryo! This great mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh, to atone divine justice, and save the guilty sinner, strikes all the angels of glory into everlasting astonishment, while they fall at the feet of the God-man adoring, and with angelic raptures look into the mysteries of redemption in his blood. *Which things the angels desire to look into.* Mysteries, at which faith humbly bows and adores!—Faith which seeth *him who is invisible*, and by which alone we can behold Emmanuel's glories, and the glories of salvation purchased by his blood; as we shall more fully see in the next particular. When Peter confessed to his Lord, *Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God*, his Saviour replies, *Blessed art thou Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.* From a heart impregnated with a sense of this blessedness, no doubt Peter in our text hails all who had obtained like precious faith with himself and his fellow disciples.

3. We learn the superior excellency of faith from the strength and brightness of its *evidence*. The power of faith is the most noble possessed by mortals, and its evidence the brightest this side eternal vision; unless we should except inspiration. The evidence of sense only reaches to material objects, and the evidence of reason is confined within the limits of the fallen creature's power; but faith sees *him who is invisible*, and is the *evidence of things not seen*, not seen either by the eye of sense or reason. It penetrates into the invisibilities of the other world. *ελεγχος*, rendered evidence, signifies a clear convictive proof, or demonstration. Invisible glories appear evident to the eye of faith, and are
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more impressivè than any objects which daily offer to our sight : For it perceiveth them by a spiritual light ;—a light immediately infused into the soul by his almighty power, *who commanded the light to shine out of darkness. The spiritual man judgeth* (or discovereth) *all things.* Instructed from on high, by the power of the Holy Ghost, he hath a spiritual discernment of, and relish for, the transcendent glory of divine objects.

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God ; for they are foolishness unto him ; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned ; and no unrenewed man hath a spiritual eye to discern them. The doctrine of the cross of Christ is *foolishness* to the learned Greek, and a *stumbling block* to the self-righteous Jew. Was the natural man possessed of all the sublimity of a Longinus and a Homer, all the power of a Demosthenes and a Cicero, all the wisdom of a Solon and Lycurgus, and with all the philosophy and improved knowledge of a Socrates and a Plato ; all this notwithstanding, without a principle of faith, the sublime mysteries of the gospel will be foolishness unto him. Yea, did he unite with all these advantages the study of the oracles of God ; yet as to unbelieving Jewish rabbies, who knew not *the Lord of Glory*, the gospel would be a hidden mystery to him, and the preaching of the cross a stumbling block.

But why need we run back to heathen philosophers and Jewish doctors ? The whole tribe of infidels, in this and the preceding ages, (some of whom were men of the most acute and improved genius), are striking examples of this melancholy truth. And many who reject the name infidel, some of them by their corrupt opinions, ever sive of the gospel of Christ ; some by their vile practices ; and others by their aversion to the power of godliness, proclaim to the world that they have dark and unbelieving hearts. Oh !

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sin has an awfully blinding and hardening tendency. Therefore are sinners called *children of darkness*, and Satan's territories a *kingdom of darkness*.

But it is the glory of Christianity, that while the mysteries of the gospel are *hid from the wise and prudent*, they are *revealed unto babes*. The weakest child of grace knows more of God, of Christ, of the scheme of salvation and operations of Grace, than the most instructed and cultivated sinners. He may not be as able as they to reason upon those topics; but he sees their attractive beauties, feels their power, and relishes the comforts of them, which they do not. He may not be able to trace the operations of nature in their causes and effects; yet he sees more of, and is more affected with, the divine glories shining through a spire of grass, a single flower, or a drop of cold water, than the graceless philosopher can perceive in all the stupendous works of God, and by the assistance of all his tubes and glasses. For even *through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the power of God*, and see more of his power and glory in their frame, than all the efforts of feeble reason can discern. Let faith behold the glory of God in the face of Christ, and the heart will be prepared to read his glory in all the works of his hands.

4. The excellency of faith appears with striking evidence from its power and *influence* to bring heaven down to earth, (so to speak), and give us a present taste of the blessedness to be enjoyed there; for it *is the substance of things hoped for*. It gives them a present subsistence in the heart. Faith receives, and is itself, *an earnest of our inheritance, the first fruits of the spirit of glory*. An earnest being part of the promise given in hand, to ensure the whole, is of the very same kind of the thing itself for which it is pledged. Like the believing spies of old, the faith of true believers brings down some clusters of the heavenly Canaan, by the delicious taste
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of which their souls give a good report of the promised land, and become earnest to take possession of it. It bears no more proportion, indeed, to the happiness of heaven, than a drop to the ocean, or a single ray to the whole body of light in the sun ; nor so much. Yet as a ray is of the same nature with the sun, and a drop with the ocean ; so faith and its fruits are of the same nature of heaven itself. Grace is glory begun, and glory is grace perfected.

A brief view of the description given of heaven in the word of God, with the nature and effects of saving faith, may serve to illustrate this subject more fully. Heaven is described as a state of perfect rest, and perfect holiness. There the servants of Christ *see his face* ;—see him *face to face*, and there *is fulness of joy, and pleasure for evermore*. But faith, as we have seen, not only receives the account of its object from testimony, but (by the operations of the Holy Ghost) through that testimony sees the object itself, beholds its glory *. It produceth sweet rest and comfort in the

* The difference between immediate vision, and seeing the object by faith, seems to consist principally, if not wholly, in the mode of discovery, and the degree of their effects respectively upon the mind. Here we are as well encumbered with flesh, as weakened by sin, and view the objects through mediums of sense. The gospel and visible ordinances are glasses through which we view the glory of God, and by which the Holy Spirit reflects the image of that glory upon our minds. But in heaven there will be no need of a glass ; a glass would only obscure the vision ; as to look at the sun through a glass would weaken and disturb rather than assist the sight. In heaven we shall see the glory of God with evidence as bright and powerful as a frame, strengthened with immortality, and enlightened with vision, can see and enjoy the infinitely glorious object. By immediate vision I do not mean, that the glorified

the soul, purifieth the heart, and *worketh by love*, and *believing in Christ, we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory*. Viewing the glory of its object with the grounds of trust given by a promising Saviour, the soul is irresistibly, but sweetly, drawn to a satisfying rest in him. Blessed prelude of heaven! And viewing this glory, they love it, their hearts are delighted with it. But love to God is the purity of a soul, and joy the triumph of love. The one will ever be in proportion to the other. O believers, would you live free from the bitter reproaches of conscience, and enjoy a heaven upon earth, be much in the exercise of faith. By this you may travel through the promises, and pluck a flower here and a flower there, from which you shall suck the sweets of celestial blessedness.

5. The excellency of faith is derived from its being the spring of spiritual life, the *moving principle* of all the other
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glorified saints will never behold the glory of God through any of his works. New worlds and new wonders may forever arise, through which he will manifest his glory to them. Nor would I be understood to mean, that they shall look, or that it is possible for any creature to look, directly into the divine essence, without any medium of discovery. How that may be, I cannot tell. However, if they shall behold his glory through means, the means as well as the capacity for happiness, will be suited to that state of perfection. But when this mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruption incorruption, the use of figures to strike the senses shall have for ever ceased. Nor shall the saints in glory, as in the present state, attain to the knowledge of God by weak and tedious deductions; but this fountain of light will pour, with fullest evidence, the inexpressibly bright beams of his glory into their souls, as the sun his rays upon the earth, whether directly from the divine essence, or through his works. Their knowledge will be intuitive, without the least degree of obscurity.

graces and holy affections *. *The life which I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. Faith worketh by love, as we have seen ; for the faith of being loved begets love to its object. We love him, because he first loved us. It produceth true repentance ; they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and mourn for him. To believe that Christ was pierced by and for our sins, opens the sluices of godly sorrow, and lays the soul low at his feet ; and trusting the mercy and truth of his promise, believers are encouraged to look to the living Head for gracious influences, to quicken them to the exercise of every grace and Christian virtue, by which they are gradually assimilated to and prepared for glory.*

My Christian brethren, the more you learn the spiritual art of living upon Christ by faith for strength, and for the whole of your sanctification, as well as pardon, the easier will your journey to heaven be, and the greater speed will you make in your way. You make little progress in your way, perhaps, by frequently disputing whether you are in it; and your complaints of darkness and deadness remain, because you do not come immediately to the fountain for light and life. You examine yourselves, and use many means to quicken your souls unto the acts of spiritual life. All this is your duty. But the exercise of faith, the most noble means of all, being too much neglected, your complaints

* There are these three sister graces, *faith, hope, charity*; but *the greatest of these is charity*. 1 Cor. xiii. 13. Charity or Christian love, is the greatest in point of duration; for faith shall be turned into vision, hope into fruition, while love shall eternally enjoy the rewards of victory. But in this life faith takes the lead; for as well love itself, as all the other graces, flow from it, as a spring, and will be in strength in proportion to the strength of faith.

plaints continue, and they will continue until you apply to Christ by a present direct act of faith. This would change your night into day, and your deadness into life. By this you will obtain light to discern clearly what Christ has done for your souls, and enjoy the comforts of it. And by this you will obtain victory over the body of death, and a growing conformity to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

6. Faith is most excellent, as it is an *active* principle of all *holy* obedience. *For this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.* It is a compend of all Christian duties, and the life and spring of them all. Viewing the excellency of the divine law, especially as made honourable by the obedience of Christ, believers *delight in it after the inward man*, and are fully reconciled to it as an eternal rule of righteousness. *Love is the fulfilling of the law*, and their *faith worketh by love*;—supreme love to God, and *love one to another, as he gave us commandment.* Their obedience is the willing offering of love;—not forced, but free;—not of constraint, but with a ready mind. The end of their obedience is the glory of God, who is honoured by the fruits of it; and the powerful motive to it, the Saviour's love. *For the love of Christ constraineth us.* And viewing the perfection of his righteousness and grace, they rest in him for the acceptance of their services as well as of their persons, and strength for the performance of them. *In the Lord have I righteousness and strength*, is the Christian's motto. *I will go on in the strength of the Lord God, making mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only*, is his firm resolution. In the strength of the Lord, or by influences of grace derived from him for the discharge of duty, making mention of his righteousness as the only ground of their acceptance in the performance of it. *I believed*, said David, *therefore have I spoken.* *We also believe*, said Paul, *and therefore speak.* Then do ministers

sters preach with persuasive power and influence, when they are under the powerful influence of faith; and hearers, receiving the word as a message sent from God, drink it in, and feed upon it, as hidden manna. *Sweet are thy words unto my taste.* By faith both preachers and hearers indite good matter in all their religious duties. This dictates prayer and praise in their hearts before they come upon their tongue. This makes one preacher differ from another, one hearer differ from another, and the same person to differ from himself, at different times. When his faith is not in exercise, he is languid, cold and without spiritual activity, in the performance of duty; but when faith is awake he feels, and others feel with him, life and vigour in all his religious duties.

What has been said on this point at once teacheth the nature of holy obedience, and the necessity of faith to produce it. The principles, motives and ends of such obedience are all evangelical. How different, how widely different from this is the formal, the dead and selfish obedience of carnal professors! O believers! do you thirst for life and communion with God in duty? to that end try to have faith in lively exercise in your souls. This will make Christ's yoke fit easy upon you, and his burden light. This gives such strength and enlargement to the heart, that, though *the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall,—they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up on wings as eagles, they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.*

7. Faith is the most effectual *antidote* against temptations to sin from the devil, the world, or the flesh. Purifying the heart, it produceth in it an habitual relish for holiness, and a fixed opposition to the lusts of the flesh and of the mind. And the more this principle is cultivated by believers, the greater their victories over sin, and the more

disposed will they be to *fight the good fight of faith*, until they win the eternal crown. And this is the *victory that overcometh the world even our faith*. While faith views invisible glories, neither the pleasures nor the sufferings of the present time appear worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Neither shall the chilling damps of adversity sink you into despondency, nor the empty puff of prosperity swell your minds, while you keep the promise and faithful Promiser in view. Faith will perceive in the world nothing but *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life*—all its profits uncertain; all its pleasures bewitching; all its honours empty bubbles, easily broken by every blast; and all its applause an infectious breath, apt to corrupt wherever it smites. And the apostle ascribes a peculiar influence to the power of faith, to repel the attacks of our grand adversary. *Above all taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked*. These darts are, in general, the temptations of Satan, that wicked one; but more especially blasphemy and despair injected into the heart—called *fiery darts* in allusion to the practice of some barbarous nations, who dipped the points of their arrows or darts in poison, that they might inflame the flesh, and more certainly do execution. These secret darts of the malicious foe, inflamed with the venom of hell, create fear and tormenting anguish in the conscience. But no sooner does faith get a clear view of the faithfulness and mercy of an all-sufficient Saviour, than the afflicted combatant rises victorious, and Satan, as a vanquished foe, flies the field. Believers! always hold up your shield, and learn more and more the due use of it, that with safety and greater ease you may make your way to the crown, through an opposing crowd of snares and powerful enemies.

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8. In the *last* place, faith brings into the souls of believers the noblest *consolation* and *support* under all the sorrows and trials of the present life. The apostle Peter, speaking of the joy of believers in the salvation to which they are kept through faith, adds, *though now for a season (if need be) ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations. That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory at the appearing of Christ.* God chooseth and refineth his people in the furnace of affliction; their afflictions try their faith, and their faith supports them under the trial. By faith Moses forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. By faith many of the worthies endured cruel mockings, scourgings, bonds and imprisonments—were stoned, sawn asunder, tempted, slain with the sword;—wandered about in sheep skins, and goat skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented;—wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in caves and dens of the earth.

Accounting their lot hard, we even at this day feel a sympathy with martyrs of old, who endured trials so severe. If taken, however, upon the large scale, it will be found, that God was peculiarly kind to them. For the Son of God walked with them in the midst of the furnace; many of them sung in the fire, and some of them have declared, that the flames were to them *as a bed of roses*. The joy of the Lord was their strength, and they experienced the truth of that promise their faith built upon, *As thy days, so shall thy strength be*. I doubt not but the glories of the reward which their faith looked to and tasted, poured such consolation into their hearts as quenched their pain, and was a present reward for their sufferings. But if we look into heaven, what distinguished glory shall we see on the martyr's crown! What superlative blessedness poured into their glo-

rified souls! For a well instructed witness to this truth faith, *Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* Nothing can exceed the strength and glory of this beautiful climax. Human language cannot rise higher. Every step of it throws strength and glory forward upon the succeeding step. Not only *far more*, but *far more exceeding*; not only *far more exceeding*, but an *eternal weight of glory* shall arise out of the affliction of the saints; and the weight of the glory shall be proportioned to the weight of their afflictions, and the degree of faith's improvement of them.

In our day the faith of believers has not trials of so severe a kind as the ancients had to encounter, which may be a reason why it does not commonly shine with such distinguished brightness as theirs. Yet every one will have his trials of various kinds, and faith is a blessed mean of supporting him under them all. Is he pained in body or in mind? Faith fixes upon the sure word of promise for relief, and looks forward to the glorious period, when *God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.* Does he bear reproach? In patience he possesseth his soul, in the belief that Christ esteems him, and in due time will make his righteousness shine as the noon day. Do houses, lands, or any worldly possession fail? Faith looks to the purchased inheritance that fadeth not away, and feeds upon the first fruits of it. Do near and dear relations die? Faith says, your best friend is in heaven, Christ your elder brother, your husband, your Saviour, and your God, who, as Elkanah said to Hannah, is not only better to you than ten sons; but infinitely better than all creature comforts.

Believers! abound in the exercise of believing the promises, and resting in Christ for the performance of them; then shall your affections sit lighter upon you, and those bitter waters shall be changed into sweetness. Then shall you
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experience the truth of his promise who cannot lie, *that all things* (even their sharpest trials) *work together for good to them that love God.* Then though you walk through the water and fire of affliction, its flood shall not overflow you, nor its flame kindle upon you. And then shall you say with patient Job, *What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?*—*The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.* On the whole,

Is faith a mean of interesting us in Christ and all the blessings of his purchase? Is its object most glorious, and its evidence most bright? Does it give to the soul an earnest of heaven? Is it a spring of spiritual life? a principle of all holy obedience? the best antidote against temptations? and the noblest support and comfort under affliction? How rich then is your treasury, who have obtained this precious gift from the Lord. Although you were stripped of every earthly possession, and, as a poor Lazarus, picked up crumbs at the foot of a rich man's table, you are, notwithstanding, rich. Christ says to you, as to poor Sardis, *I know thy poverty; but thou art rich*, rich in faith—partakers of the soul-enriching grace of God, heirs of glory! rich inheritance! what is its price? Or what can equal it? *No mention shall be made of coral or of pearl: The price of it is above rubies—The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold. The fruit thereof is better than gold, yea than fine gold; and the revenue thereof than choice silver. All the things thou canst desire are not to be compared with it.*

Believers, of whatsoever condition in life you are, high or low, rich or poor, you have infinite reason to praise God for the distinguishing favour. *Faith is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.* May your hearts, impressed with a sense of the riches and freedom of grace, unite in Paul's grateful,

but humble profession, *By the grace of God I am what I am*, Ye have been pluckt as brands from everlasting burning, and in the distributions of grace a most precious and soul-enriching lot hath fallen unto you. That Reverend man of God, Mr Thomas Bradbury, was in youth as a wild ass's colt; but after he was converted, and in the ministry, when he would see any prophane debauchee strolling through the streets of London, he used to say, with tears and great tenderness, There goes poor Tom Bradbury, had it not been for the grace of God. So each of you, the very best of you, may say, Of all rakes I had been the most brutish and vile, had it not been for the grace of God. O grace! infinitely rich and free grace, eternity can never exhaust its praise.

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