

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THIS chapter abounds in most weighty principles. It consists of three distinct sections, each one of which claims our deep attention.

We must not attempt to weaken the admonitory force of such a Scripture, or turn aside its keen edge, by saying that it does not apply to Christians – that it is wholly Jewish in its scope and application. No doubt, primarily, it was addressed to Israel; this is so obvious as not to admit of a question. But let us not forget that it was “**written for our learning,**” and not only so, but the more closely we study it, the more we shall see that its teaching is of universal importance.

“If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them: thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear Him, and keep His commandments, and obey His voice, and ye shall serve Him, and cleave unto Him. And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the Lord thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee”
(Ver. 1-5).

Here we have divine provision made for all cases of false teaching and false religious influence.

We all know how easily the poor human heart is led astray by anything in the shape of a sign or a wonder, and especially when such things stand connected with religion. This is not confined to the nation of Israel; we see it everywhere and at all times. Anything supernatural, anything involving an infringement of what are called the ordinary laws of nature, is almost sure to act powerfully on the human mind. A prophet rising up in the midst of the people and confirming his teaching by miracles, signs, and wonders, would be almost sure to get a hearing and obtain an influence.

In this way, Satan has worked in all ages, and he will work yet more powerfully, at the end of this present age, in order to deceive and lead to their everlasting destruction those who will not hearken to the precious truth of the Gospel.

“The mystery of iniquity,” which has been working in the professing church for eighteen centuries, will be headed up in the person of **“that Wicked whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming; even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness”** (II Thessalonians 2:8-12).

So also in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew, our Lord warns His disciples against the same kind of influence – **“Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch that; if, it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before “(Ver. 23-25).**

Again, in Revelation 13, we read of the second beast, coming up out of the earth, the great false prophet, the antichrist, doing great wonders, **“so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight often, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live”** (Ver. 13, 14).

Now, each of the above three passages of Holy Scripture refers to scenes which shall be enacted after the Church has been taken away out of this world; but on this we do not dwell, inasmuch as our object in quoting them for the reader is, to let him see how far the devil can go in the way of signs and wonders, to lead people away from the truth; and also to set before him the one divine and therefore perfect safeguard against all the delusive power of the enemy.

The human heart has no ability whatever to resist the influence of **“great signs and wonders,”** put forth in favor of the most deadly error. There is but the one thing which can fortify the soul, and enable it to resist the devil and his deadly delusions, and that is, the Word of God. To have the precious truth of God treasured up in the heart is the divine secret of preservation from all error, even though backed up by the most astounding miracles. Hence, in the first of the above quotations, we see that the reason why people will be deceived by the signs and lying wonders of **“that wicked”** one is, **“because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.”**

It is the love of the truth that preserves from error, be it ever so persuasive, ever so fascinating, ever so strongly supported by the powerful evidence of **“great signs and wonders.”** It is not cleverness, intellectual power, mental grasp, extensive learning – all these things are perfectly powerless in the presence of Satan’s wiles and machinations. The most gigantic human intellect must fall an easy prey to the wiles of the serpent. But, blessed be God, the craft, the subtilty, the signs and lying wonders, all the resources of Satan, all the machinery of hell, are perfectly powerless with a heart that is governed by the love of the truth.

A little child who knows and believes and loves the truth is blessedly shielded, sheltered, and divinely preserved from the blinding and deceiving power of the wicked one. If ten thousand false prophets were to arise and perform the most extraordinary miracles that were ever presented to the human gaze, in order to prove that the Bible is not the inspired Word of God, or that our Lord JESUS CHRIST is not God over all, blessed forever, or in order to set aside the glorious truth that the blood of JESUS CHRIST, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin, or any other precious truth revealed in Holy Scripture, it could have no effect whatever on the very simplest babe in CHRIST whose heart is governed by the Word of God. Yea, if an angel from Heaven were to come down and preach any thing contrary to what we are taught in the Word of God, we have a divine warrant to pronounce him anathema, without any discussion or argument whatever.

This is an unspeakable mercy.

It puts the simple-hearted, unlettered child of God into the most blessed position – a position, not only of moral security, but of sweetest repose.

We are not called upon to analyze the false doctrine, or to weigh the evidence advanced in favor of it; we reject, with stern decision, both the one and the other, simply because we have the certainty of the truth and the love of it in our hearts.

“Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams;” – although the sign or the wonder had come to pass – **“for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.”**

Here, beloved reader, was the all-important point for Israel, and it is the same for us.

Then, now, and always, the true moral security is in having the heart fortified with the love of the truth, which is only another way of expressing the love of God. The faithful Israelite who loved the Lord, with all his heart and with all his soul, would have a ready and conclusive answer for all the false prophets and dreamers who might arise – a thoroughly effectual method of dealing with them. **“Thou shalt not hearken.”**

If the enemy does not get the ear, he is not likely to reach the heart. The sheep follow the Shepherd; **“for they know His voice. And a stranger”** – even though showing signs and wonders – **“will they not follow, but will flee from him.”** Why? Is it because they are able to discuss and argue and analyze? No, thanks and praise to God; but because **“they know not the voice of strangers.”**

The simple fact of not knowing the voice is a sufficient reason for not following the speaker.

All this is full of comfort and consolation for the beloved lambs and sheep of the flock of CHRIST. They can hear the voice of their loving, faithful Shepherd; they can gather around Him, and find in His presence true rest and perfect safety. He makes them to lie down in green pastures, and leads them by the still waters of His love. This is enough. They may be very weak – yea, perfect weakness in themselves – but this is no hindrance to their rest and blessing; quite the contrary, it only casts them more upon His almighty power.

We need never be afraid of weakness; it is fancied strength we have to dread, vain confidence in our own wisdom, our own intelligence, our scriptural knowledge, our spiritual attainments – these are the things we have to fear; but as for our weakness, the more deeply we feel it the better, for our Shepherd's strength is made perfect in weakness, and His precious grace is amply sufficient for all the need of His beloved and blood-bought flock as a whole, and for each member in particular.

Only let us keep near to Him in the abiding sense of our own perfect helplessness and nothingness; let us treasure up His precious Word in our hearts; let us feed upon it, as the very sustenance of our souls, day by day, the staple article of our lives, the living bread for the strengthening of the inward man. Thus shall we be safe from every strange voice, every false prophet, every snare of the devil, every influence which might tend to draw us away from the path of obedience, and the practical confession of the name of CHRIST.

Ties of affection that draw away from the truth

We must now quote for the reader the second paragraph of our chapter, in which the Lord's people are warned against another snare of the devil. Oh, how many and varied are his snares and wiles! how manifold are the dangers of the people of God! but, blessed be His holy name, there is full provision in His Word for all.

“If thy brother, the son of thy mother,” – nearer, dearer, and more tender than the son of the father – **“or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers, namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him; but thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you”** (Ver. 6-11).

Here, then, we have something quite different from the false prophet or the dreamer of dreams. Thousands might be proof against the influence at these, and yet fall before the ensnaring and seductive power of natural affection. It is very hard to resist the action of this latter. It demands deep-toned devotedness, great singleness of eye, firm purpose of heart, to deal faithfully with those who live deep down in our hearts' tender affections.

The trial to some of withstanding and rejecting a prophet or a dreamer with whom there was no personal relationship, no tender link of fond affection, would be as nothing compared with having to treat with stern and severe decision the wife of the bosom, the beloved brother or sister, the devoted and tenderly loved friend.

But where the claims of God, of Christ, of truth are at stake, there must be no hesitation. If any should seek to make use of the ties of affection in order to draw us aside from our allegiance to CHRIST, we must resist them with unqualified decision. **“If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and Sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple”** (Luke 10:26).

Let us see that we thoroughly understand this aspect of the truth, and also that we give it its proper place.

If poor, blind reason be listened to, it will be sure to present to the mind the most hideous perversion of this great practical subject. Reason, whenever it attempts to exercise its powers in the things of God, is sure to prove itself the active and efficient agent of the devil in opposition to the truth.

In things human and earthly, reason may go for what it is worth; but in things divine and heavenly, it is not only worthless, but positively mischievous.

What then, we may ask, is the true moral force of Luke 15:26 and Deuteronomy 13:8-10?

Most assuredly, they do not mean that we are to be **“without natural affection,”** which is one of the special marks of the apostasy of the last days. This is perfectly clear. God Himself has established our natural relationships, and each of these relationships has its characteristic affections, the exercise and display of which are in lovely harmony with the mind of God. Christianity does not interfere with our relationships in nature, but it introduces a power whereby the responsibilities which attach to those relationships can be duly fulfilled to the glory of God. And not only so, but in the various epistles, the Holy Ghost has given the most ample instructions to husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, thus proving, in the very fullest and most blessed manner, the divine sanction of those relationships and the affections which belong to them.

All this is perfectly plain; but still we have to inquire how it fits in with Luke 15 and Deuteronomy 13. The answer is simply this: The harmony is divinely perfect. Those Scriptures apply only to cases in which our natural relationships and affections interfere with the claims of God and of Christ. When they operate in this way, they must be denied and mortified. If they dare to intrude upon a domain which is wholly divine, the sentence of death must be written upon them.

In contemplating the life of the only perfect man that ever trod this earth of ours, we can see how beautifully He adjusted the various claims which, as a man and a servant, He had to meet. He could say to His mother, **“Woman, what have I to do with thee?”** and yet, at the fitting moment, He could, with exquisite tenderness, commend that mother to the care of the disciple whom He loved. He could say to His parents, **“Wist ye not that I must be about My Father’s business?”** and, at the same time, go home with them and be sweetly subject to parental authority. Thus the written teachings of Holy Scripture, and the perfect ways of the living Christ, do both combine to teach us how to discharge aright the claims of nature and the claims of God.

But it may be that the reader feels considerable difficulty in reference to the line of action enjoined in Deuteronomy 13:9, 10. He may find it hard to reconcile it with a God of love, and with the grace, gentleness, and tenderness inculcated in the New Testament Scriptures. Here again we must keep a vigilant eye upon reason. It always affects to find ample scope for its powers in the stern enactments of the divine government; but, in reality, it only displays its blindness and folly. Still, though we would make very short work with infidel reason, we earnestly desire to help any honest soul who may not be able to see his way through this question.

We have had occasion, in our studies on the earlier chapters of this book, to refer to the very weighty subject of God's governmental dealings both with Israel and the nations; but, in addition to what has already come under our notice, we have to bear in mind the very important difference between the two economies of law and grace. If this be not clearly apprehended, we shall find very considerable difficulty in such passages as Deuteronomy 13:9, 10. The great characteristic principle of the Jewish economy was righteousness; the characteristic principle of Christianity is grace – pure, unqualified grace. If this fact be fully grasped, all difficulty vanishes.

It was perfectly right, perfectly consistent, and in perfect harmony with the mind of God for Israel to slay their enemies. God commanded them to do so. And, in like manner, it was right and consistent for them to execute righteous judgment, even unto death, upon any member of the congregation who should seek to draw them aside after false gods, as in the passage before us – to do so was in full moral harmony with the grand ruling principles of government and law, under which they were placed, in accordance with the dispensational wisdom of God. All this is perfectly plain. It runs through the entire canon of Old Testament Scripture. God's government in Israel, and His government of the world in connection with Israel, was on the strict principle of righteousness. And as it was in the past, so shall it be in the future, **“A king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment.”**

But in Christianity, We see something quite different. The moment we open the pages of the New Testament, and hearken to the teachings and mark the actings of the Son of God, we find ourselves on entirely new ground, and in a new atmosphere; in a word, we are in the atmosphere and on the ground of pure, unqualified grace.

Thus, as a sample of the teaching, take a passage or two from what is called The Sermon on the Mount – that marvelous and precious compendium of the principles of the kingdom of Heaven – **“Ye have heard that it hath been said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth’; but I say unto you, that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.”** Again, **“Ye have heard that it hath been said, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy’; but I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the sons [υιοι] of your Father which is in heaven; for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust . . . Be ye therefore perfect [τελειοι], even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect”** (Matthew v.38-48).

We cannot now dwell upon those blessed sentences; we merely quote them for the reader in order to let him see the immense difference between the Jewish and Christian economy. What was perfectly right and consistent for a Jew, might be quite wrong and inconsistent for a Christian.

This is so plain that a child may see it; and yet, strange to say, many of the Lord's beloved people seem to be clouded on the subject. They judge it to be perfectly right for Christians to deal in righteousness, and go to war, and to exercise worldly power. Well, then, if it be right for Christians to act thus, we would simply ask, where is it taught in the New Testament? where have we a single sentence from the lips of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, or from the pen of the HOLY GHOST, to warrant or sanction such a thing? As we have said, in reference to other questions that have come before us in our studies on this book, it is of no possible use for us to say, "We think so and so." Our thoughts are simply worth nothing. The one grand question, in all matters of Christian faith and morals, is, "What saith the New Testament?" What did our Lord and Master teach, and what did He do? He taught that His people now are not to act as His people of old acted. Righteousness was the principle of the old economy; grace is the principle of the new.

This Was what CHRIST taught, as may be seen in numberless passages of Scripture.

And how did He act?

- Did He deal in righteousness with people?
- Did He assert His rights?
- Did He exercise worldly power?
- Did He go to law?
- Did He vindicate Himself, or retaliate?

When His poor disciples, in utter ignorance of the heavenly principles which He taught, and in total forgetfulness of His whole course of action, said to Him, on one occasion in the which a certain village of the Samaritans refused to receive Him, "**Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elias did?**" what was His answer?

"He turned and rebuked them, and said, 'Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; for the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save.' And they went to another village."

It was perfectly consistent with the spirit, principle, and genius of the dispensation of which Elias was the exponent and representative, to call down fire from Heaven to consume the men sent by a godless king. to arrest him; but the blessed Lord was the perfect Exponent and divine Representative of another dispensation altogether. His was a life of perfect self-surrender, from first to last. He never asserted His rights, He came to serve and to give; He came to represent God – to be the perfect expression of the Father in every way. The Father's character shone out in His every look, His every word, His every act, His every movement.

Such was the Lord Christ when He was down here among men, and such was His teaching. He did what He taught, and He taught what He did. His words expressed what He was, and His ways illustrated His words. He came to serve and to give, and His whole life was marked by those two things, from the manger to the Cross.

We may truly say, time would fail us to quote the passages in proof and illustration of this; nor is there any need, inasmuch as the truth of it will hardly be called in question.

Well, then, is not He our great Exemplar in all things? is it not by His teaching and ways that our course and character as Christians are to be formed? How are we to know how we ought to walk, save by hearkening to His blessed words and gazing on His perfect ways?

If we as Christians are to be guided and governed by the principles and precepts of the Mosaic economy, then, assuredly, it would be right for us to go to law, to contend for our rights, to engage in war, to destroy our enemies; but then .what becomes of the teaching and example of our adorable Lord and Saviour? What of the teachings of the Holy Ghost? What of the New Testament? Is it not as plain as a sunbeam to the reader that for a Christian to do these things is to act in flagrant opposition to the teaching and example of his Lord?

Here, however, we may be met by the old and oft-repeated inquiry, “What would become of the world, what would become of its institutions, what would become of society, if such principles were to be universally dominant?”

The infidel historian, in speaking of the early Christians, and their refusal to join the Roman army, sneeringly inquires, “What would have become of the empire, surrounded as it was on all sides by barbarians, if everyone had indulged in such pusillanimous ideas as these?”

We reply at once, If those spiritual and heavenly principles were universally dominant, there would be no wars – no fighting, and hence there would be no need of soldiers, no need of standing armies or navies, no need of constabulary or police; there would be no wrong-doings, no strife about property, and hence no need of courts of law, judges, or magistrates; in short, the world as it now is would have an end; the kingdoms of this world would have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.

But the plain fact is, those heavenly principles of which we speak are not intended for the world at all, inasmuch as the world could not adopt them, or act upon them for a single hour; to do so would involve the immediate and complete break-up of the present system of things, the dissolution of the entire framework of society as at present constituted.

Hence, the objection of the infidel crumbles into dust beneath our feet, like all other infidel objections, and the questions and the difficulties which are based upon them. They are deprived of every atom of moral force.

The integral difference between the Old and the New Testament

Heavenly principles are not designed for “**this present evil world**” at all; they are designed for the Church, which is not of the world, even as JESUS is not of the world. “**If,**” said our Lord to Pilate, “**My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is My kingdom not from hence.**”

Mark the word “**now.**”

By and by, the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord; but now, He is rejected, and all who belong to Him – His Church – His people – are called to share His rejection, to follow Him into the outside place, and walk as pilgrims and strangers here below, waiting for the moment when He shall come to receive them to Himself, that where He is, there they may be also.

Now, it is the attempt to mix the world and the Church together that produces such terrible confusion.

It is one of Satan’s special wiles, and it has done more to mar the testimony of the Church of God and hinder its progress than most of us are aware. It involves a complete turning. of things upside down, a confounding of things that differ essentially, an utter denial of the Church’s true character, her position, her walk, and her hope.

We sometimes hear the expression, “Christian world:”. what does it mean? It is simply an attempt to combine two things which in their source, nature, and character are as diverse as light and darkness. It is an effort to tack a new piece upon an old garment, which, as our Lord tells us, only makes the rent worse.

It is not God’s object to Christianize the world, but to call His people out of the world, to be a heavenly people, governed by heavenly principles, formed by a heavenly object, and cheered by a heavenly hope.

If this be not clearly seen; if the truth as to the Church’s true calling and course be not realized as a living power in the soul, we shall be sure to make the most grievous mistakes in our work, walk, and service. We shall make an entirely wrong use of the Old Testament Scriptures, not only on prophetic subjects, but in reference to the whole range of practical life; indeed, it would be utterly impossible to calculate the loss which must result from not seeing the distinctive calling, position, and hope of the Church of God, her association and identification – her living union with a rejected, risen, and glorified CHRIST.

We cannot attempt to enlarge upon this most precious and interesting theme; but we should just like to point out to the reader an instance or two illustrative of the Spirit’s method of quoting and applying Old Testament Scripture. Take, for example, the following passage from that lovely thirty-fourth psalm,- “**The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.**” Now, mark the way in which the HOLY SPIRIT quotes this passage in the first Epistle of Peter – “**The face of the Lord is against them that do evil**” (Chap. 3:12). Not a word about cutting off. Why is this? Because the Lord is not now acting upon the principle of cutting off.

He acted upon it under the law, and He will act upon it in the kingdom by and by; but just now, He is acting in grace and long-suffering mercy. His face is quite as much and quite as decidedly against all evil-doers as ever it was or ever it will be, but not now to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

The most striking illustration of this marvelous grace and forbearance, and of the difference between the two principles on which we have been dwelling, is seen in the fact that the very men who with wicked hands crucified His only begotten and well-beloved Son – evil-doers, surely, of the most pronounced type, – instead of being cut off from the earth, were the very first to hear the message of full and free pardon through the blood of the Cross.

Now, it may appear to some that we are making too much of the mere omission of a single clause of Old Testament Scripture.

Let not the reader think so. Even had we but this one instance, it would be a serious mistake to treat it with anything like indifference. But the fact is, there are scores of passages of the same character as the one just quoted, all illustrative of the contrast between the Jewish and Christian economies, and also between Christianity and the coming kingdom.

God is now dealing in grace. with the world, and so should His people, if they want to be like Him, and such they are called to be.

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” And again, **“Be ye therefore imitators 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”** (Ephesians 5:1).

This is our model. We are called to copy our Father’s example – to imitate Him. He is not going to law with the world; He is not enforcing His rights with the strong hand of power. By and by He will; but just now, in this day of grace, He showers His blessings and benefits in rich profusion upon those whose life is one of enmity and rebellion against Him. All this is perfectly marvelous, but thus it is; and we, as Christians, are called to act on this morally glorious principle.

It may be said by some, How could we ever get on in the world – how could we conduct our business on such a principle as this? We should be robbed and ruined; designing people would take advantage of us if they knew that we would not go to law with them; they would take our goods, or borrow our money, or occupy our houses, and refuse to pay us. In short, we could never get on in a world like this if we did not assert our rights and establish our claims by the strong hand of power. What is the law for but to make people behave themselves? Are not the powers that be ordained of God for the very purpose of maintaining peace and good order in our midst? What would become of society if we had not soldiers, policemen, magistrates, and judges? And if God has ordained that such things should be, why should not His people avail themselves of them? and not only so, but who so fit to occupy places of authority and power, or to wield the sword of justice, as the people of God?

There is, no doubt, very great apparent force in all this line of argument. The powers that be are ordained of God. The king, the governor, the judge, the magistrate, are, each in his place, the expression of the power of God. It is God who invests each with the power which he wields; it is He who has put the sword into his hand, for the punishment of evil-doers, and the praise of them that do well. We bless God with all our hearts for the constituted authorities of the country. Day and night, in private and in public, we pray for them. It is our bounden duty to obey and submit ourselves to them in all things, provided always that they do not call upon us to disobey God, or do violence to conscience. If they do this, we must what? Resist? Nay, but suffer.

All this is perfectly plain. The world as it now is could not go on for a single day if men were not kept in order by the strong hand of power. We could not live, or at least life would be perfectly intolerable, were it not that evil-doers are kept in terror of the glittering sword of justice.

Even as it is, through lack of moral power on the part of those who bear the sword, lawless demagogues are allowed to stir up the evil passions of men to resist the law of the land and disturb the peace and threaten the lives and property of well-disposed and harmless subjects of the government.

But admitting all this, in the fullest possible manner, as every intelligent Christian, every one taught by Scripture, most assuredly will, it leaves wholly untouched the question of the Christian's path in this world.

Christianity fully recognizes all the governmental institutions of the country. It forms no part of the Christian's business to interfere, in anyone way, with such institutions. Wherever he is, whatever be the principle or character of the government of the country in which his lot is cast, it is his duty to recognize its municipal and political arrangements, to pay taxes, pray for the government, honor governors in their official capacity, wish well to the legislature and the executive, pray for the peace of the country, live in peace with all, so far as in him lies.

We see all this in the blessed Master Himself in perfection, blessed be His holy name for evermore!

In His memorable reply to the crafty Heroditus, He recognizes the principle of subjection to the powers that be – **“Render to Caesar the things that be Caesar's, and to God the things that be God's.”** And not only so, but we find Him also paying tribute, although personally free. They had no right to demand it of Him, as He plainly shows to Peter; and it might be said, Why did He not appeal? Appeal! Nay; He shows us something quite different. Hear His exquisite reply to His mistaken apostle:

“Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast a hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money; that take and give unto them for Me and thee.” (Matthew 17). *

*** The fact that the tribute-money may have been for the temple does not touch the principle set forth in the text.**

And here we get back, with increased moral force, to our thesis, namely, the Christian's path in this world. What is it? He is to follow his Master – to imitate Him in all things. Did He assert His rights? Did He go to law? Did He try to regulate the world? Did He meddle with municipal or political matters? Was He a politician? Did He wield the sword? Did He consent to be a judge or a divider, even when appealed to, as we say, to arbitrate about property? Was not His whole life one of complete self-surrender, from first to last? Was He not continually giving up, until, at the Cross, He gave up His precious life as a ransom for many?

We shall leave these questions to find their answer deep down in the heart of the Christian reader, and to produce their practical effect in his life. We trust that the foregoing line of truth will enable him to interpret aright such passages as Deuteronomy 13:9, 10.

Our opposition to idolatry and our separation from evil, in every shape and form, while not less intense and decided, most surely, than that of Israel of old, is not to be displayed in the same way. The Church is imperatively called upon to put away evil and evil-doers, but not after the same fashion as Israel. It is no part of her duty to stone idolaters and blasphemers, or burn witches. The church of Rome has acted upon this principle, and even Protestants (to the shame of Protestantism) have followed her example. *

*** The burning of Servetus, in 1553, for his theological opinions, Is a frightful blot upon the Reformation, and upon the man who sanctioned such an unchristian proceeding. True, the opinions of Servetus were fatally and fundamentally false, – he held the Arian heresy, which is simply blasphemy against the Son of God; but to burn him, or anyone else, for false doctrine, was a flagrant sin against the spirit, genius, and principle of the Gospel, the deplorable fruit of ignorance as to the essential difference between Judaism and Christianity.**

The Church is not called – nay, she is positively and peremptorily forbidden to use the temporal sword. It is a fiat denial of her calling, character, and mission to do so.

When Peter, in ignorant zeal and carnal haste, drew the sword in defense of his blessed Master, he was at once corrected by his Master's faithful word, and instructed by his Master's gracious act, – **“Put up thy sword into the sheath; for all they that take the sword shall perish by the sword.”** And having thus reproved the act of His mistaken though well-meaning servant, He undid the mischief by His gracious touch. **“The weapons of our warfare,”** says the inspired apostle, **“are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ”** (II Corinthians 10:4, 5).

The professing church has gone all astray as to this great and most important question. She has joined herself with the world, and sought to further the cause of CHRIST by carnal and worldly agency. She had ignorantly attempted to maintain the Christian faith by the most shameful denial of Christian practice.

The burning of heretics stands as a most fearful moral blot upon the page of the church's history. We can form no adequate idea of the terrible consequences resulting from the notion that the Church was called to take Israel's place and act on Israel's principles. *

*** It is one thing for the Church to learn from the history of Israel, and another thing altogether to take Israel's place, act on Israel's principles, and appropriate Israel's promises. The former is the Church's duty and privilege; the latter has been the Church's fatal mistake.**

It completely falsified her testimony, robbed her of her entirely spiritual and heavenly character, and led her upon a path which ends in Revelation 17 and 18. Let him that readeth understand.

But we must not pursue this line of things further here. We trust that what has passed before us will lead all whom it may concern to consider the whole subject in the light of the New Testament, and thus be the means, through the infinite goodness of God, of leading them to see the path of entire separation which we as Christians are called to tread; in the world, but not of it, even as our Lord CHRIST is not of it. This will solve a thousand difficulties, and furnish a grand general principle which can be practically applied to a thousand details.

We shall now conclude our study of Deuteronomy 13. by a glance at its closing paragraph.

The importance of Israel's national unity

“If thou shalt hear say in one of thy cities, which the Lord thy God hath given thee to dwell there, saying, Certain men, the children of Belial, are gone out from among you, and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which ye have not known; then shalt thou inquire, and make search, and ask diligently; and, behold, if it be truth, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought among you, thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, and all that is therein, and the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword. And thou shalt gather all the spoil of it into the midst of the street thereof, and shalt burn with fire the city, and all the spoil thereof every whit, for the Lord thy God; and it shall be a heap forever; it shall not be built again. And there shall cleave naught of the cursed thing to thine hand; that the Lord may turn from the fierceness of His anger, and show thee mercy, and have compassion upon thee, and multiply thee, as He hath sworn unto thy fathers; when thou shalt hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, to keep all His commandments which I command thee this day, to do that which is right in the eyes of the Lord thy God”
(Ver. 12-18).

Here we have instruction of the most solemn and weighty character. But the reader must bear in mind that, solemn and weighty as it most surely is, it is based upon a truth of unspeakable value, and that is, Israel's national unity. If we do not see this, we shall miss the real force and meaning of the foregoing quotation.

A Case is supposed of grave error in some one of the cities of Israel, and the question might naturally arise, Are all the cities involved in the evil of one? *

*** It is, of course, needful to bear in mind that the evil referred to in the text was of the very gravest character. It was an attempt to draw the people away from the one living and true God. It touched the very foundation of Israel's national existence. It was not merely a local or municipal question, but a national one.**

Assuredly, inasmuch as the nation was one. The cities and tribes were not independent; they were bound up together by a sacred bond of national unity – a unity which had its center in the place of the divine presence.

Israel's twelve tribes were indissolubly bound together.

- The twelve loaves on the golden table in the sanctuary formed the beautiful type of this unity, and every true Israelite owned and rejoiced in this unity.
- The twelve stones in Jordan's bed,
- The twelve stones on Jordan's bank,
- Elijah's twelve stones on Mount Carmel.

All set forth the same grand truth – the indissoluble unity of Israel's twelve tribes.

- The good king Hezekiah recognized this truth when he commanded that the burnt-offering and the sin-offering should be made for all Israel. (II Chronicles 21:24).
- The faithful Josiah owned it and acted upon it when he carried his reformatory operations into all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel. (II Chronicles 34:33).
- Paul, in his magnificent address before king Agrippa, bears witness to the same truth when he says, **“Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come.”** (Acts 26:7) *

*** It may interest the reader to know that the word rendered in the above passage, “twelve tribes,” is singular – το δωδε καθυλον. It certainly gives very full and vivid expression to the grand idea of indissoluble unity which is so precious to God, and therefore so precious to faith.**

And when we look forward into the bright future, the same glorious truth shines, with heavenly lustre, in the seventh chapter of Revelation, where, we see the twelve tribes sealed and secured for blessing, rest, and glory, in connection with a countless multitude of the Gentiles. And finally, in Revelation 21. we see the names of the twelve tribes engraved on the gates of the Holy Jerusalem, the seat and center of the glory of God and the Lamb.

Thus, from the golden table in the sanctuary to the golden city descending out of Heaven from God, we have a marvelous chain of evidence in proof of the grand truth of the indissoluble unity of Israel's twelve tribes.

And then, if the question be asked, Where is this unity to be seen? Or how did Elijah or Hezekiah or Josiah or Paul see it?

The answer is a very simple one – They saw it by faith; they looked within the sanctuary of God, and there, on the golden table, they beheld the twelve loaves, setting forth the perfect distinctness and yet the perfect oneness of the twelve tribes. Nothing can be more beautiful. The truth of God must stand forever. Israel’s unity was seen in the past, and it will be seen in the future; and though, like the higher unity of the Church, it is unseen in the present, faith believes it all the same, holds it and confesses it in the face of ten thousand hostile influences

And now let us look for a moment at the practical application of this most glorious truth, as presented in the closing paragraph of Deuteronomy 13.

A report reaches a city in the far north of the land of Israel of serious error taught in a certain city in the extreme south – deadly error, tending to draw the inhabitants away from the true God.

What is to be done? The law is as plain as possible; the path of duty is laid down with such distinctness that it only needs a single eye to see it, and a devoted heart to tread it. **“Then shalt thou inquire, and make search, and ask diligently.”** This surely is simple enough.

But some of the citizens might say, “What have we in the north to do with error taught in the south? Thank God, there is no error taught amongst us; it is entirely a local question; each city is responsible for the maintenance of the truth within its own walls. How could we be expected to examine into every case of error which may spring up here and there all over the land? our whole time would be taken up, so that we could not attend to our fields, our vineyards, our oliveyards, our flocks, and our herds.

It is quite as much as we can do to keep our own borders all right. We certainly condemn the error, and if anyone holding or teaching it were to come here, and that we knew of it, we should most decidedly shut our gates against him. Beyond this, we do not feel ourselves responsible to go.

Now, what, we may ask, would be the reply of the faithful Israelite to all this line of argument which, in the judgment of mere nature, seems so exceedingly plausible? A very simple and very conclusive one, we may be sure. He would say it was simply a denial of Israel’s unity. If every city and every tribe were to take independent ground, then verily the high-priest might take the twelve loaves off the golden table before the Lord and scatter them here and there and every where; our unity is gone; we are all broken up into independent atoms, having no national ground of action. Besides, the commandment is most distinct and explicit – **“Thou shalt inquire, and make search, and ask diligently.”**

We are bound, therefore, on the double ground of the nation’s unity and the plain command of our covenant-God. It is of no possible use to say there is no error taught amongst us, unless we want to separate ourselves from the nation; if we belong to Israel, then verily the error is taught amongst us, as the Word says, **“Such abomination is wrought among you.”**

How far does the **“you”** extend? As far as the national boundaries. Error taught at Dan affects those dwelling at Beersheba. How is this? Because Israel is one.

And then the Word is so plain, so distinct, so emphatic. We are bound to search into it. We cannot fold our arms and sit down in cold indifference and culpable neutrality, else we shall be involved in the awful consequences of this evil; yea, we are involved until we clear ourselves of it by judging it, with unflinching decision and unsparing severity.

Such, beloved reader, would be the language of every loyal Israelite, and such his mode of acting in reference to error and evil wherever found.

To speak or act otherwise would simply be indifference as to the truth and glory of God, and independency as regards Israel. For any to say that they were not responsible to act according to the instructions given in Deuteronomy 13:12-18, would be a complete surrender of the truth of God and of Israel's unity. All were bound to act, or else be involved in the judgment of the guilty city.

And surely if all this was true in Israel of old, it is not less true in the Church of God now. We may rest assured that anything like indifference where CHRIST is concerned is most hateful to God. It is the eternal purpose and counsel of God to glorify His Son; that every knee should bow to Him, and every tongue confess that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father; **“that all should honor the Son even as they honor the Father.”**

Hence, if CHRIST be dishonored, – if doctrines be taught derogatory to the glory of His Person, the efficacy of His work, or the virtue of His offices, we are bound, by every motive which could possibly act on our hearts, to reject, with stern decision, such doctrines. Indifference or neutrality where the Son of God is concerned is high treason in the judgment of the high court of Heaven. We would not be indifferent if it were a question of our own reputation, our personal character, or our personal or family property; we should be thoroughly alive to anything affecting ourselves or those dear to us.

How much more deeply ought we to feel in reference to what concerns the glory and honor, the name and cause, of the One to whom we owe our present and everlasting all – the One who laid aside His glory, came down into this wretched world, and died a shameful death upon the Cross, in order to save us from the everlasting flames of hell. Could we be indifferent to Him? neutral where He is concerned? God, in His great mercy, forbid!

No, reader; it must not be. The honor and glory of Christ must be more to us than all beside. Reputation, property, family, friends – all must stand aside if the claims of Christ are involved. Does not the Christian reader own this, with all the energy of his ransomed soul? We feel persuaded he does, even now; and oh, how shall we feel when we see Him face to face, and stand in the full light of His moral glory? with what feelings shall we then contemplate the idea of indifference or neutrality with respect to Him!

And are we not justified in declaring that next to the glory of the Head stands the great truth of the unity of His body – the Church? Unquestionably! If the nation of Israel was one, how much more is the body of Christ one! and if independency was wrong in Israel, how much more wrong in the Church of God! The plain fact is this: the idea of independency cannot be maintained for a moment in the light of the New Testament.

As well might we say that the hand is independent of the foot, or the eye of the ear, as assert that the members of the body of Christ are independent one of another.

“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ” – a very remarkable statement, setting forth the intimate union of Christ and the Church – **“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members everyone of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more, those members of the body which seem to be more feeble, are necessary; and those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, upon these we bestow more abundant honor; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness; for our comely parts have no need; but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honor to that part which lacked ~ that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now YE ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST, AND MEMBERS IN PARTICULAR”** (I Corinthians 12:12-27).

We do not attempt to dwell upon this truly marvelous Scripture; but we earnestly desire to call the attention of the Christian reader to the special truth which it so forcibly sets before US – a truth which intimately concerns every true believer on the face of the earth, namely, that he is a member of the body of Christ.

This is a great practical truth, involving, at once, the very highest privileges and the very weightiest responsibilities.

It is not merely a true doctrine, a sound principle, or an orthodox opinion; it is a living fact, designed to be a divine power in the soul. The Christian can no longer view himself as an independent person, having no association, no vital link, with others. He is livingly bound up with all the children of God – all true believers – all the members of Christ body upon the face of the earth.

“By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.”

The Church of God is not a mere club, or a society, an association, or a brotherhood; it is a body united by the HOLY GHOST to the Head in Heaven; and all its members on earth are indissolubly bound together.

This being so, it follows, of necessity, that all the members of the body are affected by the state and walk of each. “**If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it,**” – that is, all the members of the body. If there is anything wrong with the foot, the hand feels it. How? Through the head. So in the Church of God, if anything goes wrong with an individual member, all feel it through the Head with whom all are livingly connected by the HOLY GHOST.

Some find it very hard to grasp this great truth; but there it stands plainly revealed on the inspired page, not to be reasoned about, or submitted in any way to the human judgment, but simply to be believed. It is a divine revelation. No human mind could ever have conceived such a thought; but God reveals it, faith believes it, and walks in the blessed power of it.

It may be the reader feels disposed to ask, How is it possible for the state of one believer to affect those who know nothing about it? The answer is, “**If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it.**” All the members of what? Is it of any mere local assembly or company who may happen to know or be locally connected with the person concerned? Nay, but the members of the body wherever they are. Even in the case of Israel, where it was only a national unity, we have seen that if there was evil in anyone of their cities, all were concerned, all involved, all affected. Hence, when Achan sinned, although there were myriads of people totally ignorant of the fact, the Lord said, “**Israel hath sinned,**” and the whole assembly suffered a humiliating defeat.

Can reason grasp this weighty truth? No; but faith can. If we listen to reason, we shall believe nothing; but, by the grace of God, we shall not listen to reason, but believe what God says because He says it.

And oh, beloved Christian reader, what an immense truth is this unity of the body!

- What practical consequences flow out of it!
- How eminently calculated it is to minister to holiness of walk and life!
- How watchful it would make us over ourselves – our habits, our ways, our whole moral condition!
- How careful it would make us not to dishonor the Head to whom we are united, or grieve the Spirit by whom we are united, or injure the members with whom we are united!

But we must close this chapter, much as we should like to linger over one of the very grandest, most profound, and most powerful formative truths that can possibly engage our attention.

May the Spirit of God make it a living power in the soul of every true believer on the face of the earth.

~ end of chapter 13 ~

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