

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

By C. H. M.

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CHAPTER FOUR

“Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers giveth you.”

Here we have very prominently before us the special characteristic of the entire book of Deuteronomy – **“Hearken”** and **“do,”** that ye may **“live”** and **“possess.”**

This is a universal and abiding principle. It was true for Israel, and it is true for us.

The pathway of life and the true secret of possession is simple obedience to the holy commandments of God. We see this all through the inspired volume, from cover to cover. God has given us His Word, not to speculate upon it or discuss it, but that we may obey it. And it is as we, through grace, yield a hearty and happy obedience to our Father’s statutes and judgments, that we tread the bright pathway of life, and enter into the reality of all that God has treasured up for us in Christ. **“He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me; and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him.”**

How precious is this! Indeed, it is unspeakable.

It is something quite peculiar. It would be a very serious mistake to suppose that the privilege here spoken of is enjoyed by all believers. It is not. It is only enjoyed by such as yield a loving obedience to the commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ. It lies within the reach of all, but all do not enjoy it, because all are not obedient. It is one thing to be a child, and quite another to be an obedient child; it is one thing to be saved, and quite another thing to love the Saviour, and delight in all His most precious precepts.

We may see this continually illustrated in our family circles. There, for example, are two sons, and one of them only thinks of pleasing himself, doing his will, gratifying his own desires. He takes no pleasure in his father’s society, does not take any pains to carry out his father’s wishes, knows hardly anything of his mind, and what he does know he utterly neglects or despises. He is ready enough to avail himself of all the benefits which accrue to him from the relationship in which he stands to his father – ready enough to accept clothes, books, money – all, in short, that the father gives; but he never seeks to gratify the father’s heart by a loving attention to his will, even in the smallest matters.

The other son is the direct opposite to all this. He delights in being with his father; he loves his society, loves his ways, loves his words; he is constantly taking occasion to carry out his father's wishes, to get him something that he knows will be agreeable to him. He loves his father, not for his gifts, but for himself; and he finds his richest enjoyment in being in his father's company and in doing his will.

Now, can we have any difficulty in seeing how very differently the father will feel towards those two sons?

True, they are both his sons, and he loves them both, with a love grounded upon the relationship in which they stand to him; but beside the love of relationship common to both, there is the love of complacency peculiar to the obedient child. It is impossible that a father can find pleasure in the society of a willful, self-indulgent, careless son. Such a son may occupy much of his thoughts, he may spend many a sleepless night thinking about him and praying for him, he would gladly spend and be spent for him; but he is not agreeable to him, does not possess his confidence, cannot be the depository of his thoughts.

All this demands the serious consideration of those who really desire to be acceptable or agreeable to the heart of our heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

We may rest assured of this, that obedience is grateful to God; and **"His commandments are not grievous"** – nay, they are the sweet and precious expression of His love, and the fruit and evidence of the relationship in which He stands to us. And not only so, but He graciously rewards our obedience by a fuller manifestation of Himself to our souls, and His dwelling with us.

This comes out in great fullness and beauty in our Lord's reply to Judas, not Iscariot, for whose question we may be thankful – **"Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world? ' Jesus answered and said unto him, 'If a man love Me, he will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him'"** (I John 15).

Here we are taught that it is not a question of the difference between **"the world"** and **"us,"** inasmuch as the world knows nothing either of relationship or obedience, and is therefore in no wise contemplated in our Lord's words. The world hates Christ, because it does not know Him. Its language is, **"Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways."** **"We will not have this Man to reign over us."**

Such is the world, even when polished by civilization, and gilded with the profession of Christianity. There is, underneath all the gilding, all the polish, a deep-seated hatred of the Person and authority of Christ. His sacred, peerless name is tacked on to the world's religion, at least throughout baptized Christendom; but behind the drapery of religious profession, there lurks a heart at enmity with God and His Christ.

But our Lord is not speaking of the world in John 15.

He is shut in with “**His own**,” and it is of them He is speaking. Were He to manifest Himself to the world, it could only be for judgment and eternal destruction. But, blessed be His name, He does manifest Himself to His own obedient children, to those who have His commandments and keep them, to those who love Him and keep His words.

And, let the reader thoroughly understand that when our Lord speaks of His commandments, His words, and His sayings, He does not mean the Ten Commandments, or Law of Moses.

No doubt, those Ten Commandments form a part of the whole canon of Scripture – the inspired Word of God; but to confound the Law of Moses with the commandments of Christ would be simply turning things upside down, it would be to confound Judaism with Christianity – law and grace. The two things are as distinct as any two things can be, and must be so maintained by all who would be found in the current of the mind of God.

We are sometimes led astray by the mere sound of words; and hence, when we meet with the word “**commandments**,” we instantly conclude that it must needs refer to the Law of Moses. But this is a very great and mischievous mistake.

If the reader is not clear and established as to this, let him close this volume and turn to the first eight chapters of the Epistle to the Romans, and the whole of the Epistle to the Galatians, and read them calmly and prayerfully, as in the very presence of God, with a mind freed from all theological bias and the influence of all previous religious training. There he will learn, in the fullest and clearest manner, that the Christian is not under law in any way, or for any object whatsoever, either for life, for righteousness, for holiness, for walk, or for anything else.

In short, the teaching of the entire New Testament goes to establish, beyond all question, that the Christian is not under law, not of the world, not in the flesh, not in his sins. The solid ground of all this is the accomplished redemption which we have in Christ Jesus, in virtue of which we are sealed by the Holy Ghost, and thus indissolubly united to, and inseparably identified with a risen and glorified Christ; so that the apostle John can say of all believers, all God’s dear children, “**As He [Christ] is, so are we in this world.**”

This settles the whole question, for all who are content to be governed by Holy Scripture. And as to all beside, discussion is worse than useless.

We have digressed from our immediate subject, in order to meet any difficulty arising from a misunderstanding of the word “**commandments**.”

The reader cannot too carefully guard against the tendency to confound the commandments spoken of in John 15, with the commandments of Moses, given in Exodus 20. And yet we reverently believe that Exodus 20 is as truly inspired as John 15.

And now, ere we finally turn from the subject which has been engaging us, we would ask the reader to refer, for a few moments, to a piece of inspired history which illustrates, in a very striking way, the difference between an obedient and disobedient child of God.

He will find it in Genesis 18:19. It is a profoundly interesting study, presenting a contrast instructive, suggestive, and practical beyond expression. We are not going to dwell upon it, having in some measure done so in our "*Notes on the Book of Genesis*;" but we would merely remind the reader that he has before him, in these two chapters, the history of two saints of God. Lot was just as much a child of God as Abraham. We have no more doubt that Lot is amongst "**the spirits of just men made perfect**" than that Abraham is there. This, we think, cannot be called in question, inasmuch as the inspired apostle Peter tells us that Lot's "**righteous soul was vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked.**"

But mark the grave difference between the two men.

The Lord Himself visited Abraham, sat with him, and partook readily of his hospitality. This was a high honor indeed, a rare privilege – a privilege which Lot never knew, an honor to which he never attained. The Lord never visited him in Sodom; He merely sent His angels, His ministers of power, the agents of His government. And even they, at first, sternly refused to enter Lot's house or to partake of his proffered hospitality. Their withering reply was, "**Nay, but we will abide in the street all night.**" And when they did enter his house, it was only to protect him from the lawless violence with which he was surrounded, and to drag him out of the wretched circumstances into which, for worldly gain and position, he had plunged himself. Could contrast be more vivid?

But further, the Lord delighted in Abraham, manifested Himself to him, opened His mind to him, told him of His plans and purposes – what He was about to do with Sodom. "**Shall I,**" said He, "**hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.**"

We could hardly have a more telling illustration of John 14:21, 23, although the scene occurred two thousand years before the words were uttered.

Have we aught like this in the history of Lot? Alas! No. It could not be. He had no nearness to God, no knowledge of His mind, no insight into His plans and purposes. How could he? Sunk, as he was, in the low moral depths of Sodom, how could he know the mind of God? Blinded by the murky atmosphere which in wrapped the guilty cities of the plain, how could he see into the future? Utterly impossible.

If a man is mixed up with the world, he can only see things from the world's stand-point; he can only measure things by the world's standard, and think of them with the world's thoughts.

Hence it is that the church, in its Sardis condition, is threatened with the coming of the Lord as a thief, instead of being cheered with the hope of His coming as the bright and morning star. If the professing church has sunk to the world's level – as, alas! She has – she can only contemplate the future from the world's point of view.

This accounts for the feeling of dread with which the great majority of professing Christians look at the subject of the Lord's coming. They are looking for Him as a thief, instead of the blessed Bridegroom of their hearts. How few there are, comparatively, who love His appearing!

The great majority of professors (we grieve to have to pen the words) find their type in Lot rather than in Abraham. The Church has departed from her proper ground; she has gone down from her true moral elevation, and mingled herself with that world which hates and despises her absent Lord.

Still, thank God, there are **“a few names, even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments”** – a few living stones, amid the smoldering ashes of lifeless profession – a few lights twinkling amid the moral gloom of cold, nominal, heartless, worldly Christianity. And not only so, but in the Laodicean phase of the Church's history, which presents a still lower and more hopeless condition of things, when the whole professing body is about to be spued out of the mouth of **“the faithful and true witness”** – even at this advanced stage of failure and departure, those gracious words fall, with soul-stirring power, on the attentive ear, **“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.”** *

*** To apply the solemn address of Christ to the church of Laodicea, as we sometimes find it done in modern evangelical preaching, to the case of the sinner, is a great mistake. No doubt, what the preacher means is right enough, but it is not presented here. It is not Christ knocking at the door of a sinner's heart, but knocking at the door of the professing church. What a fact is this! How full of deep and awful solemnity as regards the church! What an end to come to! – Christ outside! But what grace, as regards Christ, for He is knocking! He wants to come in; He is still lingering, in patient grace and changeless love, ready to come in to any faithful individual heart that will only open to Him. “If any man” even one! In Sardis, He could speak positively of “a few;” in Laodicea, He can only speak doubtfully as to finding one. But should there be even one, He will come in to him, and sup with him. – Precious Saviour! Faithful Lover of our souls! “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.”**

Reader, need we wonder that the enemy should seek to mutilate and misapply the solemn and searching address to the church of Laodicea – the professing body in the last dreary stage of its history? We have no hesitation in saying that to apply it merely to the case of an unconverted soul is to deprive the professing church of one of the most pertinent, pungent, and powerful appeals within the covers of the New Testament.

Thus, in the days of professing Christianity, as in the days of the patriarchs – in the times of the New Testament, as in those of the Old, we see the same value and importance attached to a hearing ear and an obedient heart.

Abraham, in the plains of Mamre, the pilgrim and the stranger, the faithful and obedient child of God, tasted the rare privilege of entertaining the Lord of glory – a privilege which could not be known by one who had chosen his place and his portion in a sphere doomed to destruction.

So, also, in the days of Laodicean indifference and boastful pretension, the truly-obedient heart is cheered with the sweet promise of sitting down to sup with Him who is **“the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.”**

In a word, let the condition of things be what it may, there is no limit to the blessing of the individual soul who will only hearken to the voice of Christ, and keep His commandments.

Let us remember this. Let it sink down into the very deepest depths of our moral being.

Nothing can rob us of the blessings and privileges flowing from obedience.

The truth of this shines out before our eyes in every section and on every page of the volume of God. At all times, in all places, and under all circumstances, the obedient soul was happy in God, and God was happy in him.

It always holds good, whatever be the character of the dispensation, that, **“To this man will I look, even to him who is of a contrite spirit, and trembles at My word.”** Nothing can ever alter or touch this.

It meets us in the fourth chapter of our blessed book of Deuteronomy, in the words with which this section opens – **“Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments which I teach you, for to do, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers giveth you.”**

It meets us in those precious words of our Lord, in John 15, on which we have been dwelling – **“He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me,”** etc. And again, **“If a man love Me, he will keep my sayings.”** *

* **There is an interesting difference between the Lord’s “commandments” and “sayings.” The former set forth, distinctly and definitely, what we ought to do; the latter are the expression of His mind. If I give my child a command, it is the statement of his duty; and if he loves me, he will delight to do it. But if he has heard me say I like to see such a thing done, although I have not actually told him to do it, it will touch my heart much more deeply to see him go and do that thing in order to gratify me, than if I had given him a positive command. Now, ought we not to try and please the heart of Christ? Should we not “labor to be agreeable to Him”? He has made us accepted; surely we ought to seek, in every possible way, to be acceptable to Him. He delights in a loving obedience; it was what He Himself rendered to the Father. “I delight to do Thy will; yea, Thy law is within My heart.” “If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love.” Oh, that we may drink more deeply into the spirit of Jesus, walk in His blessed footsteps, and render Him a more loving, devoted, and whole-hearted obedience in all things! Let us earnestly seek after these things, beloved Christian reader, that His heart may be gratified, and His name glorified in us, and in our entire practical career from day to day.**

It shines with peculiar brightness in the words of the inspired apostle John – **“Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment. And he that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him”** (I John 3:21-24).

Passages might easily be multiplied, but there is no need. Those which we have quoted set before us; in the clearest and fullest way possible, the very highest motive for obedience, namely, its being agreeable to the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ – well-pleasing to God.

True, we owe a hearty obedience on every ground. **“We are not our own; we are bought with a price.”** We owe our life, our peace, our righteousness, our salvation, our everlasting felicity and glory, all to Him; so that nothing can exceed the moral weight of His claims upon us for a life of whole-hearted obedience. But above and beyond His moral claims stands the marvelous fact that His heart is gratified, His spirit refreshed, by our keeping His commandments and doing those things that are pleasing in His sight.

Beloved Christian reader, can anything exceed the moral power of such a motive as this?

Only think of our being privileged to give pleasure to the heart of our beloved Lord! What sweetness, what interest, what preciousness, what holy dignity, it imparts to every little act of obedience to know that it is grateful to the heart of our Father! How far beyond the legal system is this! It is a most perfect contrast, in its every phase and every feature.

The difference between the legal system and Christianity is the difference between death and life, bondage and liberty, condemnation and righteousness, distance and nearness, doubt and certainty.

How monstrous the attempt to amalgamate these two things – to work them up into one system, as though they were but two branches from the one stem! What hopeless confusion must be the result of any such effort! How terrible the effect of seeking to place souls under the influence of the two things! As well might we attempt to combine the sun’s meridian beams with the profound darkness of midnight.

Looked at from a divine and heavenly stand-point, judged in the light of the New Testament, measured by the standard of the heart of God, the mind of Christ, there could not be a more hideous anomaly than that which presents itself to our view in Christendom’s effort to combine law and grace.

And as to the dishonor done to God, the wound inflicted on the heart of Christ, the grief and despite offered to the Holy Ghost, the damage done to the truth of God, the grievous wrong perpetrated upon the beloved lambs and sheep of the flock of Christ, the terrible stumbling-block thrown in the way of both Jew and Gentile, and, in short, the serious injury done to the entire testimony of God during the last eighteen centuries, the judgment seat of Christ can alone declare it; and oh, what an awful declaration that will be! It is too tremendous to contemplate.

But there are many pious souls throughout the length and breath of the professing church who conscientiously believe that the only possible way to produce obedience, to attain to practical holiness, to secure a godly walk, to keep our evil nature in order, is to put people under the law.

They seem to fear that if souls are taken from under the schoolmaster, with his rod and rudiments, there is an end to all moral order. In the absence of the authority of law, they look for nothing but hopeless confusion. To take away the Ten Commandments as a rule of life, is, in their judgment, to remove those grand moral embankments which the hand of God has erected to stem the tide of human lawlessness.

We can fully understand their difficulty.

Most of us have had to encounter it, in one shape or another. But we must seek to meet it in God's way. It is of no possible use to cling, with fond tenacity, to our own notions, in the face of the plainest and most direct teaching of Holy Scripture. We must, sooner or later, give up all such notions.

Nothing will, nothing can, stand but the Word of our God – the voice of the Holy Ghost – the authority of Scripture – the imperishable teachings of that peerless revelation which our Father has, in His infinite grace, put into our hands. To that we must listen, with profound and reverent attention; to it we must bow down, with unquestioning and unqualified obedience.

We must not presume to hold a single opinion of our own: God's opinion must be ours. We must clear out all the rubbish, which, by the influence of mere human teaching, has accumulated in our minds, and have every chamber thoroughly cleansed by the action of the Word and Spirit of God, and thoroughly ventilated by the pure and bracing air of the new creation.

Furthermore, we must learn to confide implicitly in every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. We must not reason, we must not judge, we must not discuss: we must simply believe. If man speaks, if it be a mere question of human authority, then indeed we must judge, because man has no right to command. We must judge what he says, not by our own opinions, or by any human standard, creed, or confession of faith, but by the Word of God. But when Scripture speaks, all discussion is closed.

This is an unspeakable consolation.

It is not within the compass of human language to set forth adequately the value or the moral importance of this great fact.

- It delivers the soul completely from the blinding power of self-will on the one hand, and of mere subjection to human authority on the other.
- It brings us into direct, personal, living contact with the authority of God; and this is life, peace, liberty, moral power, true elevation, divine certainty, and holy stability.
- It puts an end to doubts and fears, to all the fluctuations of mere human opinion, so perplexing to the mind, so torturing to the heart.

We are no longer tossed about with every wind of doctrine, every wave of human thought. God has spoken. This is quite enough. Here the heart finds its deep and settled repose. It has made its escape from the stormy ocean of theological controversy, and cast anchor in the blessed haven of divine revelation.

Hence, therefore, we would say to the pious reader of these lines, if you would know the mind of God on the subject before us – if you would know the ground, character, and object of Christian obedience, you must simply listen to the voice of Holy Scripture.

And what does it say? Does it send us back to Moses, to teach us how to live? Does it send us back to the palpable mount, in order to secure holy living?

Does it put us under the law, to keep the flesh in order? Hear what it says. Yes; hearken and ponder. Take the following words from Romans 6 -words of emancipating, holy power:

“For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under law, but under grace.”

Now, we most earnestly entreat the reader to let these words enter into the very depths of his soul.

The Holy Ghost declares, in the simplest and most emphatic manner, that Christians are not under law. If we were under law, sin would have dominion over us. Indeed, we invariably find, in Scripture, that **“sin,” “law,”** and **“flesh”** are linked together.

A soul under law cannot possibly enjoy full deliverance from the dominion of sin; and in this we can see at a glance the fallacy of the whole legal system, and the utter delusion of seeking to produce holy living by putting souls under the law. It is simply putting them into the very place where sin can lord it over them, and rule them with absolute sway. How is it possible, then, to produce holiness by law? It is absolutely hopeless.

But let us turn, for a moment, to Romans 7.

“Wherefore, my brethren, ye also” – and all true believers, all God’s people – **“are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.”**

Now, it is perfectly plain that we cannot be **“dead to the law”** and **“under the law”** at the same time.

It may perhaps be argued that the expression, **“dead to the law”** is merely a figure. Well, supposing it be so, we ask, A figure of what? Surely it cannot be a figure of persons under law. Nay, it is a figure of the very opposite.

And let us mark particularly, the apostle does not say the law is dead.

Nothing of the kind. The law is not dead, but we are dead to it. We have passed, by the death of Christ, out of the sphere to which the law belongs. Christ took our place; He was made under the law; and, on the Cross, He was made sin for us. But He died for us, and we died in Him; and He has thus taken us clean out of the position in which we were under the dominion of sin, and under law, and introduced us into an entirely new position, in living association and union with Himself, so that it can be said, **“As He is, so are we in this world.”**

Is He under law? Assuredly not. Well, neither are we. Has sin any claim upon Him? None whatever. Neither has it any upon us. We are, as to our standing, as He is in the presence of God; and therefore to put us back under law would be a complete overturning of the entire Christian position, and a most positive and flagrant contradiction of the very plainest statements of Holy Scripture.

Now, we would, in all simplicity and godly sincerity, ask, How could holy living be promoted by removing the very foundation of Christianity? How could indwelling sin be subdued by putting us under the very system that gave sin power over us? How could true Christian obedience ever be produced by flying in the face of Holy Scripture? We confess we cannot conceive any thing more thoroughly preposterous. Surely a divine end can only be gained by pursuing a divine way. Now, God’s way of giving us deliverance from the dominion of sin is by delivering us from under law; and hence all those who teach that Christians are under law are plainly at issue with God. Tremendous consideration for all who desire to be teachers of the law!

But let us hear further words from the seventh chapter of Romans.

The apostle goes on to say, **“For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, being dead [or, having died] to that wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.”**

Here, again, all is as clear as a sunbeam. What means the expression, **“When we were in the flesh”**? Does it – can it mean that we are still in that condition? Clearly not.

If I were to say, when I was in London, would anyone understand that I am in London still? The thought is absurd.

But what does the apostle mean by the expression, **“When we were in the flesh”**?

He simply refers to a thing of the past – to a condition that no longer obtains. Are believers, then, not in the flesh? So Scripture emphatically declares. But does this mean that they are not in the body? Assuredly not. They are in the body as to the fact of their existence, but not in the flesh as to the ground of their standing before God.

In chapter 8, we have the most distinct statement of this point – **“So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.”**

* **“The law is good, if a man use it lawfully” (I Timothy 1). And Again, “The law is holy” (Romans 7). Scripture never teaches that the law is dead. but it teaches that the believer is dead to the law. But further, *αποθανοντες* cannot possibly apply to the law, as any well-taught school-boy can see at a glance; it applies to unbelievers. Were it the law, the word would be *αποθανοντος*.”**

Here we have the statement of a most solemn fact, and the setting forth of a most precious, glorious privilege. **“They that are in the flesh cannot please God.”**

They may be very moral, very amiable, very religious, very benevolent; – but they cannot please God. Their entire position is false. The source whence all the streams flow is corrupt; the root and stem whence all the branches emanate are rotten – hopelessly bad. They cannot produce a single atom of good fruit – fruit that God can accept. **“They cannot please God.”** They must get into an entirely new position; they must have a new life, new motives, new objects, in a word, they must be a new creation. How solemn is all this! Let us weigh it thoroughly, and see if we understand the Apostle’s words.

But on the other hand, mark the glorious privilege of all true believers. **“Ye are not in the flesh.”**

Believers are no longer in a position in which they cannot please God. They have a new nature – a new life, every movement, every outflow, of which is agreeable to God. The very feeblest breathing of the divine life is precious to God. Of this life, the Holy Ghost is the power, Christ the object, glory the goal, Heaven the home. All is divine, and therefore perfect.

True, the believer is liable to err, prone in himself to wander, capable of sinning. In him (that is, in his flesh,) dwelleth no good thing. But his standing is based on the eternal stability of the grace of God, and his state is met by the divine provision which that grace has made for him in the precious atonement and all-prevailing advocacy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus he is forever delivered from that terrible system in which the prominent figures are, **“Flesh,” “Law,” “Sin,” “Death”** – melancholy group, most surely! – and he is brought into that glorious scene in which the prominent figures are, **“Life,” “Liberty,” “Grace,” “Peace,” “Righteousness,” “Holiness,” “Glory,” “Christ.”**

“For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched” – that is, the palpable mount – **“and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard, entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (For they could not endure that which was commanded, ‘And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart:’ and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, ‘I exceedingly fear and quake:’) but ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, the general assembly, the church of the first-born [ones] which are written in Heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than Abel”** (Hebrews 7).

Thus we have endeavored to meet the difficulty of any conscientious reader who up to the moment in which he opened this volume had cherished the conviction that it is only by putting believers under the law that practical holiness and true obedience can be attained.

We trust he has followed us through the line of Scripture evidence which we have laid before him. If so, he will see that to place believers in such a position is to do away with the very foundations of Christianity – to abandon grace – to give up Christ – to go back to the flesh, in which we cannot please God, and to place ourselves under the curse.

In short, the legal system of men is diametrically opposed to the teaching of the entire New Testament.

It was against this system and its upholders that the blessed apostle Paul, during his whole life, ever testified. He absolutely abhorred it, and continually denounced it.

The law-teachers were ever seeking to sap and undermine his blessed labors, and subvert the souls of his beloved children in the faith. It is impossible to read his burning sentences in the Epistle to the Galatians, his withering references in his Epistle to the Philippians, or his solemn warnings in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and not see how intense was his abhorrence of the whole legal system of the law-teachers, and how bitterly he wept over the ruins of the testimony so dear to his large, loving, devoted heart.

But it is possible that after all we have written, and notwithstanding the full tide of Scripture evidence to which we have called the reader's attention, he may still feel disposed to ask, Is there not a danger of unholy laxity and levity if the restraining power of the law be removed?

To this we reply, God is wiser than we are.

He knows best how to cure laxity and levity, and how to produce the right sort of obedience.

He tried the law, and what did it do?

- it worked wrath;
- it caused the offense to abound;
- it developed "**the motions of sins;**"
- it brought in death;
- it was the strength of sin;
- it deprived the sinner of all power;
- it slew him;
- it was condemnation;
- it cursed all who had to do with it.

"As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse." And all this, not because of any defect in the law, but because of man's total inability to keep it.

Is it not plain to the reader that neither life nor righteousness nor holiness nor true Christian obedience could ever be attained under law? Is it possible, after all that has passed in review before us, that he can have a single question, a single doubt, a single difficulty? We trust not. No one who is willing to bow down to the teaching and authority of the New Testament can adhere to the legal system for one hour.

However, ere we turn from this weighty and all-important subject, we shall place before the reader a passage or two of Scripture in which the moral glories of Christianity shine forth with peculiar luster, in vivid contrast to the entire Mosaic economy.

A person who walks in the Spirit – as every Christian ought – fulfills the righteousness of the law. Love is the fulfilling of the law; and love will lead us to do what the Ten Commandments could never effect, namely, to love our enemies. No lover of holiness, no advocate of practical righteousness, need ever be the least afraid of losing aught by abandoning the legal ground, and taking his place on the elevated platform of true Christianity – by turning from Mount Sinai to Mount Zion – by passing from Moses to Christ. No; he only reaches a higher source, a deeper spring, a wider sphere of holiness, righteousness, and practical obedience.

And then, if anyone should feel disposed to ask, does not the line of argument which we have been pursuing tend to rob the law of its characteristic glory? We reply, Most assuredly not. So far from this, the law was never so magnified, never so vindicated, never so established, never so glorified, as by that precious work which forms the imperishable foundation of all the privileges, the blessings, the dignities, and the glories of Christianity.

The blessed apostle anticipates and answers this very question in the earlier part of his Epistle to the Romans.

“Do we then,” he says, **“make void the law through faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the law.”**

How could the law be more gloriously vindicated, honored, and magnified than in the life and death of the Lord Jesus Christ? Will anyone seek, for a moment, to maintain the extravagant notion that it is magnifying the law to put Christians under it? We fondly trust the reader will not.

Ah! no; all this line of things must be completely abandoned by those whose privilege it is to walk in the light of the new creation; who know Christ as their life and Christ as their righteousness, Christ their sanctification, Christ their great exemplar, Christ their model, Christ their all and in all; who find their motive for obedience, not in the fear of the curses of a broken law, but in the love of Christ, according to those exquisitely beautiful words, **“The love of Christ”** – not the Law of Moses – **“constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead. And He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again”** (II Corinthians 5).

Could the law ever produce aught like this? Impossible.

But, blessed forever be the God of all grace, **“what the law could not do,”** not because it was not holy, just, and good, but **“in that it was weak through the flesh”** – the workman was all right, but the material was rotten, and nothing could be made of it; but **“God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who,”** as risen with Christ, linked with Him by the Holy Ghost, in the power of a new and everlasting life, **“walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”**

This, and only this, is true, practical Christianity; and if the reader will turn to the second of Galatians, he will find another of those fine, glowing utterances of the blessed apostle, setting forth, with divine force and fullness, the special glory of Christian life and walk. It is in connection with his faithful rebuke of the apostle Peter at Antioch, when that beloved and honored servant of Christ, through his characteristic weakness, had been led to step down, for a moment, from the elevated moral ground on which the Gospel of the grace of God places the soul.

We cannot do better than quote the entire paragraph for the reader: every sentence of it is pregnant with spiritual power.

“But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face.” He did not go behind his back, to disparage and depreciate him in the view of others, even though **“he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles; but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him, insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by works of law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by works of law; for by works of law shall no flesh be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid [or, Far be the thought – μη γενοιτο] For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.”** For if the things were right, why destroy them? and if they were wrong, why build them again? **“For I, through law, am dead to law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live [not by the law, as a rule of life, but] by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God; for if righteousness come by law, then Christ is dead in vain [or, has died for nothing – [δωρεαν]]”** (Galatians 2:11-21).

Here, then, we have one of the very finest statements of the truth as to practical Christianity anywhere to be found. But what specially claims our attention just now is, the very marked and beautiful way in which the Gospel of God opens up the path of the true believer between the two fatal errors of legality on the one side and carnal laxity on the other.

Verse 19, in the passage just quoted, contains the divine remedy for both these deadly evils. To all – whoever or wherever they are – who would seek to put the Christian under the law, in any shape or for any object whatsoever, our apostle exclaims, in the ears of dissembling Jews, with Peter at their head, and as an answer to all the law-teachers of every age, “**I am dead to law.**”

What can the law have to say to a dead man?

Nothing. The law applies to a living man, to curse him and kill him because he has not kept it. It is a very grave mistake indeed to teach that the law is dead or abolished. It is nothing of the sort. It is alive in all its force, in all its stringency, in all its majesty, in all its unbending dignity.

It would be a very serious mistake to say that the law of England against murder is dead; but if a man is dead, the law no longer applies to him, inasmuch as he has passed entirely out of its range.

But how is the believer dead to law? The apostle replies, “**I through law am dead to law.**”

The law had brought the sentence of death into his conscience, as we read in Romans 7, “**I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.**”

But there is more than this. The apostle goes on to say, “**I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.**”

And here is the triumphant answer of the Christian to those who say that inasmuch as the Mosaic law is abrogated, there is no longer any demand for the legal restraint under which the Jews were called to live. To all who would seek liberty for self-indulgence, the answer is, “**I am dead to law, [not that I might give a loose rein to the flesh, but] that I might live unto God.**”

Thus nothing can be more complete, nothing more morally beautiful, than the answer of true Christianity to legality on the one hand and licentiousness on the other. Self crucified; sin condemned; new life in Christ; a life to be lived to God; a life of faith in the Son of God; the motive – spring of that life, the constraining love of Christ – what can exceed this?

Will anyone, in view of the moral glories of Christianity, contend for putting believers under the law, putting them back into the flesh – back into the old creation – back to the sentence of death in the conscience – back to bondage, darkness, distance, fear of death, condemnation?

Is it possible that anyone who has ever tasted, even in the very feeblest measure, the heavenly sweetness of God’s most blessed Gospel, can accept the wretched mongrel system, composed of half law and half grace, which Christendom offers to the soul? How terrible to find the children of God – members of the body of Christ – temples of the Holy Ghost – robbed of their glorious privileges, and burdened with a heavy yoke, which, as Peter says, “**neither our fathers nor we were able to bear.**”

We earnestly entreat the Christian reader to consider what has been placed before him. Search the Scriptures; and if you find these things to be so, then fling aside forever the grave-clothes in which Christendom enwraps its deluded votaries, and walk in the liberty wherewith Christ makes His people free; tear off the bandage with which it covers the eyes of men, and gaze on the moral glories which shine with such heavenly brilliancy in the Gospel of the grace of God.

And then let us prove, by a holy, happy, gracious walk and conversation that grace can do what law never could.

Let our practical ways from day to day, in the midst of the scenes, circumstances, relationships, and associations in which we are called to live, be the most convincing reply to all who contend for the law as a rule of life.

Finally, let it be our earnest, loving desire and aim to seek, in so far as in us lies, to lead all the dear children of God into a clearer knowledge of their standing and privileges in a risen and glorified Christ. May the Lord send out His light and His truth, in the power of the Holy Ghost, and gather His beloved people around Himself, to walk in the joy of His salvation, in the purity and light of His presence, and to wait for His coming.

We do not attempt to offer any apology for what may perhaps appear to some of our readers to be a very lengthened digression from the fourth chapter of Deuteronomy.

The fact is, we have been led into what we judge to be a very needed line of practical truth by the very first verse of the chapter, as quoted at the opening of this section. We felt it absolutely necessary, in speaking of the weighty question of obedience, to seek to place it on its true basis.

If Israel was called to “**hearken and do,**” how much more are we, who are so richly blessed – yea, “**blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.**”

We are called to obedience, even to the obedience of Jesus Christ, as we have it in I Peter 1, “**Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.**” We are called to the very same character of obedience as that which marked the life of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Of course, in Him there was no hindering influence as, alas! there is in us; but as to the character of the obedience, it is the same.

This is an immense privilege.

We are called to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. “**He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk even as He walked.**”

Now, in pondering the path of our Lord, in considering His marvelous life, there is one point which demands our profound and reverent attention – a point which connects itself, in a very special manner, with the book of Deuteronomy – and that is, the way in which He ever used the Word of God – the place which He ever gave to the Holy Scriptures. This we consider to be a subject of the last possible importance at the present moment.

It holds a prominent place throughout the lovely book with which we are at present engaged. Indeed, as we have already remarked, it characterizes the book, and marks it off from the three books which precede it in the divine canon. We shall find proofs and illustrations of this in abundance as we pass along.

Everywhere, the Word of God gets its own paramount place, as the only rule, the only standard, the only authority, for man.

- It meets him in every position, in every relationship, in every sphere of action, and in every stage of his moral and spiritual history.
- It tells him what he ought to do, and what he ought not. It furnishes him with ample guidance in every difficulty.
- It descends, as we shall see, to the most minute details – such details, indeed, as fill us with amazement to think that the High and Mighty One that inhabiteth eternity could occupy Himself with them – to think that the Omnipotent Creator and Sustainer of the vast universe could stoop to legislate about a bird's nest. (Chap. 22:6).

Such is the Word of God – that peerless revelation – that perfect and inimitable volume which stands alone in the history of literature.

And we may say that one special charm of the book of Deuteronomy – one peculiar feature of interest is, the way in which it exalts the Word of God, and enforces upon us the holy and happy duty of unqualified and unhesitating obedience.

Yes; we repeat and would fervently emphasize the words – unqualified and unhesitating obedience. We would have these wholesome words sounded in the ears of Christian professors throughout the length and breadth of the earth.

We live in a day specially marked by the setting up of man's reason, man's judgment, man's will; in short, we live in what the inspired apostle calls "**man's day**." On all hands we are encountered by lofty and boastful words about human reason, and the right of every man to judge and reason and think for himself.

The thought of being absolutely and completely governed by the authority of Holy Scripture is treated with sovereign contempt by thousands of men who are the religious guides and teachers of the professing church. For anyone to assert his reverent belief in the plenary inspiration, the all-sufficiency, and the absolute authority of Scripture, is quite sufficient to stamp him as an ignorant, narrow-minded man, if not a semi-lunatic, in the judgment of some who occupy the very highest position in the professing church.

In our universities, our colleges, and our schools, the moral glory of the Divine Volume is fast fading away, and instead thereof our young people are led and taught to walk in the light of science – the light of human reason. The Word of God itself is impiously placed at the bar of man's judgment, and reduced to the level of the human understanding. Every thing is rejected which soars beyond man's feeble vision.

Thus the Word of God is virtually set aside.

For, clearly, if Scripture is to be submitted to human judgment, it ceases to be the Word of God.

It is the very height of folly to think of submitting a divine and therefore perfect revelation to any tribunal whatsoever. Either God has given us a revelation or He has not. If He has, that revelation must be paramount, supreme, above and beyond all question, absolutely unquestionable, unerring, divine. To its authority all must bow down, without a single question. To suppose for a moment that man is competent to judge the Word of God, able to pronounce upon what is or what is not worthy of God to say or to write, is simply to put man in God's place. And this is precisely what the devil is aiming at, although many of his instruments are not aware that they are helping on his designs.

But the question is continually cropping up before us, "How can we be sure that we have, in our English Bible, the bona-fide revelation of God?" We reply, God can make us sure of it.

If He does not, no one can: if He does, no one need. This is our ground, and we deem it unassailable. We should like to ask all those who start this infidel question (for such we must honestly call it), Supposing that God cannot give us the absolute certainty that, in our common English Bible, we do actually possess His own most precious, priceless revelation, then whither are we to turn?

Of course, in such a weighty matter, on which momentous and eternal consequences hang, a single doubt is torture and misery. If I am not sure of possessing a revelation from God, I am left without a single ray of light for my path; I am plunged in darkness, gloom, and mental misery.

What am I to do?

- Can man help me by his learning, his wisdom, or his reason?
- Can he satisfy my soul by his decision?
- Can he solve my difficulty, answer my question, remove my doubt, dissipate my fear?

Is man better able than God to give me the assurance that God has spoken?

The idea is absolutely monstrous – monstrous in the very highest degree.

The plain fact is this, reader: If God cannot give us the certainty that He has spoken, we are left without His word altogether. If we must turn to human authority, call it what you please, in order to guarantee the Word of God to our souls, then that authority is higher and greater, safer and more trustworthy, than the Word which it guarantees.

Blessed be God, it is not so. He has spoken to our hearts. He has given us His Word, and that Word carries its own credentials with it. It stands in no need of letters of commendation from a human hand.

What! Turn to man to accredit the Word of the living God! – apply to a worm to give us the assurance that our God has spoken to us in His Word! Away forever with the blasphemous notion, and let our whole moral being – all our ransomed powers adore the matchless grace, the sovereign mercy, that has not left us to grope in the darkness of our own minds, or to be bewildered by the conflicting opinions of men; but has given us His own perfect and most precious revelation, the divine light of His Word, to guide our feet into the path of certainty and peace, to enlighten our understandings and comfort our hearts, to preserve us from every form of doctrinal error and moral pravity, and finally, to conduct us into the rest, blessedness, and glory of His own heavenly kingdom. All praise to His name throughout the everlasting ages!

But we must bear in mind that the marvelous privilege of which we have spoken – and truly it is most marvelous – is the basis of a most solemn responsibility.

If it be true that God has, in His infinite goodness, given us a perfect revelation of His mind, then what should be our attitude in reference to it? Are we to sit in judgment upon it? Are we to discuss, argue, or reason? Alas! For all who do so, they will find themselves on terribly dangerous ground. The only true, the only proper, the only safe attitude for man in the presence of God's revelation is, obedience – simple, unqualified, hearty obedience. This is the only right thing for us, and this is the thing which is pleasing to God. The path of obedience is the path of sweetest privilege, rest, and blessing.

This path can be trodden by the merest babe in Christ, as well as by the “**young men**” and the “**fathers**.” There is the one straight and blessed path for all. Narrow it is, no doubt; but, oh! it is safe, bright, and elevated. The light of our Father's approving countenance ever shines upon it; and in this blessed light the obedient soul finds the most triumphant answer to all the reproaches of those who talk, in high-sounding words, about breadth of mind, liberality of thought, freedom of opinion, progress, development and such like.

The obedient child of God can afford to put up with all this, because he feels and knows, he believes and is sure, that he is treading a path indicated for him by the precious Word of God. He is not careful to explain or apologize, feeling assured that those who object, oppose, and reproach are utterly incapable of understanding or appreciating his explanation. And, moreover, he feels that it is no part of his duty to explain or defend. He has but to obey; and as for objectors and opposers, he has but to refer them to his Master.

This makes it all so simple, so plain, so certain. It delivers the heart from a thousand difficulties and perplexities. If we were to set about replying to all who undertake to raise questions or start difficulties, our whole life would be spent in the profitless task. We may rest assured the best possible answer to all infidel objectors is, the steady, earnest, onward path of unqualified obedience. Let us leave infidels, skeptics, and rationalists to their own worthless theories, while we, with unswerving purpose and firm step, pursue that blessed path of childlike obedience which, like the shining light, shineth more and more unto the perfect day. Thus shall our minds be kept tranquil, for “**the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.**”

When the Word of God, which is settled forever in Heaven, is hidden deep down in our hearts, there will be a calm certainty, a holy stability, and a marked progress in our Christian career, which will afford the best possible answer to the gainsayer, the most effectual testimony to the truth of God, and the most convincing evidence and solid confirmation to every wavering heart.

ADDING OR REMOVING FROM THE WORD OF GOD

The chapter before us abounds in the most solemn exhortation to Israel, grounded upon the fact of their having heard the Word of God.

Thus in the second verse we have a sentence or two which should be deeply engraved on the tablets of every Christian's heart – **“Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it.”**

These words involve two grand facts with regard to the Word of God.

It is not to be added to, for the simplest of all reasons, because there is nothing lacking; it is not to be diminished, because there is nothing superfluous. Every thing we want is there, and nothing that is there can be done without. **“Add thou not unto His words, lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.”**

To suppose that aught can be added to God's Word is, upon the very face of it, to deny that it is God's Word; and, on the other hand, if we admit that it is the Word of God, then it follows of necessity (blessed necessity!) that we could not afford to do without a single sentence of it. There would be a blank in the volume which no human hand could fill up, if a single clause were dropped from its place in the canon. We have all we want, and hence we must not add: we want it all, and hence we must not diminish.

How deeply important is all this, in this day of human tampering with the Word of God! How blessed to know that we have in our possession a book so divinely perfect that not a sentence, not a clause, not a word, can be added to it.

We speak not, of course, of translations or versions, but of the Scriptures as given of God – His own perfect revelation. To this, not a touch can be given. As well might a human finger have dared to touch the creation of God, on the morning when all the sons of God sang together, as to add a jot or a tittle to the inspired Word of God.

And on the other hand, to take away a jot or a tittle from it, is to say that the Holy Ghost has penned what was unnecessary. Thus the holy volume is divinely guarded at both ends. It is securely fenced round about, so that no rude hand should touch its sacred contents.

What! It may be said in reply, do you mean to say that every sentence, from the opening lines of Genesis to the close of Revelation, is divinely inspired? Yes; that is precisely the ground we take.

We claim for every line between the covers of the volume a divine origin.

To question this is to attack the very pillars of the Christian faith. A single flaw in the canon would be sufficient to prove it not of God. To touch a single stone in the arch is to bring down the whole fabric in ruins around us.

All Scripture is divinely inspired, and being so, must be “**profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect** [αρτιος], **thoroughly furnished unto all good works**” (II Timothy 3).

This stronghold must on no account be surrendered; nay, it must be tenaciously held, in the face of every infidel assault.

If it be given up, all is hopelessly lost – we have nothing to lean upon. Either the Word of God is perfect, or we are left without any divine foundation for our faith. If there be a word too much or a word too little in the revelation which God has given us, then verily we are left, like a ship without compass, rudder, or chart, to be drifted about on the wild, tumultuous ocean of infidel thought; in short, if we have not an absolutely perfect revelation, we are of all men most miserable.

But we may still be challenged with such a question as this: Do you believe that the long string of names in the opening chapters of I Chronicles – those genealogical tables are divinely inspired? were they written for our learning? And if so, what are we to learn from them? We unhesitatingly declare our reverent belief in the divine inspiration of all these; and we have no doubt whatever but that their value, interest, and importance will be fully proved by and by in the history of that people to whom they specially apply.

And then, as to what we are to learn from those genealogical records, we believe they teach us a most precious lesson as to the Lord’s faithful care of His people Israel, and His loving interest in them and in all that concerns them. He watches over them from generation to generation, even though they are scattered and lost to human view. He knows all about “**the twelve tribes,**” and He will manifest them in due time, and plant them in their destined inheritance, in the land of Canaan, according to His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Now, is not all this full of blessed instruction for us? Is it not full of comfort for our souls? Is it not most confirmatory of our faith to mark the gracious pains-taking of our God, His minute care and vigilance in reference to His earthly people? Most assuredly it is. And ought not our hearts to be interested in all that interests the heart of our Father? Are we not to take an interest in anything save what directly concerns ourselves? Where is there a loving child who would not take an interest in all his father’s concerns, and delight to read every line that drops from his father’s pen?

Let us not be misunderstood. We do not, by any means, attempt to imply that all portions of the Word of God are of like interest and importance to us.

We do not presume to assert that we are to hang with equal interest over the first chapter of I Chronicles and the seventeenth chapter of John or the eighth chapter of Romans.

It seems hardly necessary to make such a statement, inasmuch as no such question is raised. But what we assert is that each of the above scriptures is divinely inspired, one just as much as another; and not only so, but we further assert that I Chronicles 1, and such like passages fill a niche which John 17 cannot fill, and do a work which Romans 8 cannot do.

And finally, above and beyond all, we must remember that we are not competent to judge what is and what is not worthy of a place in the inspired canon. We are ignorant and short-sighted; and the very portion which we might deem beneath the dignity of inspiration may have some very important bearing upon the history of God's ways with the world at large or with His people in particular.

In short, it simply resolves itself into this with every truly pious soul – every really spiritual mind: we reverently believe in the divine inspiration of every line of our precious Bible, from beginning to end; and we believe this not on the ground of any human authority whatsoever.

To believe in Holy Scripture because it comes to us accredited by any authority upon earth, would be to set that authority above Holy Scripture, inasmuch as that which guarantees has more weight – more value than the thing guaranteed. Hence, we should no more think of looking to human authority to confirm the Word of God than we should of bringing out a rush-light to prove that the sun was shining.

No, reader; we must be clear and decided as to this. It must be, in the judgment of our souls, a great cardinal truth which we hold dearer than life itself – the plenary inspiration of Holy Scripture.

Thus shall we have wherewithal to answer the cool audacity of modern skepticism, rationalism, and infidelity. We do not mean to say that we shall be able to convince infidels. God will deal with them in His own way, and convince them with His own unanswerable arguments in His own time. It is labor and time lost to argue with such men. But we feel persuaded that the most dignified and effective answer to infidelity, in its every phase, will be found in the calm repose of the heart that rests in the blessed assurance that **“all Scripture is given by inspiration of God;”** and again, **“Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning; that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”**

The former of these precious quotations proves that Scripture has come from God; the latter, that it has come to us.

Both together go to prove that we must neither add to nor take from the Word of God. There is nothing lacking, and nothing superfluous. The Lord be praised for this solid foundation-truth, and for all the comfort and consolation that flows from it to every true believer!

We shall now proceed to quote for the reader a few of the passages in this fourth chapter of Deuteronomy which so emphatically set forth the value, importance, and authority of the Word of God. In them, as in the whole of this book, we shall see that it is not so much a question of any particular ordinance, rite, or ceremony, but of the weight, solemnity, and dignity of the Word of God itself, whatever that Word may set before us.

“Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it.”

Their conduct was to be ruled and formed, in all things, by the divine commandments. Immense principle for them, for us, for all! **“Keep, therefore, and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.”**

Let us specially weigh these words. Their wisdom and their understanding were to consist in their simply keeping and doing the divine statutes and judgments. It was not by learned discussion or arguments that their wisdom was to be displayed, but by childlike, unquestioning obedience. All the wisdom was in the statutes and judgments, not in their thoughts and reasonings respecting them.

The profound and marvelous wisdom of God was seen in His Word, and this was what the nations were to see and admire. The light of the divine judgments shining in the conduct and character of the people of God was to draw forth the admiring testimony of the nations around.

Alas! Alas! How differently it turned out! How little did the nations of the earth learn, from the actings of Israel, about God and His Word! Yea, His name was blasphemed continually through their ways. Instead of occupying the high and holy and happy ground of loving obedience to the divine commandments, they descended to the level of the nations around them—adopted their habits, worshiped their gods, and walked in their ways; so that those nations, instead of seeing the lofty wisdom, purity, and moral glory of the divine statutes, saw only the weakness, folly, and moral degradation of a people who made their boast in being the depository of those oracles which condemned themselves. (Romans 2:3).

Still, blessed be God, His Word must stand forever, however His people may fail to carry it out. His standard is perfect, and therefore must never be lowered; and if the power of His Word be not seen in the ways of His people, it will shine in the condemnation of those ways, and ever abide for the guidance, comfort, strength, and blessing of any who desire, however feebly or falteringly, to tread the path of obedience.

However, in the chapter with which we are at present occupied, the lawgiver seeks to set the divine standard faithfully before the people, in all its dignity and moral glory. He fails not to unfold to them the true effect of obedience, while he solemnly warns them against the danger of turning away from the holy commandments of God. Hear his powerful pleadings with their hearts.

“What nation is there so great,” he says, “who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we can upon Him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?”

Here is true moral greatness, at all times and in all places, for a nation, for a people, for a household, or for an individual.

To have the living God nigh unto us; to have the sweet privilege of calling upon Him, in all things; to have His power and His mercy ever exercised toward us; to have the light of His blessed countenance shining approvingly upon us, in All our ways; to have the moral effect of His righteous statutes and holy commandments seen in our practical career, from day to day; to have Him manifesting Himself to us, and making His abode with us.

What human language can adequately set forth the deep blessedness of such privileges as these? and yet they are placed, by infinite grace, within the reach of every child of God on the face of the earth. We do not mean to assert that every child of God enjoys them. Far from it. They are reserved, as we have already seen, for those who, through grace, are enabled to render a loving, hearty, reverent obedience .to the divine word.

Here lies the precious secret of the whole matter.

It was true for Israel of old, and it is true for the Church now – it was true for the individual soul then, and it is true for the individual soul now, that divine complacency is the priceless reward of human obedience. And we may further add that obedience is the bounden duty and high privilege of all God’s people, and of each in particular. Come what may, implicit obedience is our privilege and our duty, divine complacency our present sweet reward.

But the poor human heart is prone to wander, and manifold influences are at work around us to draw us off from the narrow path of obedience.

Family Devotions

We need not marvel, therefore, at the solemn and oft-repeated admonitions addressed by Moses to the hearts and consciences of his hearers. He pours his large, loving heart out to the congregation so dear to him, in glowing, earnest, soul-stirring accents. **“Only take heed to thyself,”** he says, **“and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life; but teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons.”**

These are weighty words for all of us. They set before us two things of unspeakable importance, namely, individual and domestic responsibility – personal and household testimony.

God’s people of old were responsible to keep the heart with all diligence, lest it should let slip the precious Word of God. And not only so, but they were solemnly responsible to instruct their children and their grandchildren in the same. Are we, with all our light and privilege, less responsible than Israel of old? Surely not. We are imperatively called upon to give ourselves to the careful study of the Word of God – to apply our hearts to it. It is not enough that we hurry over a few verses or a chapter, as a piece of daily religious routine. This will not meet the case at all. We want to make the Bible our supreme and absorbing study,- that in which we delight – in which we find our refreshment and recreation. It is to be feared that some of us read the Bible as a matter of duty, while we find our delight and refreshment in the newspaper and light literature. Need we wonder at our shallow knowledge of Scripture?

How could we know aught of the living depths or the moral glories of a volume which we merely take up as a cold matter of duty, and read a few verses with a yawning indifference, while, at the same time, the newspaper or the sensational novel is literally devoured?

It will perhaps be said, in reply, we cannot be always reading the Bible. Would those who thus speak say, we cannot be always reading the newspaper or the novel? And, we would further inquire, what must be the actual state of a person who can say, "We cannot be always reading the Bible"? Can he be in a healthy condition of soul? Can he really love the Word of God? Can he have any just sense of its preciousness, its excellence, its moral glories? Impossible.

What mean the following words to Israel: "**Therefore shall ye lay up these My words in your heart, and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes**"?

The "**heart**," the "**soul**," the "**hand**" the "**eyes**" – all engaged about the precious Word of God. This was real work. It was to be no empty formality, no barren routine. The whole man was to be given up, in holy devotion, to the statutes and judgments of God.

"And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the door-posts of thine house, and upon thy gates."

- Do we, Christians, enter into such words as these? Has the Word of God such a place in our hearts, in our homes, and in our habits?

- Do those who enter our houses, or come in contact with us in daily life, see that the Word of God is paramount with us?

- Do those with whom we do business see that we are governed by the precepts of Holy Scripture?

- Do our servants and our children see that we live in the very atmosphere of Scripture, and that our whole character is formed and our conduct governed by it?

These are searching questions for our hearts, beloved Christian reader. Let us not put them away from us.

We may rest assured there is no more correct indicator of our moral and spiritual condition than that afforded by our treatment of the Word of God. If we do not love it – love to study it – thirst after it – delight in it – long for the quiet hour in the which we can hang over its sacred page and drink in its most precious teaching – meditate upon it, in the closet, in the family, in the street; in short, if we do not breathe its holy atmosphere – if we could ever give utterance to such a sentiment as that given above, that "we cannot be always reading the Bible," then, verily, we have urgent need to look well to our spiritual state, for we are sadly out of health.

The new nature loves the Word of God – earnestly desires it, as we read in I Peter 2 – "**As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby.**"

This is the true idea. If the sincere milk of the Word be not sought after, diligently used and eagerly fed upon, we must be in a low, unhealthy, dangerous condition of soul. There may not be anything outwardly wrong in our conduct, we may not be publicly dishonoring the Lord in our ways, but we are grieving His loving heart by our gross neglect of His Word, which is but another term for the neglect of Himself.

It is the very height of folly to talk of loving Christ if we do not love and live upon His Word. It is a delusion to imagine that the new life can be in a healthy, prosperous condition where the Word of God is habitually neglected in the closet and the family.

We do not, of course, mean that no other book but the Bible should be read, or we should not pen these "Notes;" but nothing demands greater watchfulness than the matter of reading. All things are to be done in the name of Jesus, and to the glory of God, and this is amongst the "**all things.**"

We should read no book that we cannot read to the glory of God, and on which we cannot ask God's blessing.

We feel that this entire subject demands the most serious consideration of all God's people, and we trust that the Spirit of God may use our meditation on the chapter before us to stir up our hearts and consciences in reference to what is due to the Word of God, both in our hearts and in our houses.

No doubt, if it has its right place in the heart, it will have its right place also in the house; but if there be no acknowledgment of the Word of God in the bosom of the family, it is hard to believe that it has its right place in the heart.

Heads of houses should ponder this matter seriously. We are most fully persuaded that there ought to be, in every Christian household, a daily acknowledgment of God and His Word. Some may perhaps look upon it as bondage, as legality, as religious routine, to have regular family worship.

We would ask such objectors, Is it bondage for the family to assemble at meals? Are the family reunions around the social board ever regarded as a wearisome duty – a piece of dull routine? Certainly not, if the family be a well-ordered and happy one. Why, then, should it be regarded as a burdensome thing for the head of a Christian household to gather his children and his servants around him and read a few verses of the precious Word of God, and breathe a few words of prayer before the throne of grace? We believe it to be a habit in perfect accordance with the teaching of both the Old and the New Testaments – a habit grateful to the heart of God – a holy, blessed, edifying habit.

What should we think of a professing Christian who never prayed, never read the Word of God, in private? Could we possibly regard him as a happy, healthy, true Christian? Assuredly not. Indeed we should seriously question the existence of divine life in such a soul. Prayer and the Word of God are absolutely essential to healthy, vigorous Christian life; so that a man who habitually neglects these must be in an utterly dead state.

Now, if it be thus in reference to an individual, how can a family be regarded as in a right state where there is no family reading, no family prayer, no family acknowledgment of God or His Word? Can we conceive a God-fearing household going on from Lord's day morning to Saturday night without any collective recognition of the One to whom they owe every thing?

Day after day rolls on, domestic duties are attended to, the family assemble regularly at meals, but there is no thought of summoning the household around the Word of God, or around the mercy-seat. We ask, where is the difference between such a family and any poor heathen household? Is it not most sad – most deplorable to find those who make the very highest profession, and who take their places at the Lord's Table, yet living in the gross neglect of family reading-family worship?

Reader, are you the head of a household? If so, what are your thoughts on the subject? and what is your line of action? Have you family reading and family prayer, daily in your house? If not, (bear with us when we ask you,) why not? Search and see what is the real root of the matter. Has your heart declined from God, from His Word and His ways? Do you read and pray in private? Do you love the Word and prayer? Do you find delight in them? If so, how is it you neglect them in your household?

Perhaps you seek to excuse yourself on the ground of nervousness and timidity; if so, look to the Lord to enable you to overcome the weakness. Just cast yourself on His unfailing grace, and gather your household around you at a certain hour each day, read a few verses of Scripture and breathe half a dozen words of prayer; or, if you cannot do this at first, just let the family kneel for a few moments in silence before the throne.

Anything, in short, like a family acknowledgment, a family testimony: anything but a godless, careless, prayerless life in your household. Do, dear friend, suffer the word of exhortation in this matter. Let us entreat you to begin at once, looking to God to help you, as He most assuredly will, for He never fails a really trusting, dependent heart. Do not any longer go on neglecting God and His Word in your family circle. It is really terrible. Let no arguments about bondage, legality, or formalism weigh with you for a moment. We almost feel disposed to exclaim, Blessed bondage! If indeed it be bondage to read the Word, we cordially welcome it, and fearlessly glory in it.

But, no; we cannot for a moment regard it in any such light. We believe it to be a most delightful privilege for everyone whom God has set at the head of a household to gather all the members of that household around him and read a portion of the blessed book, and pour out his heart in prayer to God. We believe it is specially the duty of the head so to do. It is by no means necessary to make it a long, wearisome service. As a rule, both in our houses and in our public assemblies, short, fresh, fervent exercises are by far the most edifying.

But this, of course, is an open question, as to which we merely give our judgment, which must go for what it is worth. The length and character of the service must, in every case, be left to the person who conducts it. But we do most earnestly trust that if these lines should be scanned by anyone who is the head of a household, and if he has hitherto neglected the holy privilege of family worship – family reading, he will, henceforth, do so no more.

May he be enabled to say, with Joshua, “**And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; . . . [Let others do as they will] as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.**”

Beware of Empty Formalism

It is not, surely, that we would lead any to imagine that the mere act of family reading takes in all that is comprehended in that weighty sentence, “**We will serve the Lord.**” Far from it. That blessed service takes in everything belonging to our private and domestic history; it takes in the most minute details of practical daily life. All this is most true and invaluable. But we are most thoroughly persuaded that nothing can go right in any household in which family reading and family prayer are habitually neglected.

It may be said that there are many families who seem very particular about their morning and evening reading and prayer, and yet their whole domestic history, from morning till night, is a flagrant contradiction of their so-called religious service. It may be that the head of the house, instead of shedding sunlight upon the family circle, is morose in his temper, rude and coarse in his manners, rough and contradictory to his wife, arbitrary and severe to his children, unreasonable and exacting to his servants, finding fault with what is laid on the table, after having asked God’s blessing upon it; and, in short, in every way giving the lie to his reading and his prayer in the family. So also as to the wife and the mother, and the children and the servants. The whole domestic economy is out of order. There is disorder and confusion; meals are unpunctual; there is a want of kindly consideration one of another; the children are rude, selfish, and willful; the servants are thoughtless, wasteful, and disobedient, if not much worse; the tone, atmosphere, and style of the entire establishment are unchristian, ungodly, utterly unbecoming.

And then, when you travel outside the domestic circle, and mark the conduct of the heads and members of the family toward those outside – mark their business, if they be in business, hear the testimony of those who deal with them, as to the quality of their goods, the style and character of their work; the spirit and temper in which they carry on their business; such grasping and griping, such covetousness, such commercial trickery; nothing of God, nothing of Christ, nothing to distinguish them from the most thorough worldlings around; yea, the conduct of those very worldlings, of those who would never think of such a thing as family worship, would put them to shame.

Under such painful and humiliating circumstances, what of the family worship – the family reading – the family altar? Alas! it is an empty formality – a powerless, worthless, unseemly proceeding; in place of being a morning and evening sacrifice, it is a morning and evening lie – a solemn mockery – an insult to God.

All this is sadly true. There is a terrible lack of household testimony – of common, practical righteousness in our families and in the entire economy of our houses. There is but little of the white raiment – the fine linen, which is the righteousness of saints. We seem to forget those weighty words of the inspired apostle in Romans 15 – “**The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.**”

Some of us seem to think that whenever we meet with the word “**righteousness**,” it must needs mean the righteousness of God in which we stand, or righteousness imputed to us.

This is a very great mistake indeed. We must remember there is a practical and human side of this question; there is the subjective as well as the objective – the walk as well as the standing – the condition as well as the position.

These things must never be separated. It is of little use to set up or seek to maintain a family altar amid the ruins of family testimony. It is nothing short of a hideous caricature to begin and end with so-called family worship a day characterized throughout by ungodliness and unrighteousness, levity, folly, and vanity. Can aught be more unsightly or more miserably inconsistent than an evening spent in song-singing, charades, and other light games, closed up with a contemptible bit of religion in the shape of reading and prayer?

All this line of things is most deplorable. It ought not to be found in connection with the holy name of Christ, with His assembly, or the holy exercises of His table. We must measure everything in our private life, in our domestic economy, in our daily history, in all our intercourse, and in all our business transactions, with that one standard, namely, the glory of Christ. our one grand question, in reference to everything that comes before us or solicits our attention, must be, Is this worthy of the holy name which is called upon me? If not, let us not touch it; yea, let us turn our back upon it with stern decision, and flee from it with holy energy. Let us not listen for a moment to the contemptible question, “What harm is there in it?”

Nothing but harm if Christ be not in it. No truly devoted heart would ever entertain, much less put, such a question. Whenever you hear anyone speaking thus, you may at once conclude that Christ is not the governing object of the heart.

We trust the reader is not weary of all this homely, practical truth. We believe it is loudly called for in this day of high profession. We have all of us much need to consider our ways, to look well to the real state of our hearts as to Christ; for here lies the true secret of the whole matter. If the heart be not true to Him, nothing can be right – nothing in the private life, nothing in the family, nothing in the business, nothing in the assembly, nothing anywhere; but if the heart be true to Him, all will be-must be right.

No marvel, therefore, if the blessed apostle, when he reaches the close of that wonderful Epistle to the Corinthians, sums all up with this solemn declaration: “**If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha.**”

In the course of his letter, he deals with various forms of doctrinal error and moral pravity; but when he comes to the close, instead of pronouncing his solemn sentence upon any particular error or evil, he hurls it with holy indignation against anyone, no matter who or what, who does not love the Lord Jesus Christ. Love to Christ is the grand safeguard against every form of error and evil. A heart filled with Christ has no room for aught beside; but if there be no love to Him, there is no security against the wildest error or the worst form of moral evil.

We must now return to our chapter.

The attention of the people is specially called to the solemn scenes at Mount Horeb – scenes which should surely have deeply and abidingly impressed their hearts. **“Specially the day that thou stoodest before the Lord thy God in Horeb, when the Lord said unto me, Gather Me the people together, and I will make them hear My words.”**

The grand and all-important point for Israel of old, for the Church now, for each, for all, at all times and in all places, is, to be brought into direct, living contact with the eternal Word of the living God, to the end **“that they may learn to fear Me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children.”**

It is very beautiful to note the intimate connection between hearing God’s Word and fearing His name. It is one of those great root-principles which never change, never lose their power or their intrinsic value. The Word and the name go together; and the heart that loves the one will reverence the other, and bow down to its holy authority in all things.

- **“He that loveth Me not keepeth not My sayings.”**

- **“He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth His word, in him verily is the love of God perfected”** (John 15; I John 2).

Every true lover of God will treasure up His Word in the heart, and where the Word is thus lovingly treasured in the heart, its hallowed influence will be seen in the whole life, character, and conduct.

God’s object in giving His Word is that it may govern our conduct, form our character, and shape our ways; and if His Word has not this practical effect upon us, it is utterly vain for us to speak of loving Him – yea, it is nothing short of positive mockery, which He must sooner or later resent.

And let us note particularly the solemn responsibility of Israel as to their children.

They were not only to **“hear”** and **“learn”** for themselves, but they were also to teach their children. This is a universal and abiding duty, which cannot be neglected with impunity. God attaches very great importance to this matter. We hear Him saying as to Abraham, **“I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him”** (Genesis 18).

These words are most important, as setting before us the divine estimate of domestic training and family piety. In all ages, and under all dispensations, God has been pleased to give expression to His approbation of the proper education of the children of His people – their faithful training according to His Holy Word. We find no such thing sanctioned in Scripture as children being allowed to grow up in ignorance and carelessness and willfulness.

Some professing Christians, under the baneful influence of a certain school of theology, seem to think that it is, in some way, an interference with the sovereignty of God, with His purposes and counsels, to instruct their children in the truth of the Gospel and the letter of Holy Scripture. They consider that the children ought to be left to the action of the Holy Ghost, which they are sure to experience in God's own time if indeed they are of God's elect, and if not, all human effort is perfectly useless.

Now, we must, in all faithfulness to the truth of God and to the souls of our readers, bear the clearest and strongest testimony against this one-sided view of the great practical subject before us. There is nothing more mischievous, nothing more pernicious in its effect upon the conscience, the heart, the life, the whole practical career and moral character, than one-sided theology.

It does not matter what side you take, so long as you only take one. It is sure to produce what we must term a spiritual malformation. We feel we cannot too strongly and earnestly warn the reader against this sore evil. It can only lead to the most disastrous results; and as to its effect in reference to the training of our children and the management of our households – the subject now before us – it is mischievous in the extreme. Indeed we have seen the most deplorable consequences follow the carrying out of this line of thought. We have known the children of Christian parents to grow up in utter ignorance of divine things, in carelessness, recklessness, and open infidelity; and if a word of admonition were offered it has been met by arguments based upon the dogmas of a one-sided divinity – and the one side turned the wrong way.

It has been said, "We cannot make Christians of our children, and we must not make them formalists or hypocrites. It must be a divine work or nothing. When God's time comes, He will effectually call them, if indeed they are among the number of His elect; if not, all our efforts are perfectly useless."

To all this we reply, that this line of argument, if carried to its fullest extent, would prevent the farmer from plowing his ground or sowing his seed. It is very plain that he cannot make the seed to germinate or fructify. He could no more cause a solitary grain of wheat to grow than he could create the universe. Does this prevent his plowing and sowing? does it cause him to fold his arms and say, I can do nothing. I cannot, by any effort of mine, make corn grow. It is a divine operation, and therefore I must wait God's time? Does any farmer reason and act like this? Surely not, unless he be a lunatic. Every sound-minded person knows that plowing and sowing must go before the reaping; and if the former be neglected, it is the height of extravagant folly to look for the latter.

Nor is it otherwise in the matter of training our children. We know God is sovereign; we believe in His eternal counsels and purposes; we fully recognize the grand doctrines of election and predestination – yea, we are as thoroughly persuaded of them as of the truth that God is, or that Christ died and rose again. Moreover, we believe that the new birth must take place in every instance – in the case of our children as of all beside; we are convinced that this new birth is entirely a divine operation, effected by the Holy Ghost, through the Word, as we are distinctly taught in our Lord's discourse with Nicodemus in John 3, and also in James 1:18 and I Peter 1:23.

But does not this touch, in the most remote way, the solemn responsibility of Christian parents to teach and train their children, diligently and faithfully, from their earliest moments? Most certainly not.

Woe be to the parents who, on any plea or on any ground whatsoever, be it one-sided theology, misapplied Scripture, or aught else, deny their responsibility, or neglect their plain, bounden duty, in this holy business. True, we cannot make our children Christians, and we ought not to make them formalists or hypocrites; but we are not called to make them any thing. We are simply called to do our duty by them, and leave results to God.

We are instructed and commanded to bring up our children **“in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”**

When is this “bringing up” to commence? when are we to begin the sacred work of training our little ones? Surely, at the beginning. The very moment we enter upon a relationship, we enter also upon the responsibility which that relationship entails. We cannot deny this; we cannot shake it off. We may neglect it, and have to reap the sad consequences of our neglect, in various ways.

It is a very serious thing to stand in the sacred relationship of a parent – very interesting and very delightful, no doubt; but most serious, because of the responsibility involved. True it is, blessed be God, His grace is sufficient for us in this as in all beside, and **“if any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”** **“We are not sufficient of ourselves,”** in this weighty matter, to think or to do anything as ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God, and He will meet our every need. We have simply to draw upon Him, for exigency of every hour.

But we must do our duty. Some do not like the homely word “duty.” They think it has a legal ring about it. We trust the reader does not think so, for it is a very great mistake indeed. We look upon the word as a very sound and morally wholesome one, and we believe that every true Christian loves it. One thing is certain, it is only in the path of duty we can count on God. To talk of trusting God, when out of the path of duty, is a miserable conceit, and a delusion; and in the matter of our relationship as parents, to neglect our duty is to bring down upon us the most disastrous consequences.

We believe the whole business of Christian education is summed up in two brief sentences, namely,

- Count on God for your children, and,
- Train your children for God.

To take the first without the second is antinomianism; to take the second without the first is legality; to take both together is sound, practical Christianity-true religion in the sight of God and man.

It is the sweet privilege of every Christian parent to count, with all possible confidence, upon God for his children. But then we must remember that there is, in the government of God, an inseparable link connecting this privilege with the most solemn responsibility as to training. For a Christian parent to speak of counting on God for the salvation of his children, and for the moral integrity of their future career in this world, while the duty of training is neglected, is simply a miserable delusion.

We press this most solemnly upon all Christian parents, but especially upon those who have just entered upon the relationship.

There is great danger of shirking our duty to our children, of shifting it over upon others, or neglecting it altogether. We do not like the trouble of it; we shrink from the constant worry as it seems to us. But we shall find that the trouble and the worry and the sorrow and the heart-scalding arising from the neglect of our duty will be a thousand times worse than all that can be involved in the discharge of it.

To every true lover of God there is deep delight in treading the path of duty. Every step taken in that path strengthens our confidence to go on. And then we can always count upon the infinite resources that we have in God when we are keeping His commandments. We have simply to betake ourselves, morning by morning, yea, hour by hour, to our Father's exhaustless treasury, and there get all we want, in the way of grace and wisdom and moral power, to enable us to discharge aright the holy functions of our relationship.

“He giveth more grace.” This always holds good. But if we, instead of seeking grace to discharge our duty, seek ease in neglecting it, we are simply laying up a store of sorrow which will accumulate rapidly and fall upon us heavily at a future day.

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Galatians 6).

This is the condensed statement of a great principle of God's moral government – a principle of universal application, and one which applies, with singular force, to the subject before us. As we sow, in the matter of the education of our children, so we shall, most assuredly, reap. There is no getting out of this.

But let not any dear Christian parent, whose eye may scan these lines, be at all discouraged or fainthearted. There is no reason whatever for this, but, on the contrary, every reason for the most joyful confidence in God. **“The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.”**

Let us tread, with firm step, the path of duty; and then we can count, with unwavering confidence, upon our ever-faithful and gracious God for the need of each day as it rolls along. And in due time we shall reap the precious fruit of our labor, according to the appointment of God, and in pursuance of the enactments of His moral government.

We do not attempt to lay down any rules or regulations for the training. We do not believe in such. Children cannot be trained by dry rules. Who could attempt to embody in rules all that is wrapped up in that one sentence, “**Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord**”?

Here we have, indeed, a golden rule which takes in every thing from the cradle to matured manhood. Yes, we repeat, “**from the cradle;**” for we are most fully persuaded that all true Christian training begins at the very beginning. Some of us have little idea of how soon and how sharply children begin to observe, and how much they take in as they gaze at us through their dear expressive eyes.

And then how marvelously susceptible they are of the moral atmosphere which surrounds them!

Yes; and it is this very moral atmosphere that constitutes the grand secret of training our families. Our children should be permitted to breathe, from day to day, the atmosphere of love and peace, purity, holiness, and true practical righteousness. This has an amazing effect in forming the character. It is a great thing for our children to see their parents walking in love, in harmony, in tender care one for the other, in kind consideration for the servants, in love and sympathy for the poor. Who can measure the moral effect upon a child of the very first angry look, or unkind word, between father and mother? And in cases where the daily history is one of unsightly strife and contention – the father, contradicting the mother, and the mother disparaging the father – how are children to grow in such an atmosphere as this?

The fact is, it is not within the compass of human language to set forth all that is involved in the moral tone of the entire family circle – the spirit, style, and atmosphere of the whole household, the drawing-room, the dining-room, the nursery, the kitchen; where circumstances admit of such distinctions, or where the family have to confine themselves to two rooms. It is not a question of rank, position, or wealth, but of the beautiful grace of God shining out in all.

There may be the stalled ox or the dinner of herbs – these are not, at present, in question. But what we press on all fathers and mothers – all heads of households, high and low, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, is the necessity of training their children in an atmosphere of love and peace, truth and holiness, purity and kindness. Thus will our households be the practical exhibition of the character of God; and all who come in contact with them will, at least, have before their eyes a practical witness to the truth of Christianity.

But, ere we turn from the subject of domestic government, there is one special point to which we desire to call the attention of Christian parents – a point of the utmost possible moment, yet too much neglected amongst us, and that is, the need of inculcating upon our children the duty of implicit obedience. This cannot be too strongly insisted upon, inasmuch as it not only affects the order and comfort of our households, but, what is infinitely more important, it concerns the glory of God and the practical carrying out of His truth. “**Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right.**” And again, “**Children, obey your parents in all things; for this is well pleasing unto the Lord**” (Ephesians 6; Colossians 3).

This is absolutely essential, and must be firmly insisted upon from the very outset.

The child must be taught to obey from his earliest moments. He must be trained to submit himself to divinely appointed authority, and that, as the apostle puts it, “**in all things.**” If this be not attended to from the very first, it will be found almost impossible to attend to it afterwards.

If the will be allowed to act, it grows, with terrible rapidity, and each day’s growth increases the difficulty of bringing it under control. Hence, the parent should begin at once to establish his authority on a basis of moral strength and firmness; and when this is done, he may be as gentle and tender as the most loving heart could desire.

We do not believe in sternness, harshness, or severity. They are by no means necessary, and are generally the accompaniments of bad training and the proofs of bad temper. God has put into the parent’s hand the reins of government and the rod of authority, but it is not needful – if we may so express it – to be continually chucking the reins and brandishing the rod, which are the sure proofs of moral weakness. Whenever you hear a man continually talking about his authority, you may be sure his authority is not properly established.

There is a quiet dignity about true moral power which is perfectly unmistakable.

Furthermore, we judge it to be a mistake for a parent to be perpetually crossing a child’s will in matters of no moment. Such a line of action tends to break the child’s spirit, whereas the object of all sound training is to break the will. The child should ever be impressed with the idea that the parent seeks only his real good, and that if he has to refuse or prohibit any thing, it is not for the purpose of curtailing the child’s enjoyment, but simply for the promotion of his true interests.

One grand object of domestic government is to protect each member of the household in the enjoyment of his privileges, and in the proper discharge of his relative duties. Now, inasmuch as it is the divinely appointed duty of a child to obey, the parent is responsible to see this duty discharged, for if it be neglected, some other members of the domestic circle must suffer.

There can be no greater nuisance in a house than a naughty, willful child; and, as a general rule, wherever you find such, it is to be traced to bad training.

We are aware, of course, that children differ in temper and disposition – that some children have peculiarly strong wills and sturdy tempers, and are therefore specially hard to manage.

All this we quite understand; but it leaves wholly untouched the question of the parent’s responsibility to insist upon implicit obedience. He can always count on God for the needed grace and power to carry out this point. Even in the case of a widowed mother, we believe, most assuredly, she can look to God to enable her to command her children and her household. In no case, therefore, should parental authority be surrendered for a moment.

It sometimes happens that, through injudicious fondness, the parent is tempted to pamper the will of the child; but it is sowing to the flesh, and must yield corruption. It is not true love at all to indulge a child’s will, neither can it possibly minister to his true happiness or legitimate enjoyment.

An over-indulged, self-willed child is miserable himself and a grievous infliction on all who have to do with him. Children should be taught to think of others, and to seek to promote their comfort and happiness in every way. How very unseemly it is, for example, for a child to enter the house and ascend the stairs whistling, singing, and shouting, in total disregard of other members of the household who may be seriously disturbed and annoyed by such conduct! No properly trained child would think of acting in such a way; and where such unsubdued, unruly, inconsiderate conduct is allowed, there is a serious defect in the domestic government.

It is essential to family peace, harmony, and comfort, that all the members should “**consider one another.**”

We are responsible to seek the good and the happiness of those around us, and not our own. If all would but remember this, what different households we should have! and what a different tale would families have to tell!

Every Christian household should be the reflection of the divine character. The atmosphere should just be the very atmosphere of Heaven. How is this to be? Simply by each one – parent, child, master, and servant – seeking to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, and manifest His spirit.

- He never pleased Himself,
- He never sought His own interest in anything;
- He did always the thing that pleased the Father;
- He came to serve and to give;
- He went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil.

Thus it was ever with that most blessed One – the gracious, loving, sympathizing Friend of all the sons and daughters of want, weakness, and sorrow; and if only the various members of each Christian family were formed on this perfect model, we should, at least, realize something of the power and efficacy of personal and domestic Christianity, which, blessed be God, can ever be maintained and exhibited notwithstanding the hopeless ruin of the professing church.

“**Thou and thy house**” suggests a great golden principle which runs through the volume of God, from beginning to end.

In every age, under every dispensation, in the days of the patriarchs, in the days of the law, and in the days of Christianity, we find, to our exceeding comfort and encouragement, that personal and domestic godliness has its place as something grateful to the heart of God and to the glory of His holy name.

This we consider to be most consolatory at all times, but more particularly at a time like the present, when the professing church seems so rapidly sinking into gross worldliness and open infidelity; and not this only, but when those who most earnestly desire to walk in obedience to the Word of God, and to act on the grand foundation-truth of the unity of the body, find it so difficult to maintain a corporate testimony.

In view of all this, we may well bless God, with overflowing hearts, that personal and family piety can always be maintained, and that from the heart and the home of every Christian a constant stream of praise may ascend to the throne of God, and a stream of active benevolence flow out to a needy, sorrowful, sin-stricken world.

May it be so more and more, through the mighty ministry of God the Holy Ghost, that God, in all things, may be glorified in the hearts and homes of His beloved people.

The Sin of Idolatry

We have now to consider the very solemn warning addressed to the congregation of Israel against the terrible sin of idolatry – a sin to which, alas! the poor human heart is ever prone, in one way or another. It is quite possible to be guilty of the sin of idolatry without bowing down before a graven image; wherefore it behooves us to weigh well the words of warning which fell from the lips of Israel’s venerable lawgiver, They are most assuredly written for our learning.

“And ye came near and stood under the mountain; and the mountain burned with fire unto the midst of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness.”

Solemn and suited accompaniments of the occasion!

“And the Lord spake unto you out of the midst of the fire.” Oh, how differently He speaks in the Gospel of His grace! **“Ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude.”** Important fact for them to ponder! **“Only a voice.”** And **“faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”** **“And He declared unto you His covenant, which He commanded you to perform Ten Commandments; and He wrote them upon two tables of stone. And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments,”** not that they might discuss them, sit in judgment upon them, or argue about them, but **“that ye might do them”** – the grand old story, the Deuteronomic theme of obedience, most precious! whether out of or **“in the land whither ye go over to possess it.”**

Here lies the solid ground of the appeal against idolatry. They saw nothing. God did not show Himself to them. He did not assume any bodily shape, of which they might form an image. He gave them His word – His holy commandments, so plain that a child could understand them, and the wayfaring men though fools need not err therein. There was no need for them, therefore, to set about imagining what God was like; nay, this was the very sin against which they were, so faithfully warned.

They were called to hear God’s voice, not to see His shape – to obey His commandment, not to make an image of Him.

Superstition vainly seeks to do honor to God by forming and worshiping an image; Faith, on the contrary, lovingly receives and reverently obeys His holy commandments.

“If a man love Me,” says our blessed Lord, **“he will”** – what? make an image of Me, and worship it? Nay, but **“he will keep My words.”**

This makes it so simple, so safe, so certain. We are not called to work up our minds to form any conception of God; we have simply to hear His word and keep His commandments. We can have no idea whatever of God but as He has been pleased to reveal Himself. **“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.”** – **“God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”**

Jesus is declared to be the brightness of God’s glory and the exact impression of His substance. He could say, **“He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.”** Thus the Son reveals the Father; and it is by the Word, through the power of the Holy Ghost, that we know any thing of the Son; and therefore for anyone to attempt, by any efforts of his mind or workings of his imagination, to conceive an image of God, or of Christ, is simply idolatry. To endeavor to arrive at any knowledge of God or of Christ save by Scripture, is simply mysticism and confusion; nay, more, it is to put ourselves directly into the hands of the devil, to be led by him into the wildest, darkest, and deadliest delusion.

Hence, therefore, as Israel, at Mount Horeb, was shut up to the “Voice” of God and warned against any similitude, so we are shut up to Holy Scripture and warned against every thing which would draw us away, the breadth of a hair, from that holy and all-sufficient standard.

We must not listen to the suggestions of our own minds, nor to those of any other human mind: we must absolutely and sternly refuse to listen to any thing but the voice of God – the voice of Holy Scripture. Here is true security, true rest; here we have absolute certainty, so that we can say, **“I know whom”** – not merely what – **“I have believed; and am persuaded that He,”** etc.

“Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves, (for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire,) lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air, the likeness of any thing that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth; and lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven. But the Lord hath taken you; and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto Him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day.”

There is a very weighty truth set before us here.

The people are expressly taught that in making any image and bowing down thereto, they, in reality, lowered and corrupted themselves. Hence, when they made the golden calf, the Lord said unto Moses, **“Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves.”**

It could not be otherwise. The worshiper must be inferior to the object of his worship; and therefore, in worshiping a calf, they actually put themselves below the level of the beasts that perish. Well, therefore, might He say, They **“have corrupted themselves; they have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them; they have made them a molten calf, and have worshiped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, ‘These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.’”**

What a spectacle! A whole congregation, led by Aaron the high-priest, bowing in worship before a thing formed by a graving tool out of the earrings which had just been taken from the ears of their wives and daughters! Only conceive a number of intelligent beings – people endowed with reason, understanding, and conscience – saying of a molten calf, **“These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt”!**

They actually displaced the Lord by an image graven by art and man’s device! And these were the people who had seen the mighty works of the Lord in the land of Egypt.

- They had seen plague after plague falling upon Egypt and its obdurate king;
- They had seen the land, as it were, shaken to its very center by the successive strokes of the Lord’s governmental rod;
- They had seen Egypt’s first-born laid in death by the sword of the destroying angel;
- They had seen the Red Sea divided by one stroke of the Lord’s rod, and
- They had passed through upon dry ground between those crystal walls which afterwards fell, in crushing power, upon their enemies.

All these things had passed before their eyes, and yet they could so soon forget all and say of a molten calf, **“These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.”**

Did they really believe that a molten image had made the land of Egypt to tremble, humbled its proud monarch, and brought them forth victoriously? Had a calf divided the sea for them, and led them majestically through its depths? So, at least, they said; for what will people not say when the eye and the heart are turned away from God and His Word? But we may perhaps be asked, Has all this a voice for us? Are Christians to learn anything from Israel’s molten calf? and do the warnings addressed to Israel against idolatry convey any voice to the ear of the Church? Are we in danger of bowing down to a graven image? Is it possible that we, whose high privilege it is to walk in the full-orbed light of New-Testament Christianity, could ever worship a molten calf?

To all this we reply, first of all, in the language of Romans 15:4, **“Whatsoever things were written aforetime”** – Exodus 32 and Deuteronomy 4 included – **“were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”**

This brief passage contains our chartered right to range through the wide field of Old Testament scripture and gather up and appropriate its golden lessons, to feed upon its **“exceeding great and precious promises,”** to drink in its deep and varied consolation, and to profit by its solemn warnings and wholesome admonitions.

And then, as to our being capable of or liable to the gross sin of idolatry, we have a striking answer in I Corinthians 10, where the inspired apostle uses the very scene at Mount Horeb as a warning to the Church of God. We cannot do better than quote the entire passage for the reader. There is nothing like the Word of God; may we love, prize, and reverence it more and more each day.

“Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud” – those whose carcasses fell in the wilderness, as well as those who reached the land of promise, **“and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Christ.”**

How strong, how solemn, and how searching is this for all professors!

“But with many of them God was not well pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples” (let us carefully mark this), **“to the intent we should not lust after evil things”** – things in any way contrary to the mind of Christ, **“as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters”** (so that professing Christians may be idolaters) **“as were some of them; as it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.’ Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”**

Here we learn, in the plainest manner, that there is no depth of sin and folly, no form of moral pravity, into which we are not capable of plunging, at any moment, if not kept by the mighty power of God. There is no security for us save in the moral shelter of the divine presence.

We know that the Spirit of God does not warn us against things to which we are not liable. He would not say to us, **“Neither be ye idolaters,”** if we were not capable of being such. Idolatry takes various shapes. It is not, therefore, a question of the shape of the thing, but the thing itself – not the outward form, but the root or principle of the thing.

We read that **“covetousness is idolatry,”** and that a covetous man is an idolater; that is, a man desiring to possess himself of more than God has given him is an idolater – is actually guilty of the sin of Israel when they made the golden calf and worshiped it.

Well might the blessed apostle say to the Corinthians – say to us, **“Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.”** Why be warned to flee from a thing to which we are not liable? Are there any idle words in the volume of God? What mean those closing words of the first Epistle of John – **“Little children, keep yourselves from idols”**? Do they not tell us that we are in danger of worshipping idols? Assuredly they do.

Our treacherous hearts are capable of departing from the living God, and setting up some other object beside Him; and what is this but idolatry? Whatever commands the heart is the heart's idol, be it what it may—money, pleasure, power, or aught else,—so that we may well see the urgent need for the many warnings given us by the Holy Ghost against the sin of idolatry.

But we have in the fourth chapter of Galatians a very remarkable passage, and one which speaks in most impressive accents to the professing church.

The Galatians had, like all other Gentiles, worshiped idols; but, on the reception of the Gospel, had turned from idols to serve the living and true God. The Judaizing teachers, however, had come among them and taught them that unless they were circumcised and kept the law, they could not be saved.

Now this, the blessed apostle unhesitatingly pronounces to be idolatry – a going back to the grossness and moral degradation of their former days, and all this after having professed to receive the glorious Gospel of Christ.

Hence the moral force of the apostle's inquiry, "**Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain.**"

This is peculiarly striking. The Galatians were not outwardly going back to the worship of idols. It is not improbable that they would have indignantly repudiated any such idea. But, for all that, the inspired apostle asks them, "**How turn ye again?**" What does this inquiry mean if they were not going back to idolatry? And what are we now to learn from the whole passage? Simply this, that circumcision, and getting under the law, and observing days, and months, and times, and years – that all this, though apparently so different, was nothing more or less than going back to their old idolatry. The observance of days and the worship of false gods were both a turning away from the living and true God, from His Son Jesus Christ, from the Holy Ghost, from that brilliant cluster of dignities and glories which belong to Christianity.

All this is peculiarly solemn for professing Christians. We question if the full import of Galatians 4:8-10 is really apprehended by the great majority of those who profess to believe the Bible. We solemnly press this whole subject upon the attention of all whom it may concern. We pray God to use it for the purpose of stirring up the hearts and consciences of His people every where to consider their position, their habits, ways, and associations; and to inquire how far they are really following the example of the assemblies of Galatia, in the observance of saints' days and such like, which can only lead away from Christ and His glorious salvation.

There is a day coming which will open the eyes of thousands to the reality of these things, and then they will see what they now refuse to see, that the very darkest and grossest forms of paganism may be reproduced under the name of Christianity, and in connection with the very highest truths that ever shone on the human understanding.

But however slow we may be to admit our tendency to fall into the sin of idolatry, it is very plain, in Israel's case, that Moses, as taught and inspired of God, felt the deep need of warning them against it, in the most solemn and affecting terms. He appeals to them on every possible ground, and reiterates his counsels and admonitions in a manner so impressive as to leave them, assuredly, without any excuse.

They never could say that they fell into idolatry from the want of warning, or of the most gracious and affectionate entreaty. Take such words as the following: **“But the Lord hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto Him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day”** (Ver. 20).

Could anything be more affecting than this? the Lord, in His rich and sovereign grace, and by His mighty hand, brought them forth from the land of death and darkness, a redeemed and delivered people. He had brought them to Himself, that they might be to Him a peculiar treasure, above all the people upon earth. How, then, could they turn away from Him, from His holy covenant, and from His precious commandments?

Alas! Alas! They could and did. **“They made a calf, and said, ‘These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.’”**

Think of this! A calf, made by their own hands – an image, graven by art and man's device, had brought them up out of Egypt! A thing made out of the women's earrings had redeemed and delivered them! And this has been written for our admonition. But why should it be written for us if we are not capable of and liable to the very same sin? We must either admit that God the Holy Ghost has penned an unnecessary sentence, or admit our need of an admonition against the sin of idolatry; and assuredly, our needing the admonition proves our tendency to the sin.

Are we better than Israel? In no wise. We have brighter light and higher privileges, but, so far as we are concerned, we are made of the same material, have the same capabilities and the same tendencies, as they. Our idolatry may take a different shape from theirs; but idolatry is idolatry, be the shape what it may; and the higher our privileges, the greater our sin.

We may perhaps feel disposed to wonder how a rational people could be guilty of such egregious folly as to make a calf and bow down to it, and this, too, after having had such a display of the majesty, power, and glory of God. Let us remember that their folly is recorded for our admonition; and that we, with all our light, all our knowledge, all our privileges, are warned to **“flee from idolatry.”**

Let us deeply ponder all this and seek to profit by it.

May every chamber of our hearts be filled with Christ, and then we shall have no room for idols. This is our only safeguard. If we slip away the breadth of a hair from our precious Saviour and Shepherd, we are capable of plunging into the darkest forms of error and moral evil. Light, knowledge, spiritual privileges, church position, sacramental benefits, are no security for the soul. They are very good in their right place and if rightly used, but in themselves they only increase our moral danger.

Nothing can keep us safe, right, and happy but having Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith. Abiding in Him and He in us, that wicked one toucheth us not. But if personal communion be not diligently maintained, the higher our position, the greater our danger and the more disastrous our fall. There was not a nation beneath the canopy of Heaven more favored and exalted than Israel when they gathered around Mount Horeb to hear the Word of God: there was not a nation on the face of the earth more degraded or more guilty than they when they bowed before the golden calf – an image of their own formation.

God's Judicial Dealings With His Own

We must now give our attention to a fact of very deep interest, presented at verse 21 of our chapter, and that is, that Moses, for the third time, reminds the congregation of God's judicial dealing with himself. He had spoken of it, as we have seen, in chapter 1:37, and again at chapter 3:26, and here, again, he says to them, **“Furthermore the Lord was angry with me for your sakes, and sware that I should not go over Jordan, and that I should not go in unto that good land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance; but I must die in this land, I must not go over Jordan; but ye shall go over and possess that good land.”**

Now, we may ask, Why this threefold reference to the same fact? and why the special mention, in each instance, of the circumstance that the Lord was angry with him on their account?

One thing is certain, it was not for the purpose of throwing the blame over upon the people, or of exculpating himself. No one but an infidel could think this. We believe the simple object was, to give increased moral force to his appeal, more solemnity to his warning voice. If the Lord was angry with such an one as Moses – if he, for his unadvised speaking at the waters of Meribah, was forbidden to enter the promised land (much as he desired it), how needful for them to take heed!

It is a serious thing to have to do with God-blessed, no doubt, beyond all human expression or thought, but most serious, as the lawgiver himself was called to prove in his own person.

That this is the correct view of this interesting question seems evident from the following words:

“Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the Lord your God, which He made with you, and make you a graven image, or the likeness of any thing which the Lord thy God hath forbidden thee. For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.”

This is peculiarly solemn. We must allow this statement to have its full, moral weight with our souls. We must not attempt to turn aside its sharp edge by any false notions about grace. We sometimes hear it said that “God is a consuming fire to the world.” By and by He will be so, no doubt; but now He is dealing in grace, patience, and longsuffering mercy with the world. He is not dealing in judgment with the world now; but, as the apostle Peter tells us, **“the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God; and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God?”**

So also, in Hebrews 12, we read, “**For our God is a consuming fire.**” He is not speaking of what God will be to the world, but of what He is to us. Neither is it, as some put it, “God is a consuming fire out of Christ.” We know nothing of God out of Christ. He could not be “our God” out of Christ.

No, reader; Scripture does not need such twistings and turnings: it must be taken as it stands.

It is clear and distinct, and all we have to do is to hearken and obey. “**Our God is a consuming fire,**” “**a jealous God,**” not to consume us, blessed be His holy name, but to consume the evil in us and in our ways. He is intolerant of everything in us that is contrary to Himself – contrary to His holiness, and therefore contrary to our true happiness, our real, solid blessing. As the “**Holy Father,**” He keeps us in a way worthy of Himself, and He chastens us in order to make us partakers of His holiness. He allows the world to go on its way for the present, not interfering publicly with it; but He judges His house, and He chastens His children, in order that they may more fully answer to His mind and be the expression of His moral image.

And is not this an immense privilege? Yes, verily; it is a privilege of the very highest order – a privilege flowing from the infinite grace of our God, who condescends to interest Himself in us, and occupy Himself even with our infirmities, our failures, and our sins, in order to deliver us from them, and make us partakers of His holiness.

There is a very fine passage bearing upon this subject in the opening of Hebrews 12, which, because of its immense practical importance, we must quote for the reader – “**My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him; for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partaken of His holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees.”**

There are three ways of meeting divine chastening:

- We may “**despise**” it, as something commonplace – something that may happen to anyone; we do not see the hand of God in it.
- Again, we may “**faint**” under it, as something too heavy for us to bear – something entirely beyond endurance; we do not see the Father’s heart in it, or recognize His gracious object in it, namely, to make us partakers of His holiness.
- Lastly, we may be “**exercised**” by it – this is the way to reap “**the peaceable fruit of righteousness afterward.**”

We dare not “**despise**” a thing in which we trace the hand of God: we need not “**faint**” under a trial in which we plainly discern the heart of a loving Father, who will not suffer us to be tried above what we are able, but will with the trial make an issue, that we may be able to bear it, and who also graciously explains to us His object in the discipline, and assures us that every stroke of His rod is a proof of His love, and a direct response to the prayer of Christ in John 17:11, wherein He commends us to the care of the “**Holy Father**,” to be kept according to that name and all that name involves.

Furthermore, there are three distinct attitudes of heart in reference to divine chastening, namely, subjection, acquiescence, and rejoicing.

- When the will is broken, there is subjection;
- When the understanding is enlightened as to the object of the chastening, there is calm acquiescence; and
- When the affections are engaged with the Father’s heart, there is rejoicing,

and we can go forth with glad hearts to reap a golden harvest of the peaceable fruit of righteousness, to the praise of Him who, in His painstaking love, undertakes to care for us and to deal with us in holy government, and concentrate His care upon each one as though there were but that one to attend to.

How wonderful is all this! And how the thought of it should help us in all our trials and exercises!

We are in the hands of One whose love is infinite, whose wisdom is unerring, whose power is omnipotent, whose resources are inexhaustible. Why, then, should we ever be cast down? If He chastens us, it is because He loves us and seeks our real good.

We may think the chastening grievous – we may feel disposed to wonder, at times, how love can inflict pain and sickness upon us; but we must remember that divine love is wise and faithful, and only inflicts the pain, the sickness, or the sorrow for our profit and blessing.

We must not always judge of love by the form in which it clothes itself. Look at that fond and tender mother applying a blister to her child whom she loves as her own soul. She knows full well that the blister will cause her child real pain and suffering, and yet she unhesitatingly applies it, though her heart feels keenly at having to do it. But she knows it is absolutely necessary; she believes that, humanly and medically speaking, the child’s life depends upon it; she feels that a few moments’ pain may, with the blessing of God, restore the health of her precious child. Thus, while the child is only occupied with the transient suffering, the mother is thinking of the permanent good; and if the child could but think with the mother, the blister would not seem so hard to bear.

Now, it is just thus in the matter of our Father’s disciplinary dealings with us; and the remembrance of this would greatly help us to endure whatever His chastening hand may lay upon us.

It may perhaps be said that there is a very wide difference between a blister laid on for a few minutes, and years of intense bodily suffering. No doubt there is; but there is also a very wide difference between the result reached in each case. It is only with the principle of the thing we have to do. When we see a beloved child of God, or servant of Christ, called to pass through years of intense suffering, we may feel disposed to wonder why it is; and perhaps the beloved sufferer may also feel disposed to wonder, and at times be ready to faint under the weight of his long-protracted affliction.

He may feel led to cry out, Why am I thus? Can this be love? can this be the expression of a Father's tender care? "**Yes, verily,**" is Faith's bright and decided reply. "It is all love – all divinely right. I would not have it otherwise for worlds. I know this transient suffering is working out eternal blessing. I know my loving Father has put me into this furnace to purge away my dross and bring out in me the expression of His own image. I know that divine love will always do the very best for its object, and therefore this intense suffering is the very best thing for me. Of course, I feel it, for I am not a stick or a stone. My Father means me to feel it, just as the mother means the blister to rise, for it would do no good otherwise. But I bless Him, with my whole heart, for the grace that shines in the wondrous fact of His occupying Himself with me, in this way, to correct what He sees to be wrong in me. I praise Him for putting me into the furnace; and how can I but praise Him, when I see Himself, in infinite grace and patience, sitting over the furnace to watch the process, and lift me out the moment the work is done?"

This, beloved Christian reader, is the true way, and this the right spirit in which to pass through chastening of any kind, be it bodily affliction, sore bereavement, loss of property, or pressure of circumstances. We have to trace the hand of God, to read a Father's heart, to recognize the divine object in it all. This will enable us to vindicate, justify, and glorify God in the furnace of affliction. It will correct every murmuring thought, and hush every fretful utterance; it will fill our hearts with sweetest peace and our mouths with praise.

God's Loving Appeals for Personal Consecration

We must now turn, for a few moments, to the remaining verses of our chapter, in which we shall find some most touching and powerful appeals to the heart and conscience of the congregation.

The lawgiver, in the deep, true, and fervent love of his heart, makes use of the most solemn warnings, the most earnest admonition, and the most tender entreaties, in order to move the people to the one grand and all-important point of obedience.

- If he speaks to them of the iron furnace of Egypt, out of which the Lord, in His sovereign grace, had delivered them;
- If he dwells upon the mighty signs and wonders wrought on their behalf;
- If he holds up to their view the glories of that land on which they were about to plant their foot;
- or
- If he recounts the marvelous dealings of God with them in the wilderness.

It is all for the purpose of strengthening the moral basis of the Lord's claim upon their loving and reverent obedience.

The past, the present, and the future are all brought to bear upon them – all made to furnish powerful arguments in favor of their whole-hearted consecration of themselves to the service of their gracious and almighty Deliverer. In short, there was every reason why they should obey, and no possible excuse for disobedience. All the facts of their history, from first to last, were eminently calculated to give moral force to the exhortation and warning of the following passage;-

“Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the Lord your God, which He made with you, and make you a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, which the Lord thy God hath forbidden thee. For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God. When thou shalt beget children, and children’s children, and ye shall have remained long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, and shall do evil in the sight of the Lord thy God, to provoke Him to anger; I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed. And the Lord shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the Lord shall lead you. And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men’s hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell.”

How solemn is all this! What faithful warnings are here! Heaven and earth are summoned to witness. Alas! how soon and how completely all this was forgotten! and how literally all those heavy denunciations have been fulfilled in the history of the nation!

But, thank God, there is a bright side of the picture – there is mercy as well as judgment, and our God (blessed forever be His holy name) is something more than **“a consuming fire and a jealous God.”** True, He is a consuming fire, because He is holy; He is intolerant of evil, and must consume our dross. Moreover, He is jealous, because He cannot suffer any rival to have a place in the hearts of those He loves. He must have the whole heart, because He alone is worthy of it, as He alone can fill and satisfy it forever. And if His people turn away from Him and go after idols of their own making, they must be left to reap the bitter fruit of their own doings, and to prove, by sad and terrible experience, the truth of these words: **“Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another.”**

But mark how touchingly Moses presents to the people the bright side of things – a brightness springing from the eternal stability of the grace of God, and the perfect provision which that grace has made for all His people’s need, from first to last.

“But,” he says – and oh, how lovely are some of the “buts” of Holy Scripture! – **“if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find Him, if thou seek Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul.”** Exquisite grace! **“When thou art in tribulation”** – that is the time to find what our God is,- **“and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the Lord thy God, and shalt be obedient unto His voice;”** – what then? **“A consuming fire”**? Nay; but **“the Lord thy God is a merciful God; He will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which He sware unto them.”**

Here we have a remarkable onlook into Israel's future, their departure from God and consequent dispersion among the nations, the complete breaking up of the its polity, and the passing away of their national glory. But, blessed forever be the God of all grace, there is something beyond all this failure and sin and ruin and judgment.

When we get to the far end of Israel's melancholy history – a history which may truly be summed up in that one brief but comprehensive sentence, "**O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself,**" we are met by the magnificent display of the grace, mercy, and faithfulness of the Lord, the God of their fathers, whose heart of love tells itself out in that added sentence, "**In Me is thy help.**"

Yes; the whole matter is wrapped up in these two vigorous sentences, "**Thou hast destroyed thyself,**" "**But in Me is thy help.**"

- In the former, we have the sharp arrow for Israel's conscience;
- In the latter, the soothing balm for Israel's broken heart.

In thinking of the nation of Israel, there are two pages which we have to study, namely, the historic and the prophetic.

The page of history records, with unerring faithfulness, their utter ruin: the page of prophecy unfolds, in accents of matchless grace, God's remedy.

- Israel's past has been dark and gloomy: Israel's future will be bright and glorious.
- In the former, we see the miserable actings of man; in the latter, the blessed ways of God.

That gives the forcible illustration of what man is; this, the bright display of what God is. We must look at both if we would understand aright the history of this remarkable people – "**a people terrible from their beginning hitherto,**" and, we may truly add, a people wonderful to the end of time.

We do not, of course, attempt to adduce, in this place, proofs of our statement as to Israel's past and Israel's future. To do so would, we may say, without any exaggeration, demand a volume, inasmuch as it would simply be to quote a very large portion of the historical books of the Bible on the one hand, and of the prophetic books on the other.

This, we need hardly say, is out of the question; but we feel bound to press upon the reader's attention the precious teaching contained in the quotation given above. It embodies, in its brief compass, the whole truth as to Israel's past, present, and future. Mark how their past is vividly portrayed in these few words:

"When thou shalt beget children, and children's children, and ye shall have remained long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, and shall do evil in the sight of the Lord thy God, to provoke Him to anger."

Is not this precisely what they have done? Is it not here, as it were, in a nutshell? They have done evil in the sight of the Lord their God, to provoke Him to anger. That one word, “**evil**” takes all in, from the calf at Horeb to the Cross at Calvary.

Such is Israel’s past.

And now, what of their present? Are they not a standing monument of the imperishable truth of God? Has a single jot or tittle failed of all that God has spoken? Harken to these glowing words:

“I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed. And the Lord shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the Lord shall lead you.”

Has not all this been fulfilled to the letter? Who can question it?

Israel’s past and Israel’s present alike attest the truth of God’s Word. And are we not justified in declaring that inasmuch as the past and the present are a literal accomplishment of the truth of God, so shall the future?

Assuredly. The page of history and the page of prophecy were both indited by the same Spirit, and therefore they are both alike true; and as the history records Israel’s sin and Israel’s dispersion, so doth the prophecy predict Israel’s repentance and Israel’s restoration. The one is as true to faith as the other. As surely as Israel sinned in the past and are scattered at the present, so surely shall they repent and be restored in the future.

This, we conceive, is beyond all question; and we rejoice to think of it. There is not one of the prophets, from Isaiah to Malachi, that does not most distinctly set forth, in accents of sweetest grace and most tender mercy, the future blessings, pre-eminence, and glory of the seed of Abraham. *

*** Jonah, of course, is an exception; his mission was to Nineveh. He is the only prophet whose commission had exclusive reference to the Gentile.**

It would be simply delightful to quote some of the sublime passages bearing upon this most interesting subject; but we must leave the reader to search them out for himself, especially commending to his notice the precious passages contained in the closing chapters of Isaiah, in which he will find a perfect feast, as well as the fullest confirmation of the apostle’s statement that **“all Israel shall be saved.”**

All the prophets, **“from Samuel and those that follow after,”** agree as to this. The teachings of the New Testament harmonize with the voices of the prophets, and hence to call in question the truth of Israel’s restoration to their own land, and final blessing there, under the rule of their own Messiah, is simply to ignore or deny the testimony of prophets and apostles, speaking and writing by the direct inspiration of God the Holy Ghost; it is to set aside a body of Scripture evidence perfectly overwhelming.

It seems passing strange that any true lover of Christ should seek to do this; yet so it is, and so it has been, through religious prejudice, theological bias, and various other causes. But, notwithstanding all this, the glorious truth of Israel's restoration and pre-eminence in the earth shines with undimmed lustre on the prophetic page, and all who seek to set it aside, or interfere with it in any way, are not only flying in the face of Holy Scripture – contradicting the unanimous voice of apostles and prophets, but also seeking to tamper (ignorantly and unwittingly, no doubt) with the counsel, purpose, and promise of the Lord God of Israel, and to nullify His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

This is serious work for anyone to engage in, and we believe many are doing it without being aware of it; for we must understand that anyone who applies the promises made to the Old Testament fathers to the New Testament Church is, in reality, doing the serious work of which we speak. We maintain that no one has the slightest warrant to alienate the promises made to the fathers.

We may learn from those promises, delight in them, draw comfort and encouragement from their eternal stability and direct literal application – all this is blessedly true; but it is another thing altogether for men, under the influence of a system of interpretation falsely called spiritual, to apply to the Church, or to believers of the New Testament times, prophecies which, as simply and plainly as words can indicate, apply to Israel – to the literal seed of Abraham.

This is what we consider so very serious. We believe we have very little idea of how thoroughly opposed all this is to the mind and heart of God. He loves Israel – loves them for the fathers' sake, and we may rest assured He will not sanction our interference with their place, their portion, or their prospect. We are all familiar with the words of the inspired apostle in Romans 11, however we may have missed or forgotten their true import and moral force.

Speaking of Israel, in connection with the olive tree of promise, he says, **“And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in; for”** the most simple, solid, and blessed of all reasons – **“God is able,”** as He is most surely willing, **“to graff them in again. For if thou wert cut out of the olive-tree which is wild by nature, and wert graffed contrary to nature into a good olive-tree; how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be graffed into their own olive-tree? For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.”** *

*** The reader must seize the difference between “the fullness of the Gentiles” in Romans 11, and “the times of the Gentiles” in Luke 21. The former refers to those who are now being gathered into the Church: the latter, on the contrary, refers to the times of Gentile supremacy which began with Nebuchadnezzar, and runs on to the time when “the stone cut out without hands” shall fall, in crushing power, upon the great image of Daniel 2.**

And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, **‘There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is My covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.’**

“As concerning the Gospel, they are enemies for your sakes; but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief; even so have these also now not believed in your mercy [or, mercy to you. See Greek.] that they also may obtain mercy.” That is, that instead of coming in on the ground of law, or fleshly descent, they should come in simply on the ground of sovereign mercy, just as the Gentiles. **“For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all.”**

Here ends the section bearing upon our immediate subject, but we cannot refrain from quoting the splendid doxology which bursts forth from the overflowing heart of the inspired apostle as he closes the grand dispensational division of his Epistle – **“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counselor? or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him,”** as the source, **“and through Him,”** as the channel, **“and to Him,”** as the object, **“are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen.”**

The foregoing splendid passage, as indeed all Scripture, is in perfect keeping with the teaching of the fourth chapter of our book.

Israel’s present condition is the fruit of their dark unbelief: Israel’s future glory will be the fruit of God’s rich sovereign mercy – **“The Lord thy God is a merciful God, He will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which He swore unto them. For ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other.”**

The utmost bounds of time and space were to be appealed to, to see – **“whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it? Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live? Or hath God assayed to go and take Him a nation from the midst of another nation, by temptations, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by a stretched-out arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? Unto thee it was showed, that thou mightest know that the Lord He is God; there is none else beside Him. Out of heaven He made thee to hear His voice, that He might instruct thee, and upon earth He showed thee His great fire; and thou heardest His words out of the midst of the fire.”**

Here we have set forth, with singular moral power, the grand object of all the divine actings on Israel’s behalf. It was that they might know that the Lord was the one true and living God, and that there was and could be none beside Him. In a word, it was the purpose of God that Israel should be a witness for Him on the earth; and so they most assuredly shall, though hitherto they have signally failed and caused His great and holy name to be blasphemed among the nations.

Nothing can hinder the purpose of God. His covenant shall stand forever.

Israel shall yet be a blessed and effective witness for God on the earth, and a channel of rich and everlasting blessing to all nations. The Lord has pledged His word as to this, and not all the powers of earth and hell – men and devils combined can hinder the full accomplishment of all that He has spoken.

His glory is involved in Israel's future, and if a single jot or tittle of His word were to fail, it would be a dishonor cast upon His great name, and an occasion for the enemy, which is utterly impossible.

Israel's future blessing and the Lord's glory are bound together by a link which can never be snapped. If this be not clearly seen, we can neither understand Israel's past nor Israel's future. Nay, more; we may assert, with all possible confidence, that unless this blessed fact be fully grasped, our system of prophetic interpretation must be utterly false.

But there is another truth set forth in our chapter – a truth of peculiar interest and preciousness.

It is not merely that the glory of the Lord is involved in Israel's future restoration and blessedness; the love of His heart is also engaged.

This comes out with touching sweetness in the following words:

“And because He loved thy fathers, therefore He chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in His sight with His mighty power out of Egypt; to drive out nations from before thee greater and mightier than thou art, to bring thee in, to give thee their land for an inheritance, as it is this day.”

Thus the truth of God's word, the glory of His great name, and the love of His heart are all involved in His dealings with the seed of Abraham His friend; and albeit they have broken the law, dishonored His name, despised His mercy, rejected His prophets, crucified His Son, and resisted His Spirit – although they have done all this, and, in consequence thereof, are scattered and peeled and broken, and shall yet pass through unexampled tribulation, yet will the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob glorify His name, make good His word, and manifest the changeless love of His heart in the future history of His earthly people.

Nothing changes God's affection. Whom He loves and as He loves He loves unto the end.

If we deny this in reference to Israel, we have not so much as a single inch of solid standing-ground for ourselves: if we touch the truth of God in one department, we have no security as to anything.

- **“Scripture cannot be broken.”**

- **“All the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God.”**

God has pledged Himself to the seed of Abraham; He has promised to give them the land of Canaan, forever. **“His gifts and calling are without repentance.”**

He never repents of His gift or His call; and therefore for anyone to attempt to alienate His promises and His gifts, or to interfere in any way with their application to their true and proper object, must be a grievous offense to Him. It mars the integrity of divine truth, deprives us of all certainty in the interpretation of Holy Scripture, and plunges the soul in darkness, doubt, and perplexity.

The teaching of Scripture is clear, definite, and distinct.

The Holy Ghost, who indited the sacred Volume, means what He says and says what He means. If He speaks of Israel, He means Israel of Zion, He means Zion – of Jerusalem, He means Jerusalem. To apply any one of these names to the New Testament Church is to confound things that differ, and introduce a method of interpreting Scripture which, from its vagueness and looseness, can only lead to the most disastrous consequences.

If we handle the Word of God in such a loose and careless manner, it is utterly impossible to realize its divine authority over our conscience, or exhibit its formative power in our course, conduct, and character.

We must now look, for a moment, at the powerful appeal with which Moses sums up his address in our chapter: it demands our profound and reverent attention:

“Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the Lord He is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath; there is none else. Thou shalt keep therefore His statutes, and His commandments, which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, forever” (Ver. 39, 40).

Here we see that the moral claim upon their hearty obedience is grounded upon the revealed character of God, and His marvelous actings on their behalf.

In a word, they were bound to obey – bound by every argument that could possibly act on the heart, the conscience, and the understanding.

The One who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, with a mighty band and outstretched arm; who had made that land to tremble to its very center, by stroke after stroke of His judicial rod; who had opened up a pathway for them through the sea; who had sent them bread from heaven, and brought forth water for them out of the flinty rock; and all this for the glory of His great name, and because He loved their fathers – surely He was entitled to their whole-hearted obedience.

This is the grand argument, so eminently characteristic of this blessed book of Deuteronomy.

And surely this is full of instruction for Christians now. If Israel were morally bound to obey, how much more are we! If their motives and objects were powerful, how much more so are ours!

- do we feel their power?
- do we consider them in our hearts?
- do we ponder the claims of Christ upon us?
- do we remember that we are not our own, but bought with a price, even the infinitely precious price of the blood of Christ?
- do we realize this?

Are we seeking to live for Him?

- Is His glory our ruling object?
- Is His love our constraining motive? or are we living for ourselves?
- Are we seeking to get on in the world – that world that crucified our blessed Lord and Saviour?
- Are we seeking to make money?
- do we love it in our hearts, either for its own sake or for the sake of what it can procure?
- does money govern us?
- Are we seeking a place in the world, either for ourselves or for our children?

Let us honestly challenge our hearts, as in the divine presence, in the light of God's truth, what is our object-our real, governing, cherished, heart-sought object?

Reader, these are searching questions. Let us not put them aside: let us really weigh them in the very light of the judgment-seat of Christ. We believe they are wholesome, much-needed questions. We live in very solemn times.

There is a fearful amount of sham all every side, and in nothing is this sham so awfully apparent as in so-called religion.

The very days in which our lot is cast have been sketched by a pen that never colors – never exaggerates, but always presents men and things precisely as they are – **“This know also, that in the last days”** – quite distinct from **“the latter times”** of I Timothy 4 – far in advance, more pronounced, more closely defined, more strongly marked, these last days in which **“perilous [or difficult] times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more [or rather] than lovers of God.”**

And then mark the crown which the inspired apostle puts upon this appalling superstructure! **“Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof”** (II Timothy 3:1-5).

What a terrible picture! We have here, in a few glowing, weighty sentences, infidel Christendom, just as in I Timothy 4, we have superstitious Christendom. In the latter, we see popery; in the former, infidelity.

Both elements are at work around us, but the latter will yet rise into prominence – indeed, even now it is advancing, with rapid strides. The very leaders and teachers of Christendom are not ashamed or afraid to attack the foundations of Christianity.

A so-called Christian bishop is not ashamed or afraid to call in question the integrity of the five books of Moses, and, with them, of the whole Bible; for, most assuredly, if Moses was not the inspired writer of the Pentateuch, the entire edifice of Holy Scripture is swept from beneath our feet.

The writings of Moses are so intimately bound up with all the other grand divisions of the divine Volume, that if they are touched, all is gone.

We boldly affirm that if the Holy Ghost did not inspire Moses, the servant of God, to write the first five books of our English Bible, we have not an inch of solid ground to stand upon; we are positively left without a single atom of divine authority on which to rest our souls; the very pillars of our glorious Christianity are swept away, and we are left to grope our way, in hopeless perplexity, amid the conflicting opinions and theories of infidel doctors, without so much as a single ray from Inspiration's heavenly lamp.

Does this appear too strong for the reader? Does he believe that we can listen, for a moment, to the infidel denier of Moses, and yet believe in the inspiration of the Psalms, the Prophets, and the New Testament? If he does, let him be well assured he is under the power of a fatal delusion. Let him take such passages as the following, and ask himself, What do they mean, and what is wrapped up in them?

Our Lord, in speaking to the Jews – who, by the way, would not have agreed with a Christian bishop in denying the authenticity of Moses – says, **“Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father; there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me; for he wrote of Me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe My words?”** (John 5:45-47).

Think of this: The man that does not believe in the writings of Moses – does not receive every line of his as divinely inspired, does not believe in Christ's words, and therefore cannot have any divinely wrought faith in Christ Himself – cannot be a Christian at all.

This makes it a very serious matter for anyone to deny the divine inspiration of the Pentateuch, and equally serious for anyone to listen to him or sympathize with him.

It is all very well to talk of Christian charity and liberality of spirit; but we have yet to learn that it is charity or liberality to sanction, in anyway, a man who has the audacity to sweep from beneath our feet the very foundations of our faith. To speak of him as a Christian bishop, or a Christian minister of any kind, is only to make the matter a thousand times worse.

We can understand a Voltaire or a Paine attacking the Bible – we do not look for any thing else from them; but when those who assume to be the recognized and ordained ministers of religion, and the guardians of the faith of God's elect – those who consider themselves alone entitled to teach and preach Jesus Christ, and feed and tend the Church of God – when they actually call in question the inspiration of the five books of Moses, may we not well ask, Where are we? What has the professing church come to?

But let us take another passage. It is the powerful appeal of the risen Saviour to the two bewildered disciples on their way to Emmaus – **“O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken; ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?”** And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself.” And again, to the eleven and others with them, He says, **“These are the ‘words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled. which were written in the Law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning Me”** (Luke 24:25-27, 44).

Here we find that our Lord, in the most distinct and positive manner, recognizes the Law of Moses as an integral part of the canon of inspiration, and binds it up with all the other grand divisions of the divine Volume in such a way that it is utterly impossible to touch one without destroying the integrity of the whole.

If Moses is not to be trusted, neither are the Prophets, nor the Psalms. They stand or fall together. And not only so, but we must either admit the divine authenticity of the Pentateuch or draw the blasphemous inference that our adorable Lord and Saviour gave the sanction of His authority to a set of spurious documents, by quoting as the writings of Moses what Moses never wrote at all! There is positively not a single inch of consistent standing-ground between these two conclusions. Again, take the following most weighty and important passage at the close of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus: **“Abraham saith unto him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘Nay, father Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.’ And he said unto him, ‘If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead’”** (Luke 16:29-31).

Finally, if we add to all this the fact that our Lord, in His conflict with Satan in the wilderness, quotes only from the writings of Moses, we have a body of evidence quite sufficient, not only to establish, beyond all question, the divine inspiration of Moses, but also to prove that the man who calls in question the authenticity of the first five books of the Bible, can really have no Bible, no divine revelation, no authority, no solid foundation for his faith. He may call himself, or be called by others, a Christian bishop or a Christian minister; but, in solemn fact, he is a skeptic, and should be treated as such by all who believe and know the truth.

We cannot understand how anyone with a spark of divine life in his soul could be guilty of the awful sin of denying the inspiration of a large portion of the Word of God, or asserting that our Lord Christ could quote from spurious documents.

We may be deemed severe in thus writing. It seems the fashion nowadays to own as Christians those who deny the very foundations of Christianity. It is a very popular notion that, provided people are moral, amiable, benevolent, charitable, and philanthropic, it is of very small consequence what they believe. Life is better than creed or dogma, we are told. All this sounds very plausible: but the reader may rest assured that the direct tendency of all this manner of speech and line of argument is to get rid of the Bible – rid of the Holy Ghost – rid of the Christ of God – rid of all that the Bible reveals to our souls.

Let him bear this in mind, and seek to keep close to the precious Word of God; let him treasure that Word in his heart, and give himself more and more to the prayerful study of it. Thus he will be preserved from the withering influence of skepticism and infidelity, in every shape and form; his soul will be fed and nourished by the sincere milk of the Word, and his whole moral being be kept in the shelter of the divine presence continually. This is what is needed: nothing else will do.

The Three Cities of Refuge

We must now close our meditations on this marvelous chapter which has been engaging our attention; but ere doing so, we would glance for a moment at the remarkable notice of the three cities of refuge. It might, to a cursory reader, seem abrupt; but, so far from that, it is, as we might expect, in perfect and beautiful moral order. Scripture is always divinely perfect, and if we do not see and appreciate its beauties and moral glories, it is simply owing to our blindness and insensibility.

“Then Moses severed three cities on this side Jordan toward the sunrising; that the slayer might flee thither, which should kill his neighbor unawares, and hated him not in times past; and that fleeing unto one of those cities he might live; namely, Bezer in the wilderness, in the plain country, of the Reubenites; and Ramoth in Gilead, of the Gadites; and Golan in Bashan, of the Manassites.”

Here we have a lovely display of the grace of God rising, as it ever does, above human weakness and failure.

The two tribes and a half, in choosing their inheritance on this side Jordan, were manifestly stopping short of the proper portion of the Israel of God, which lay on the other side of the river of death; but, notwithstanding this failure, God, in His abounding grace, would not leave the poor slayer without a refuge in the day of his distress. If man cannot come up to the height of God's thoughts, God can come down to the depths of man's need; and so blessedly does He do so in this case, that the two tribes and a half were to have as many cities of refuge on this side Jordan as the nine tribes and a half had in the land of Canaan.

This, truly, was grace abounding. How unlike the manner of man! How far above mere law or legal righteousness! It might, in a legal way, have been said to the two tribes and a half, If you are going to choose your inheritance short of the divine mark – if you are content with less than Canaan, the land of promise, you must not expect to enjoy the privileges and blessings of that land. The institutions of Canaan must be confined to Canaan, and hence your manslayer must try and make his way across the Jordan and find refuge there.

Law might speak thus, but Grace spoke differently. God's thoughts are not ours, nor His ways as ours. We might deem it marvelous grace to provide even one city for the two and a half tribes; but our God does exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, and hence the comparatively small district on this side Jordan was furnished with as full a provision of grace as the entire land of Canaan.

Does this prove that the two and a half tribes were right? Nay; but it proves that God was good, and that He must ever act like Himself, spite of all our weakness and folly. Could He leave a poor slayer without a place of refuge in the land of Gilead, though Gilead was not Canaan? Surely not. This would not be worthy of the One who says, **“I bring near My righteousness.”**

He took care to bring the city of refuge **“near”** to the slayer. He would cause His rich and precious grace to flow over and meet the needy one just where he was. Such is the way of our God, blessed be His holy name for evermore!

“And this is the law which Moses set before the children of Israel: these are the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which Moses spake unto the children of Israel, after they came forth out of Egypt, on this side Jordan, in the valley over against Beth-pear, in the land of Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt at Heshbon, whom Moses and the children of Israel smote, after they were come forth out of Egypt: and they possessed his land, and the land of Og king of Bashan, two kings of the Amorites, which were on this side Jordan toward the sunrising; from Aroer, which is by the bank of the river Arnon, even unto Mount Sion, which is Hermon, and all the plain on this side Jordan eastward, even unto the sea of the plain, under the springs of Pisgah.”

Here closes this marvelous discourse.

The Spirit of God delights to trace the boundaries of the people, and dwell on the most minute details connected with their history. He takes a lively and loving interest in all that concerns them – their conflicts, their victories, their possessions, all their landmarks; every thing about them is dwelt upon with a minuteness which, by its touching grace and condescension, fill the heart with wonder, love, and praise.

Man, in his contemptible self-importance, thinks it beneath his dignity to enter upon minute details; but our God counts the hairs of our heads, puts our tears into His bottle, takes knowledge of our every care, our every sorrow, our every need. There is nothing too small for His love, as there is nothing too great for His power. He concentrates His loving care upon each one of His people as though He had only that one to attend to; and there is not a single circumstance in our private history, from day to day, however trivial, in which He does not take a loving interest.

Let us ever remember this, for our comfort; and may we learn to trust Him better, and use, with a more artless faith, His fatherly love and care. He tells us to cast all our care upon Him, in the assurance that He careth for us. He would have our hearts as free from care as our conscience is free from guilt. **“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”** (Philippians 4:6, 7).

It is to be feared that the great majority of us know but little of the real depth, meaning, and power of such words as these. We read them and hear them, but we do not take them in and make our own of them – we do not digest them and reduce them to practice.

How little do we really enter into the blessed truth that our Father is interested in all our little cares and sorrows, and that we may go to Him with all our little wants and difficulties.

We imagine that such things are beneath the notice of the high and mighty One who inhabiteth eternity and sitteth upon the circle of the earth.

This is a serious mistake, and one that robs us of incalculable blessing in our daily history. We should ever remember that there is nothing great or small with our God: all things are alike to Him who sustains the vast universe by the word of His power, and takes notice of a falling sparrow. It is quite as easy to Him to create a world as to provide a breakfast for some poor widow. The greatness of His power, the moral grandeur of His government, and the minuteness of His tender care, do all alike command the wonder and the worship of our hearts.

Christian reader, see that you make your own of all these things.

- Seek to live nearer to God in your daily walk.
- Lean more upon Him.
- Use Him more.
- Go to Him in all your need,

and you will never have to tell your need to a poor fellow-mortal.

“My God shall supply all your need, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

- What a source – **“God”!**
- What a standard – **“His riches in glory”!**
- What a channel – **“Christ Jesus”!**

It is your sweet privilege to place all your need over against His riches, and lose sight of the former in the presence of the latter. His exhaustless treasury is thrown open to you, in all the love of His heart; go and draw upon it, in the artless simplicity of faith, and you will never have occasion to look to a creature-stream or lean on a creature-prop.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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