

# NOTES ON THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

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## CHAPTER ONE

**“THESE be the words which Moses spake unto all Israel on this side Jordan in the wilderness, in the plain over against the Red Sea, between Paran, and Tophel, and Laban, and Hazeroth, and Dizahab. (There are eleven days’ journey from Horeb, by the way of Mount Seir, unto Kadesh-barnea).”**

The inspired writer is careful to give us, in the most precise manner, all the bearings of the place in which the words of this book were spoken in the ears of the people.

Israel had not yet crossed the Jordan; they were just beside it, and over against the Red Sea where the mighty power of God had been so gloriously displayed nearly forty years before. The whole position is described with a minuteness which shows how thoroughly God entered into everything that concerned His people.

He was interested in all their movements and in all their ways. He kept a faithful record of all their encampments. There was not a single circumstance connected with them, however trifling, beneath His gracious notice. He attended to everything. His eye rested continually on that assembly as a whole, and on each member in particular. By day and by night He watched over them. Every stage of their journey was under His immediate and most gracious superintendence. There was nothing, however small, beneath His notice; nothing, however great, beyond His power.

Thus it was with Israel in the wilderness of old, and thus it is with the Church now – the Church as a whole, and each member in particular.

A Father’s eye rests upon us continually, His everlasting arms are around and underneath us day and night. **“He withdraweth not His eyes from the righteous.”**

- He counts the hairs of our heads, and enters, with infinite goodness, into every thing that concerns us.
- He has charged Himself with all our wants and all our cares.
- He would have us to cast our every care on Him, in the sweet assurance that He careth for us.
- He most graciously invites us to roll our every burden over on Him, be it great or small.

All this is truly wonderful. It is full of deepest consolation. It is eminently calculated to tranquilize the heart, come what may.

The question is, Do we believe it? are our hearts governed by the faith of it? Do we really believe that the almighty Creator and Upholder of all things, who bears up the pillars of the universe, has graciously undertaken to do for us all the journey through? Do we thoroughly believe that **“the Possessor of heaven and earth”** is our Father? and that He has charged Himself with all our wants from first to last?

Is our whole moral being under the commanding power of those words of the inspired apostle, **“He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”**

Alas! it is to be feared that we know but little of the power of these grand yet simple truths. We talk about them, we discuss them, we profess them, we give a nominal assent to them; but with all this, we prove, in our daily life-in the actual details of our personal history, how feebly we enter into them.

If we truly believed that our God has charged Himself with all our necessities – if we were finding all our springs in Him – if He were a perfect covering for our eyes and a resting-place for our hearts, could we possibly be looking to poor creature-streams, which so speedily dry up and disappoint our hearts? We do not and cannot believe it.

It is one thing to hold the theory of the life of faith, and another thing altogether to live that life.

We constantly deceive ourselves with the notion that we are living by faith, when in reality we are leaning on some human prop, which sooner or later is sure to give way. Reader, is it not so?

Are we not constantly prone to forsake the Fountain of living waters, and hew out for ourselves broken cisterns, which can hold no water? And yet we speak of living by faith!

We profess to be looking only to the living God for the supply of our need, whatever that need may be, when, in point of fact, we are sitting beside some creature-stream and looking for something there. Need we wonder if we are disappointed? How could it possibly be otherwise? Our God will not have us dependent upon aught or anyone but Himself.

He has, in manifold places in His Word, given us His judgment as to the true character and sure result of all creature-confidence.

Take the following most solemn passage from the prophet Jeremiah: **“Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited.”**

And then mark the contrast – **“Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is: for he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.”** (Jeremiah 17:5-8).

Here we have, in language divinely forcible, clear, and beautiful, both sides of this most weighty subject put before us.

Creature-confidence brings a certain curse; it can only issue in barrenness and desolation. God, in very faithfulness, will cause every human stream to dry up – every human prop to give way, in order that we may learn the utter folly of turning away from Him.

What figure could be more striking or impressive than those used in the above passage?

- **“A heath in the desert,”**
- **“parched places in the wilderness,”**
- **“a salt land not inhabited.”**

Such are the figures used by the Holy Ghost to illustrate all mere human dependence – all confidence in man.

But on the other hand, what can be more lovely or more refreshing than the figures used to set forth the deep blessedness of simple trust in the Lord?

- **“A tree planted by the waters,”**
- **“spreading out her roots by the rivers,”**

the leaf ever green, the fruit never ceasing. Perfectly beautiful!

Thus it is with the man who trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is.

- He is nourished by those eternal springs that flow from the heart of God.
- He drinks at the Fountain, life-giving and free.
- He finds all his resources in the living God.
- There may be **“heat,”** but he does not see it;
- **“the year of drought”** may come, but he is not careful.

Ten thousand creature-streams may dry up, but he does not perceive it, because he is not dependent upon them; he abides hard by the ever-gushing Fountain. He can never want any good thing.

He lives by faith. And here, while speaking of the life of faith – that most blessed life, let us clearly understand what it is, and carefully see that we are living it.

We sometimes hear this life spoken of in a way by no means intelligent. It is not infrequently applied to the mere matter of trusting God for food and raiment. Certain persons who happen to have no visible source of temporal supplies – no settled income – no property of any kind, are singled out and spoken of as **“living by faith,”** as if that marvelous and glorious life had no higher sphere or wider range than temporal things – the mere supply of our bodily wants.

Now, we cannot too strongly protest against this most unworthy view of the life of faith. It limits its sphere and lowers its range in a manner perfectly intolerable to anyone who understands aught of its most holy and precious mysteries. Can we for a moment admit that a Christian who happens to have a settled income of any kind is to be deprived of the privilege of living by faith?

Or, further, can we permit that life to be limited and lowered to the mere matter of trusting God for the supply of our bodily wants? Does it soar no higher than food and raiment? Does it give no more elevated thought of God than that He will not let us starve or go naked?

Far away, and away forever, be the unworthy thought! The life of faith must not be so treated.

We cannot allow such a gross dishonor to be offered to it, or such a grievous wrong done to those who are called to live it. What, we would ask, is the meaning of those few but weighty words, "**The just shall live by faith**"?

- They occur, first of all, in Habakkuk 2.
- They are quoted by the apostle in Romans 1, where he is, with a master-hand, laying the solid foundations of Christianity.
- He quotes them again in Galatians 3, where he is, with intense anxiety, recalling those bewitched assemblies to those solid foundations which they, in their folly, were abandoning.
- Finally, he quotes them again in chapter 10 of his Epistle to the Hebrews, where he is warning his brethren against the danger of casting away their confidence and giving up the race.

From all this we may assuredly gather the immense importance and practical value of the brief but far-reaching sentence, "**The just shall live by faith.**" But to whom does it apply?

Is it only for a few of the Lord's servants, here and there, who happen to have no settled income? We utterly reject the thought.

It applies to every one of the Lord's people. It is the high and happy privilege of all who come under the title – that blessed title, "**The just.**"

We consider it a very grave error to limit it in any way.

The moral effect of such limitation is most injurious. It gives undue prominence to one department of the life of faith which, if any distinction be allowable, we should judge to be the very lowest. But in reality, there should be no distinction: the life of faith is one.

Faith is the grand principle of the divine life from first to last.

- by faith we are justified, and
- by faith we live;
- by faith we stand, and
- by faith we walk.

From the starting-post to the goal of the Christian course it is all by faith.

Hence, therefore it is a serious mistake to single out certain persons who trust the Lord for temporal supplies, and speak of them as living by faith, as if they alone did so. And not only so, but such persons are held up to the gaze of the Church of God as something wonderful; and the great mass of Christians are led to think that the privilege of living by faith lies entirely beyond their range. In short, they are led into a complete mistake as to the real character and sphere of the life of faith, and thus they suffer materially in the inner life.

Let the Christian reader, then, distinctly understand that it is his happy privilege, whoever he be or whatever be his position, to live a life of faith, in all the depth and fullness of that word.

He may, according to his measure, take up the language of the blessed apostle, and say, "**The life that I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.**"

Let nothing rob him of this high and holy privilege which belongs to every member of the household of faith. Alas! we fail. Our faith is weak, when it ought to be strong, bold, and vigorous. Our God delights in a bold faith. If we study the gospels, we shall see that nothing so refreshed and delighted the heart of Christ as a fine bold faith – a faith that understood Him and drew largely upon Him.

Look, for example, at the Syrophenician in Mark 7, and the centurion in Luke 7.

True, He could meet a weak faith – the very weakest. He could meet an "**If Thou wilt**" with a gracious "**I will**" – an "**If Thou canst**" with "**If thou canst believe, all things are possible.**" The faintest look, the feeblest touch, was sure to meet with a gracious response; but the Saviour's heart was gratified and His spirit refreshed when He could say, "**O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt;**" and again, "**I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.**"

Let us remember this.

We may rest assured it is the very same to-day as when our blessed Lord was here amongst men. He loves to be trusted, to be used, to be drawn upon.

We can never go too far in counting on the love of His heart or the strength of His hand.

- There is nothing too small, nothing too great for Him;
- He has all power in Heaven and on earth;
- He is head over all things to His Church;
- He holds the universe together;
- He upholds all things by the word of His power.

Philosophers talk of the forces and laws of nature: the Christian thinks with delight of Christ, His hand, His Word, His mighty power. By Him all things were created, and by Him all things consist.

And then His love!

What rest, what comfort, what joy, to know and remember that the almighty Creator and Upholder of the universe is the everlasting Lover of our souls! that He loves us perfectly; that His eye is ever upon us, His heart ever toward us; that He has charged Himself with all our wants, whatever these wants may be – whether physical, mental, or spiritual! There is not a single thing within the entire range of our necessities that is not treasured up for us in Christ. He is Heaven's treasury – God's storehouse, and all this for us.

Why, then, should we ever turn to another? Why should we ever, directly or indirectly, make known our wants to a poor fellow-mortal? Why not go straight to Jesus?

- Do we want sympathy? Who can sympathize with us like our most merciful High-Priest, who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities?
- Do we want help of any kind? Who can help us like our almighty Friend, the Possessor of unsearchable riches?
- Do we want counselor guidance? Who can give it like the blessed One who is the very wisdom of God, and who is made of God unto us wisdom?

Oh, let us not wound His loving heart, and dishonor His glorious name by turning away from Him. Let us jealously watch against the tendency so natural to us to cherish human hopes, creature-confidences, and earthly expectations. Let us abide hard by the Fountain, and we shall never have to complain of the streams. In a word, let us seek to live by faith, and thus glorify God in our day and generation.

We shall now proceed with our chapter; and in so doing, we would call the reader's attention to verse 2. It is certainly a very remarkable parenthesis.

**“(There are eleven days' journey from Horeb, by the way of Mount Seir, unto Kadesh-barnea).”**

Eleven days! and yet it took them forty years! How was this? Alas! we need not travel far for the answer.

It is only too like ourselves. How slowly we get over the ground! What windings and turnings! How often we have to go back and travel over the same ground again and again! We are slow travelers, because we are slow learners. It may be we feel disposed to marvel how Israel could have taken forty years to accomplish a journey of eleven days; but we may, with much greater reason, marvel at ourselves.

We, like them, are kept back by our unbelief and slowness of heart; but there is far less excuse for us than for them, inasmuch as our privileges are so very much higher.

Some of us have much reason to be ashamed of the time we spend over our lessons. The words of the blessed apostle do but too forcibly apply to us:

**“For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.”**

Our God is a faithful and wise as well as a gracious and patient Teacher.

He will not permit us to pass cursorily over our lessons. Sometimes, perhaps, we think we have mastered a lesson, and we attempt to move on to another; but our wise Teacher knows better, and He sees the need of deeper ploughing. He will not have us mere theorists or smatterers: He will keep us, if need be, year after year at our scales until we learn to sing.

Now, while it is very humbling to us to be so slow in learning, it is very gracious of Him to take such pains with us, in order to make us sure. We have to bless Him for His mode of teaching as for all beside – for the wonderful patience with which He sits down with us over the same lesson again and again, in order that we may learn it thoroughly. \*

**\* The journey of Israel from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea illustrates but too forcibly the history of many souls in the matter of finding peace. Many of the Lord’s beloved people go on for years, doubting and fearing, never knowing the blessedness of the liberty wherewith Christ makes His people free. It is most distressing, to anyone who really cares for souls, to see the sad condition in which some are kept all their days, through legality, bad teaching, false manuals of devotion, and such like. It is a rare thing nowadays to find in Christendom a soul fully established in the peace of the Gospel. It is considered a good thing – a sign of humility – to be always doubting. Confidence is looked upon as presumption. In short, things are turned completely upside down. The Gospel is not known: souls are under law instead of under grace, – they are kept at a distance instead of being taught to draw nigh. Much of the religion of the day is a deplorable mixture of Christ and self, law and grace, faith and works. Souls are kept in a perfect muddle all their days.**

**Surely these things demand the grave consideration of all who occupy the responsible place of teachers and preachers in the professing church. There is a solemn day approaching, when all such will be called to render an account of their ministry.**

**“And it came to pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first day of the month, that Moses spake unto the children of Israel, according unto all that the Lord had given him in commandment unto them” (Ver. 3).**

These few words contain a volume of weighty instruction for every servant of God – for all who are called to minister in the Word and doctrine. Moses gave the people just what he himself had received from God – nothing more, nothing less. He brought them into direct contact with the living Word of the Lord. This is the grand principle of ministry at all times. Nothing else is of any real value.

The Word of God is the only thing that will stand. There is divine power and authority in it. All mere human teaching, however interesting – however attractive at the time, will pass away and leave the soul without any foundation to rest upon.

Hence it should be the earnest, jealous care of all who minister in the assembly of God, to preach the Word in all its purity, in all its simplicity; to give it to the people as they get it from God; to bring them face to face with the veritable language of Holy Scripture. Thus will their ministry tell, with living power, on the hearts and consciences of their hearers. It will link the soul with God Himself, by means of the Word, and impart a depth and solidity which no human teaching can ever produce.

Look at the blessed apostle Paul. Hear him express himself on this weighty subject, – **“And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling, And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.”** What was the object of all this fear and trembling? **“That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”** (I Corinthians 2:1-5).

This true-hearted faithful servant of Christ sought only to bring the souls of his hearers into direct personal contact with God Himself. He sought not to link them with Paul. **“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed?”**

All false ministry has for its object the attaching of souls to itself. Thus the minister is exalted, God IS shut out, and the soul left without any divine foundation to rest upon. True ministry, on the contrary, as seen in Paul and Moses, has for its blessed object the attaching of the soul to God. Thus the minister gets his true place – simply an instrument, God is exalted, and the soul established on a sure foundation which can never be moved. But let us hear a little more from our apostle on this most weighty subject.

**“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received”** – nothing more, nothing less, nothing different – **“how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”**

This is uncommonly fine. It demands the serious consideration of all who would be true and effective ministers of Christ. The apostle was careful to allow the pure stream to flow down from its living source – the heart of God, into the souls of the Corinthians. He felt that nothing else was of any value, If he had sought to link them on to himself, he would have sadly dishonored his Master, done them a grievous wrong, and he himself would most assuredly suffer loss in the day of Christ. But no; Paul knew better. He would not, for worlds, lead any to build upon himself. Hear what he says to his much-loved Thessalonians. – **“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when, ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”** (I Thessalonians 2:13).



We feel solemnly responsible to commend this grave and important point to the serious consideration of the Church of God.

If all the professed ministers of Christ were to follow the example of Moses and Paul, in reference to the matter now before us, we should witness a very different condition of things in the professing church. But the plain and serious fact is, that the Church of God, like Israel of old, has wholly departed from the authority of His Word.

Go where you will, and you find things done and taught which have no foundation in Scripture. Things are not only tolerated but sanctioned and stoutly defended which are in direct opposition to the mind of Christ.

If you ask for the divine authority for this, that, and the other institution or practice, you will be told that Christ has not given us directions as to matters of church government; that in all questions of ecclesiastical polity, clerical orders, and liturgical services, He has left us free to act according to our consciences, judgment, or religious feelings; that it is simply absurd to demand a **“Thus saith the Lord”** for all the details connected with our religious institutions: there is a broad margin left to be filled up according to our national customs and our peculiar habits of thought. It is considered that professing Christians are left perfectly free to form themselves into so-called churches, to choose their own form of government, to make their own arrangements, and to appoint their own office-bearers.

Now the question which the Christian reader has to consider is, “Are these things so?” Can it be that our Lord Christ has left His Church without guidance as to matters so interesting and momentous? Can it be possible that the Church of God is worse off, in the matter of instruction and authority, than Israel?

In our studies on the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, we have seen (for who could help seeing?) the marvelous pains which the Lord took to instruct His people as to the most minute particulars connected with their public worship and private life. As to the tabernacle, the temple, the priesthood, the ritual, the various feasts and sacrifices, the periodical solemnities, the months, the days, the very hours, all was ordered and settled with divine precision. Nothing was left to mere human arrangement.

Man’s wisdom, his judgment, his reason, his conscience, had nothing whatever to do in the matter. Had it been left to man, how should we ever have had that admirable, profound, and far-reaching typical system which the inspired pen of Moses has set before us? If Israel had been allowed to do what (as some would fain persuade us) the Church is allowed, what confusion, what strife, what division, what endless sects and parties, would have been the inevitable result!

But it was not so. The Word of God settled everything.

**“As the Lord commanded Moses.”** – This grand and influential sentence was appended to everything that Israel had to do, and to everything they were not to do. Their national institutions and their domestic habits – their public and their private life, all came under the commanding authority of **“Thus saith the Lord.”**

There was no occasion for any member of the congregation to say, I cannot see this, or, I cannot go with that, or, I cannot agree with the other. Such language could only be regarded as the fruit of self-will. He might just as well say, I cannot agree with the Lord. And why? Simply because the Word of God had spoken as to everything, and that, too, with a clearness and simplicity which left no room whatever for human discussion.

Throughout the whole of the Mosaic economy there was not the breadth of a hair of margin left in which to insert the opinion or the judgment of man. It pertained not to man to add the weight of a feather to that vast system of types and shadows which had been planned by the divine mind, and set forth in language so plain and pointed, that all Israel had to do was to obey – not to argue, not to reason, not to discuss, but to obey.

Alas! alas! they failed, as we know. They did their own will: they took their own way; they did “**every man that which was right in his own eyes.**” They departed from the Word of God, and followed the imaginations and devices of their own evil heart, and brought upon themselves the wrath and indignation of offended Deity, under which they suffer till this day, and shall yet suffer unexampled tribulation.

But all this leaves untouched the point on which we are just now dwelling.

Israel had the oracles of God, and these oracles were divinely sufficient for their guidance in everything. There was no room left for the commandments and doctrines of men.

The Word of the Lord provided for every possible exigency, and that Word was so plain as to render human comment needless.

- Is the Church of God worse off, as regards guidance and authority, than Israel of old?
- Are Christians left to think and arrange for themselves in the worship and service of God?
- Are there any questions left open for human discussion?
- Is the Word of God sufficient, or is it not?
- Has it left anything unprovided for?

Let us hearken diligently to the following powerful testimony: “**All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is 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 is perfectly conclusive. Holy Scripture contains all that the man of God can possibly require to make him perfect, to equip him thoroughly for everything that can be called a “**good work.**”

And if this be true as to the man of God individually, it is equally true as to the Church of God collectively. Scripture is all-sufficient – for each, for all.

Thank God that it is so!

What a signal mercy to have a divine guide-book! Were it not so, what should we do? whither should we turn? what would become of us? If we were left to human tradition and human arrangement in the things of God, what hopeless confusion! what clashing of opinions! what conflicting judgments! And all this of necessity, inasmuch as one man would have quite as good a right as another to put forth his opinion and to suggest his plan.

We shall perhaps be told that, notwithstanding our possession of the Holy Scripture, we have, nevertheless, sects, parties, creeds, and schools of thought almost innumerable. But why is this? Simply because we refuse to submit our whole moral being to the authority of Holy Scripture. This is the real secret of the matter – the true source of all those sects and parties which are the shame and sorrow of the Church of God.

It is vain for men to tell us that these things are good in themselves – that they are the legitimate fruit of that free exercise of thought and private judgment which form the very boast and glory of Protestant Christianity.

We do not and cannot believe for a moment that such a plea will stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. We believe, on the contrary, that this very boasted freedom of thought and independence of judgment are in direct opposition to that spirit of profound and reverent obedience which is due to our adorable Lord and Master. What right has a servant to exercise his private judgment in the face of his master's plainly expressed will? None whatever. The duty of a servant is simply to obey – not to reason or to question, but to do what he is told. He fails, as a servant, just in so far as he exercises his own private judgment.

The most lovely moral trait in a servant's character is implicit, unquestioning, and unqualified obedience. The one grand business of a servant is to do his master's will.

All this will be fully admitted in human affairs; but in the things of God, men think themselves entitled to exercise their private judgment.

It is a fatal mistake.

God has given us His Word; and that Word is so plain, that wayfaring men, though fools, need not err therein. Hence, therefore, if we were all guided by that Word,- if we were all to bow down in a spirit of unquestioning obedience to its divine authority, there could not be conflicting opinions and opposing sects. It is quite impossible that the voice of Holy Scripture can teach opposing doctrines.

It cannot possibly teach one man Episcopacy; another, Presbyterianism; and another, Independency. It cannot possibly furnish a foundation for opposing schools of thought. It would be a positive insult offered to the divine volume to attempt to attribute to it all the sad confusion of the professing church. Every pious mind must recoil, with just horror, from such an impious thought.

Scripture cannot contradict itself; and therefore if two men or ten thousand men are exclusively taught by Scripture, they will think alike.

Hear what the blessed apostle says to the church at Corinth – says to us, **“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (mark the mighty moral force of this appeal) **“that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.”**

Now the question is, how was this most blessed result to be reached?

Was it by each one exercising the right of private judgment? Alas! it was this very thing that gave birth to all the division and contention in the assembly at Corinth, and drew forth the sharp rebuke of the Holy Ghost. Those poor Corinthians thought they had a right to think and judge and choose for themselves, and what was the result? **“It hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that everyone of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided?”**

Here we have private judgment and its sad fruit – its necessary fruit.

One man has quite as good a right to think for himself as another; and no man has any right whatsoever to force his opinion upon his fellow. Where, then, lies the remedy? In flinging to the winds our private judgments, and reverently submitting ourselves to the supreme and absolute authority of Holy Scripture.

If it be not thus, how could the apostle beseech the Corinthians to **“speak the same thing, and to be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment”**? Who was to prescribe the **“thing”** that all were to **“speak”**? In whose **“mind”** or whose **“judgment”** were all to be **“perfectly joined together”**?

Had any one member of the assembly, however gifted or intelligent, the slightest shadow of a right to set forth what his brethren were to speak, to think, or to judge? Most certainly not. There was one absolute, because divine, authority to which all were bound, or rather privileged, to submit themselves.

Human opinions, man’s private judgment, his conscience, his reason – all these things must go for what they are worth; and most assuredly they are perfectly worthless as authority.

The Word of God is the only authority; and if we are all governed by that, we shall **“all speak the same thing,”** and **“there will be no divisions among us;”** but we shall **“be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.”**

Lovely condition! But, alas! it is not the present condition of the Church of God; and therefore it is perfectly evident that we are not all governed by the one supreme, absolute, and all-sufficient authority – the voice of Holy Scripture – that most blessed voice that can never utter one discordant note – a voice ever divinely harmonious to the circumcised ear.

Here lies the root of the whole matter.

The Church has departed from the authority of Christ, as set forth in His Word.

Until this is seen, it is only lost time to discuss the claims of conflicting systems, ecclesiastical or theological. If a man does not see that it is his sacred duty to test every ecclesiastical system, every liturgical service, and every theological creed by the Word of God, discussion is perfectly useless. If it be allowable to settle things according to expediency – according to man’s judgment, his conscience, or his reason, then verily we may as well at once give up the case as hopeless.

If we have no divinely-settled authority – no perfect standard – no infallible guide, we cannot see how it is possible for anyone to possess the certainty that he is treading in the true path. If indeed it be true that we are left to choose for ourselves, amid the almost countless paths which lie around us, then farewell to all certainty – farewell to peace of mind and rest of heart – farewell to all Holy stability of purpose and fixedness of aim.

If we cannot say of the ground we occupy, of the path we pursue, and of the work in which we are engaged, “**This is the thing which the Lord hath commanded,**” we may rest assured we are in a wrong position, and the sooner we abandon it the better.

Thank God, there is no necessity whatever for His child or His servant to continue for one hour in connection with what is wrong. “**Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.**”

But how are we to know what is iniquity? By the Word of God.

Whatever is contrary to Scripture, whether in morals or in doctrines, is iniquity, and I must depart from it, cost what it may. It is an individual matter.-”**Let every one**” – “**He that hath ears**” – “**He that overcometh**” – “**If any man hear My voice.**”

Here is the point. Let us mark it well.

It is Christ’s voice.

- It is not the voice of this good man or that good man;
- It is not the voice of the church,
- It is not the voice of the fathers,
- It is not the voice of general councils,
- But the voice of our own beloved Lord and Master.

It is the individual conscience in direct, living contact with the voice of Christ – the living, eternal Word of God – the Holy Scriptures. Were it merely a question of human conscience or judgment or authority, we are at once plunged in hopeless uncertainty, inasmuch as what one man might judge to be iniquity, another might consider to be perfectly right. There must be some fixed standard to go by – some supreme authority from which there can be no appeal; and, blessed be God, there is.

God has spoken; He has given us His Word; and it is at once our bounden duty, our high privilege, our moral security, our true enjoyment, to obey that Word.

Not man's interpretation of the Word, but the Word itself.

This is all-important. We must have nothing – absolutely nothing between the human conscience and divine revelation. Men talk to us about the authority of the church. Where are we to find it?

Suppose a really anxious, earnest, honest soul, longing to know the true way. He is told to listen to the voice of the church. He asks, Which church? Is it the Greek, Latin, Anglican, or Scotch church? Not two of them agree. Nay, more; there are conflicting parties, contending sects, opposing schools of thought, in one and the self-same body. Councils have differed, fathers have disagreed, popes have anathematized one another. In the Anglican Establishment, we have high-church, low-church, and broad-church, each differing from the rest. In the Scotch or Presbyterian church, we have the Established church, the United Presbyterian, and the Free church. And then if the anxious inquirer turns away in hopeless perplexity from those great bodies, in order to seek guidance amid the ranks of Protestant dissenters, is he likely to fare any better? Ah! Reader, it is perfectly hopeless.

The whole professing church has revolted from the authority of Christ, and cannot possibly be a guide or an authority for anyone.

In the second and third chapters of the book of Revelation, the church is seen under judgment, and the appeal, seven times repeated, is, “**He that hath an ear, let him hear**” – what? The voice of the church? Impossible! The Lord could never direct us to hear the voice of that which is itself under judgment. Hear what, then? “**Let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.**”

And where is this voice to be heard? Only in the Holy Scriptures, given of God, in His infinite goodness, to guide our souls in the way of peace and truth, notwithstanding the hopeless ruin of the church, and the thick darkness and wild confusion of baptized Christendom – It lies not within the compass of human language to set forth the value and importance of having a divine and therefore an infallible and all-sufficient guide and authority for our individual path.

But be it remembered, we are solemnly responsible to bow to that authority, and follow that guide. It is utterly vain, indeed morally dangerous, to profess to have a divine guide and authority unless we are thoroughly subject thereto. This it was that characterized the Jews in the days of our Lord. They had the Scriptures, but they did not obey them. And one of the saddest features in the present condition of Christendom is its boasted possession of the Bible, while the authority of that Bible is boldly set aside.

We deeply feel the solemnity of this, and would earnestly press it upon the conscience of the Christian reader. The Word of God is virtually ignored amongst us. Things are practiced and sanctioned, on all hands, which not only have no foundation in Scripture, but are diametrically opposed to it. We are not exclusively taught and absolutely governed by Scripture.

All this is most serious, and demands the attention of all the Lord's people in every place. We feel compelled to raise a warning note in the ears of all Christians in reference to this most weighty subject. Indeed, it is the sense of its gravity, and vast moral importance that has led us to enter upon the service of writing these "*Notes on the book of Deuteronomy.*"

It is our earnest prayer that the Holy Ghost may use these pages to recall the hearts of the Lord's dear people to their true and proper place – even the place of reverent allegiance to His blessed Word.

We feel persuaded that what will characterize all those who will walk devotedly in the closing hour's of the Church's earthly history will be profound reverence for the Word of God, and genuine attachment to the Person of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The two things are inseparably bound together by a sacred and imperishable link.

**"The Lord Our God spake unto us in Horeb, saying, 'Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount: turn you, and take your journey, and go to the mount of the Amorites, and unto all the places nigh thereunto, in the plain, in the hills, and in the vale, and in the south, and by the sea-side, to the land of the Canaanites, and unto Lebanon, unto the great river, the river Euphrates.'"** (Ver. 6, 7).

We shall find, throughout the whole of the book of Deuteronomy, the Lord dealing much more directly and simply with the people than in any of the three preceding books; so far is it from being true that Deuteronomy is a mere repetition of what has passed before us in previous sections.

For instance, in the passage just quoted there is no mention of the movement of the cloud – no reference to the sound of the trumpet.

**"The Lord our God spake unto us."**

We know, from the book of Numbers, that the movements of the camp were governed by the movements of the cloud, as communicated by the sound of the trumpet. But neither the trumpet nor the cloud is alluded to in this book. It is much more simple and familiar. **"The Lord our God spake unto us in Horeb, saying, 'Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount.'** "

This is very beautiful. It reminds us somewhat of the lovely simplicity of patriarchal times, when the Lord spake unto the fathers as a man speaketh to his friend. It was not by the sound of a trumpet, or by the movement of a cloud, that the Lord communicated His mind to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He was so very near to them that there was no need, no room for an agency characterized by ceremony and distance. He visited them, sat with them, partook of their hospitality, in all the intimacy of personal friendship.

Such is the lovely simplicity of the order of things in patriarchal times; and this it is which imparts a peculiar charm to the narratives of the book of Genesis.

But in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers we have something quite different. There, we have set before us a vast system of types and shadows, rites, ordinances, and ceremonies, imposed on the people for the time being, the import of which is unfolded to us in the Epistle to the Hebrews. – **“The Holy Ghost thus signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing; which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation”** (Hebrews 9:8-10).

Under this system, the people were at a distance from God. It was not with them as it had been with their fathers in the book of Genesis. God was shut in from them, and they were shut out from Him.

The leading features of the Levitical ceremonial, so far as the people were concerned, were bondage, darkness, distance; but on the other hand, its types and shadows pointed forward to that one great Sacrifice which is the foundation of all God’s marvelous counsels and purposes, and by which He can, in perfect righteousness, and according to all the love of His heart, have a people near unto Himself, to the praise of the glory of His grace, throughout the golden ages of eternity.

Now, it has been already remarked, we shall find in Deuteronomy comparatively little of rites and ceremonies.

The Lord is seen more in direct communication with the people; and even the priests, in their official capacity, come rarely before us; and if they are referred to, it is very much more in a moral than in a ceremonial way. Of this we shall have ample proof as we pass along; it is a marked feature of this beautiful book.

**“The Lord our God spake unto us in Horeb, saying, ‘Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount: turn you, and take your journey, and go to the mount of the Amorites.’”**

What a rare privilege for any people to have the Lord so near to them, and so interested in all their movements and in all their concerns, great and small!

He knew how long they ought to remain in any one place, and whither they should next bend their steps. They had no need to harass themselves about their journeyings, or about any thing else. They were under the eye and in the hands of One whose wisdom was unerring, whose power was omnipotent, whose resources were inexhaustible, whose love was infinite, who had charged Himself with the care of them, who knew all their need, and was prepared to meet it, according to all the love of His heart and the strength of His holy arm. What, then, we may ask, remained for them to do? What was their plain and simple duty? Just to obey.

It was their high and holy privilege to rest in the love and obey the commandments of the Lord, their covenant God. Here lay the blessed secret of their peace, their happiness, and their moral security.



They had no need whatever to trouble themselves about their movements, no need of planning or arranging. Their journeyings were all ordered for them by One who knew every step of the way from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea, and they had just to live by the day, in happy dependence upon Him. Happy position! Privileged path! Blessed portion!

But it demanded a broken will, an obedient mind, a subject heart.

If when the Lord had said, “**Ye have compassed this mountain long enough,**” they, on the contrary, were to form the plan of compassing it a little longer, they would have had to compass it without Him. His companionship, His Counsel, and His aid could only be counted upon in the path of obedience.

Thus it was with Israel in their desert wanderings, and thus it is with us.

It is our most precious privilege to leave all our matters in the hands, not merely of a covenant God, but of a loving Father.

- He arranges our movements for us;
- He fixes the bounds of our habitation;
- He tells us how long to stay in a place, and where to go next.
- He has charged Himself with all our concerns, all our movements, all our wants.

His gracious word to us is, “**Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.**” And what then? “**The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.**”

But it may be the reader feels disposed to ask, How does God guide His people now? We cannot expect to hear His voice telling us when to move or where to go. To this we reply, at once, It cannot surely be that the members of the Church of God – the body of Christ – are worse off in the matter of divine guidance than Israel in the wilderness. Cannot God guide His children – cannot Christ guide His servants – in all their movements and in all their service? Who would think, for a moment, of calling in question a truth so plain and so precious?

True, we do not expect to hear a voice, or see the movement of a cloud; but we have what is very much better, very much higher, very much more intimate. We may rest assured our God has made ample provision for us in this, as in all beside, according to all the love of His heart.

Now, there are three ways in which we are guided:

- we are guided by the Word,
- we are guided by the Holy Ghost, and
- we are guided by the instincts of the divine nature.

And we have to bear in mind that the instincts of the divine nature, the leadings of the Holy Ghost, and the teaching of Holy Scripture will always harmonize.

This is of the utmost importance to keep before us.

A person might fancy himself to be led by the instincts of the divine nature, or by the HOLY SPIRIT, to pursue a certain line of action involving consequences at issue with the Word of God. Thus his mistake would be made apparent. It is a very serious thing for any one to act on mere impulse or impression. By so doing, he may fall into a snare of the devil, and do very serious damage to the cause of Christ.

We must calmly weigh our impressions in the balances of the sanctuary, and faithfully test them by the standard of the divine Word.

In this way we shall be preserved from error and delusion. It is a most dangerous thing to trust impressions or act on impulse.

We have seen the most disastrous consequences produced by so doing. Facts may be reliable. Divine authority is absolutely infallible. Our own impressions may prove as delusive as a will-o'-the-wisp, or a mirage of the desert: human feelings are most untrustworthy. We must ever submit them to the most severe scrutiny, lest they betray us into some fatally false line of action.

We can trust Scripture without a shadow of misgiving; and we shall find, without exception, that the man who is led by the Holy Ghost, or guided by the instincts of the divine nature, will never act in opposition to the Word of God. This is what we may call an axiom in the divine life – an established rule in practical Christianity. Would that it had been more attended to in all ages of the Church's history! Would that it were more pondered in our Own day!

But there is another point in this question of divine guidance which demands our serious attention. We not infrequently hear people speak of "*the finger of divine Providence*" as something to be relied upon for guidance. This may be only another mode of expressing the idea of being guided by circumstances, which, we do not hesitate to say, is very far indeed from being the proper kind of guidance for a Christian.

No doubt, our Lord may and does, at times, intimate His mind and indicate our path by His providence; but we must be sufficiently near to Him to be able to interpret the providence aright, else we may find that what is called "an opening of Providence" may actually prove an opening by which we slip off the holy path of obedience.

Surrounding Circumstances, just like our inward impressions, must be weighed in the presence of God, and judged by the light of His Word, else they may lead us into the most terrible mistakes. Jonah might have considered it a remarkable providence to find a ship going to Tarshish; but had he been in communion with God, he would not have needed a ship. In short, the Word of God is the one grand test and perfect touchstone for everything – for outward circumstances and inward impressions – for feelings, imaginations, and tendencies – all must be placed under the searching light of Holy Scripture and there calmly and seriously judged. This is the true path of safety, peace, and blessedness for every child of God.

It may, however, be said, in reply to all this, that we cannot expect to find a text of Scripture to guide us in the matter of our movements, or in the thousand little details of daily life. Perhaps not; but there are certain great principles laid down in Scripture, which, if properly applied, will afford divine guidance even where we might not be able to find a particular text.

And not only so, but we have the fullest assurance that our God can and does guide His children in all things.

- **“The steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord.”**
- **“The meek will He guide in judgment; and the meek will He teach His way.”**
- **“I will guide thee with Mine eye.”**

He can signify His mind to us as to this or that particular act or movement. If not, where are we? How are we to get on? How are we to regulate our movements? Are we to be drifted hither and thither by the tide of circumstances?

Are we left to blind chance, or to the mere impulse of our own will? Thank God, it is not so.

He can, in His own perfect way, give us the certainty of His mind in any given case; and without that certainty we should never move.

Our Lord Christ (all homage to His peerless name!) can intimate His mind to His servant as to where He would have him to go and what He would have him to do; and no true servant will ever think of moving or acting without such intimation. We should never act or move in uncertainty. If we are not sure, let us be quiet and wait. Very often it happens that we harass and fret ourselves about movements that God would not have us make at all.

A person once said to a friend, “I am quite at a loss to know which way to turn.” “Then, don’t turn at all,” was the friend’s wise reply. But here an all-important moral point comes in, and that is, our whole condition of soul. This, we may rest assured, has very much to do with the matter of guidance.

It is **“the meek He will guide in judgment, and teach His way.”** We must never forget this. If only we are humble and self-distrusting – if we wait on our God, in simplicity of heart, uprightness of mind, and honesty of purpose, He will most assuredly guide us. But it will never do to go and ask counsel of God in a matter about which our mind is made up, or our will is at work. This is a fatal delusion.

Look at the case of Jehoshaphat, in I Kings 22.- **“It came to pass in the third year, that Jehoshaphat the king of Judah came down to the king of Israel”** – a sad mistake, to begin with – **“And the king of Israel said unto his servants, ‘Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria?’ And he said unto Jehoshaphat, ‘Wilt thou go with me to battle to Ramoth-gilead?’ And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, ‘I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses; and, (as we have it in II Chronicles 18:3) we will be with thee in the war.’”**

Here we see that his mind was made up before ever he thought of asking counsel of God in the matter.

He was in a false position and a wrong atmosphere altogether. He had fallen into the snare of the enemy, through lack of singleness of eye, and hence he was not in a fit state to receive or profit by divine guidance. He was bent on his own will, and the Lord left him to reap the fruits of it; and but for infinite and sovereign mercy, he would have fallen by the sword of the Syrians, and been borne a corpse from the battlefield.

True, he did say to the king of Israel, **“Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord to-day.”** But where was the use of this, when he had already pledged himself to a certain line of action? What folly for anyone to make up his mind and then go and ask for counsel! Had he been in a right state of soul, he never would have sought counsel in such a case at all; but his state of soul was bad, his position false, and his purpose in direct opposition to the mind and will of God. Hence, although he heard, from the lips of the Lord’s messenger, His solemn judgment on the entire expedition, yet he took his own way, and well-nigh lost his life in consequence.

We see the same thing in the forty-second chapter of Jeremiah.

The people applied to the prophet to ask counsel as to their going down into Egypt; but they had already made up their minds as to their course – they were bent on their own will. Miserable condition! Had they been meek and humble, they would not have needed to ask counsel in the matter; but they said unto Jeremiah the prophet, **“Let, we beseech thee, our supplication be accepted before thee, and pray for us unto the Lord thy God [Why not say, The Lord our God?] even for all this remnant; (for we are left but a few of many, as thine eyes do behold us:) that the Lord thy God may show us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do.’** Then Jeremiah the prophet said unto them, **‘I have heard you; behold, I will pray unto the Lord your God according to your words; and it shall come to pass, that whatsoever thing the Lord shall answer you, I will declare it unto you; I will keep nothing back from you.’** Then they said to Jeremiah, **‘The Lord be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for the which the Lord thy God shall send thee to us. Whether it be good, or whether it be evil [How could the will of God be aught but good?], we will obey the voice of the Lord our God, to whom we send thee; that it may be well with us, when we obey the voice of the Lord our God.’** “

Now, all this seemed very pious and very promising; but mark the sequel. When they found that the judgment and counsel of God did not tally with their will, **“then spake . . . all the proud men, saying unto Jeremiah, ‘Thou speakest falsely: the Lord our God hath not sent thee to say, Go not into Egypt to sojourn there.’** “

Here, the real state of the case comes clearly out.

Pride and self-will were at work; their vows and promises were false. **“Ye dissembled in your hearts,”** says Jeremiah, **“when ye sent me unto the Lord your God, saying, ‘Pray for us unto the Lord our God; and according unto all that the Lord our God shall say, so declare unto us, and we will do it.’** “

It would have been all very well had the divine response fallen in with their will in the matter; but inasmuch as it ran counter, they rejected it altogether.

How often is this the case!

The Word of God does not suit man's thoughts; it judges them, it stands in direct opposition to his will, it interferes with his plans, and hence he rejects it. The human will and human reason are ever in direct antagonism to the Word of God, and the Christian must refuse both the one and the other if he really desires to be divinely guided.

An unbroken will and blind reason, if we listen to them, can only lead us into darkness, misery, and desolation.

- Jonah would go to Tarshish, when he ought to have gone to Nineveh; and the consequence was that he found himself **"in the belly of hell,"** with **"the weeds wrapped about his head."**

- Jehoshaphat would go to Ramoth-gilead, when he ought to have been at Jerusalem; and the consequence was that he found himself surrounded by the swords of the Syrians.

- The remnant, in the days of Jeremiah, would go into Egypt, when they ought to have remained at Jerusalem; and the consequence was that they died by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence in the land of Egypt, **"whither they desired to go and to sojourn."**

Thus it must ever be. The path of self-will is sure to be a path of darkness and misery; it cannot be otherwise: the path of obedience, on the contrary, is a path of peace, a path of light, a path of blessing, a path on which the beams of divine favor are ever poured in living lustre. It may, to the human eye, seem narrow, rough, and lonely; but the obedient soul finds it to be the path of life, peace, and moral security.

**"The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."**

Blessed path! May the writer and the reader ever be found treading it, with a steady step and earnest purpose.

Before turning from this great practical subject of divine guidance and human obedience, we must ask the reader to refer, for a few moments, to a very beautiful passage in the eleventh chapter of Luke. He will find it full of the most valuable instruction.

**"The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed, therefore, that the light which is in thee be not darkness. If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light" (Ver. 34-36).**

Nothing can exceed the moral force and beauty of this passage.

First of all, we have the “**single eye.**” This is essential to the enjoyment of divine guidance. It indicates a broken will – a heart honestly fixed upon doing the will of God. There is no under-current, no mixed motive, no personal end in view. There is the one simple desire and earnest purpose to do the will of God, whatever that will may be.

Now, when the soul is in this attitude, divine light comes streaming in and fills the whole body. Hence it follows that if the body is not full of light, the eye is not single; there is some mixed motive; self-will or self-interest is at work; we are not upright before God. In this case, any light which we profess to have is darkness; and there is no darkness so gross or so terrible as that judicial darkness which settles down upon the heart governed by self-will while professing to have light from God.

This will be seen in all its horrors by and by in Christendom, when “**that Wicked shall be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming; even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness**” (II Thessalonians 2:8-12).

How awful is this! How solemnly it speaks to the whole professing church! How solemnly it addresses the conscience of both the writer and the reader of these lines! Light not acted upon becomes darkness. – “**If the light which is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!**”

But on the other hand, a little light honestly acted upon is sure to increase; for “**to him that hath shall more be given,**” and “**the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.**”

This moral progress is beautifully and forcibly set forth in Luke 11:36 – “**If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark**” – no chamber kept closed against the heavenly rays – no dishonest reserve – the whole moral being laid open, in genuine simplicity, to the action of divine light; then “**the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light.**”

In a word, the obedient soul has not only light for his own path, but the light shines out, so that others see it, like the bright shining of a candle. “**Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.**”

We have a very vivid contrast to all this in the thirteenth chapter of Jeremiah – “**Give glory to the Lord your God, before He cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and while ye look for light, He turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness.**”

The way to give glory to the Lord our God is to obey His Word.

The path of duty is a bright and blessed path; and the one who, through grace, treads that path will never stumble on the dark mountains. The truly humble, the lowly, the self-distrusting, will keep far away from those dark mountains, and walk in that blessed path which is ever illuminated by the bright and cheering beams of God's approving countenance.

This is the path of the just, the path of heavenly wisdom, the path of perfect peace. May we ever be found treading it, beloved reader; and let us never, for one moment, forget that it is our high privilege to be divinely guided in the most minute details of our daily life. Alas! for the one who is not so guided. He will have many a stumble, many a fall, many a sorrowful experience.

If we are not guided by our Father's eye, we shall be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle,- like the horse, impetuously rushing where he ought not, or the mule, obstinately refusing to go where he ought.

How sad for a Christian to be like these!

How blessed to move, from day to day, in the path marked out for us by our Father's eye! – a path which the vulture's eye hath not seen, or the lion's whelp trodden; the path of holy obedience; the path in which the meek and lowly will ever be found, to their deep joy, and the praise and glory of Him who has opened it for them and given them grace to tread it.

In the remainder of our chapter, Moses rehearses in the ears of the people, in language of touching simplicity, the facts connected with the appointment of the judges, and the mission of the spies.

#### The appointment of the judges

Moses here attributes to his own suggestion: the mission of the spies was the suggestion of the people. That dear and most honored servant of God felt the burden of the congregation too heavy for him; and assuredly it was very heavy; though we know well that the grace of God was amply sufficient for the demand, and, moreover, that that grace could act as well by one man as by seventy.

Still, we can well understand the difficulty felt by **“the meekest man in all the earth”** in reference to the responsibility of so grave and important a charge; and truly the language in which he states his difficulty is affecting in the highest degree.

We feel as though we must quote it for the reader.

**“And I spake unto you at that time, saying, ‘I am not able to bear you myself alone [Surely not; what mere mortal could? But God was there to be counted upon for exigence of every hour] the Lord your God hath multiplied you, and, behold, ye are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude.’ (The Lord God of your fathers make you a thousand times so many more as ye are, and bless you, as He hath promised you).”**

Lovely parenthesis! Exquisite breathing of a large and lowly heart!

**“How can I myself alone bear your cumbrance, and your burden, and your strife?”**

Alas! here lay the secret of much of the **“cumbrance”** and the **“burden.”**

They could not agree among themselves, – there were controversies, contentions, and questions; and who was sufficient for these things? what human shoulder could sustain such a burden? How different it might have been with them! Had they walked lovingly together, there would have been no cases to decide, and therefore no need of judges to decide them. If each member of the congregation had sought the prosperity, the interest, and the happiness of his brethren, there would have been no **“strife,”** no **“cumbrance,”** no **“burden.”**

If each had done all that in him lay to promote the common good, how lovely would have been the result!

But, ah! it was not so with Israel in the desert; and, what is still more humbling, it is not so in the Church of God, although our privileges are so much higher.

Hardly had the assembly been formed by the presence of the Holy Ghost ere the accents of murmuring and discontent were heard. And about what? About **“neglect,”** whether fancied or real. Whatever way it was, self was at work. If the neglect was merely imaginary, the Grecians were to blame; and if it was real, the Hebrews were to blame.

It generally happens, in such cases, that there are faults on both sides; but the true way to avoid all strife, contention, and murmuring is to put self in the dust and earnestly seek the good of others. Had this excellent way been understood and adopted, from the outset, what a different task the ecclesiastical historian would have had to perform! But, alas! it has not been adopted; and hence the history of the professing church, from the very beginning, has been a deplorable and humiliating record of controversy, division, and strife.

In the very presence of the Lord Himself, whose whole life was one of complete self-surrender, the apostles disputed about who should be greatest.

Such a dispute could never have arisen had each known the exquisite secret of putting self in the dust and seeking the good of others. No one who knows aught of the true moral elevation of self-emptiness could possibly seek a good or a great place for himself. Nearness to Christ so satisfies the lowly heart, that honors, distinctions, and rewards are little accounted of; but where self is at work, there you will have envy and jealousy, strife and contention, confusion and every evil work.

Witness the scene between the two sons of Zebedee and their ten brethren, in the tenth chapter of Mark. What was at the bottom of it? Self. The two were thinking of a good place for themselves in the kingdom, and the ten were angry with the two for thinking of any such thing.



Had each set self aside, and sought the good of others, such a scene would never have been enacted, – the two would not have been thinking about themselves, and hence there would have been no ground for the “indignation “ of the ten.

But it is needless to multiply examples.

Every age of the church’s history illustrates and proves the truth of our statement that self and its odious workings are the producing cause of strife, contention, and division, always. Turn where you will – from the days of the apostles down to the days in which our lot is cast, and you will find unmortified self to be the fruitful source of strife and schism; and on the other hand, you will find that to sink self and its interests is the true secret of peace, harmony, and brotherly love.

If only we learn to set self aside, and seek earnestly the glory of Christ and the prosperity of His beloved people, we shall not have many “cases” to settle.

We must now return to our chapter.

**“How can I myself alone bear your cumbrance, and your burden, and your strife? Take you wise men, and understanding, and known among your tribes, and I will make them rulers over you. And ye answered me, and said, ‘The thing which thou hast spoken is good for us to do.’ So I took the chief of your tribes, wise men, and known”** – men fitted of God, and possessing, because entitled to the confidence of the congregation – **“and made them heads over you, captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, and captains over fifties, and captains over tens, and officers among your tribes.”**

Admirable arrangement!

If indeed it had to be made, nothing could be better adapted to the maintenance of order than the graduated scale of authority, varying from the captain of ten to the captain of a thousand; the lawgiver himself at the head of all, and he in immediate communication with the Lord God of Israel.

We have no allusion here to the fact recorded in Exodus 18, namely, that the appointment of those rulers was at the suggestion of Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law; neither have we any reference to the scene in Numbers 11. We call the reader’s attention to this as one of the many proofs which lie scattered along the pages of Deuteronomy that it is very far indeed from being a mere repetition of the preceding sections of the Pentateuch.

In short, this delightful book has a marked character of its own, and the mode in which facts are presented is in perfect keeping with that character.

It is very evident that the object of the venerable lawgiver, or rather of the Holy Ghost in him, was to bring everything to bear, in a moral way, upon the hearts of the people, in order to produce that one grand result which is the special object of the book from beginning to end, namely, a loving obedience to all the statutes and judgments of the Lord their God.

We must bear this in mind if we would study aright the book which lies open before us.

Infidels, skeptics, and rationalists may impiously suggest to us the thought of discrepancies in the various records given in the different books; but the pious reader will reject, with a holy indignation, every such suggestion, knowing that it emanates directly from the father of lies, the determined and persistent enemy of the precious revelation of God.

This, we feel persuaded, is the true way in which to deal with all infidel assaults upon the Bible. Argument is useless, inasmuch as infidels are not in a position to understand or appreciate its force; they are profoundly ignorant of the matter. Nor is it merely a question of profound ignorance, but of determined hostility; so that, in every way, the judgment of all infidel writers on the subject of divine inspiration is utterly worthless and perfectly contemptible.

We would pity and pray for the men, while we thoroughly despise and indignantly reject their opinions.

The Word of God is entirely above and beyond them. It is as perfect as its Author, and as imperishable as His throne; but its moral glories, its living depths, and its infinite perfections are only unfolded to faith and need. **“I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.”**

If we are only content to be as simple as a babe, we shall enjoy the precious revelation of a Father’s love, as given by His Spirit in the Holy Scriptures; but on the other hand, those who fancy themselves wise and prudent – who build upon their learning, their philosophy, and their reason – who think themselves competent to sit in judgment on the Word of God, and hence on God Himself, are given over to judicial darkness, blindness, and hardness of heart.

Thus it comes to pass that the most egregious folly and the most contemptible ignorance that man can display will be found in the pages of those learned writers who have dared to write against the Bible. **“Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe”** (I Corinthians 1:20, 21).

**“If any man will be wise, let him become a fool.”**

Here lies the grand moral secret of the matter. Man must get to the end of his own wisdom, as well as of his own righteousness. He must be brought to confess himself a fool ere he can taste the sweetness of divine wisdom. It is not within the range of the most gigantic human intellect, aided by all the appliances of human learning and philosophy, to grasp the very simplest elements of divine revelation; and therefore, when unconverted men, whatever may be the force of their genius or the extent of their learning, undertake to handle spiritual subjects, and more especially the subject of the divine inspiration of Holy Scripture, they are sure to exhibit their profound ignorance, and utter incompetency to deal with the question before them.

Indeed, whenever we look into an infidel book, we are struck with the feebleness of their most forcible arguments; and not only so, but in every instance in which they attempt to find a discrepancy in the Bible, we see only divine wisdom, beauty, and perfectness.

We have been led into the foregoing line of thought in connection with the subject of the appointment of the elders, which is given to us in each book according to the wisdom of the Holy Ghost, and in perfect keeping with the scope and object of the book.

We shall now proceed with our quotation.

**“And I charged your judges at that time, saying, ‘Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him. Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God’s; and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it.’ “**

What heavenly wisdom is here! What even-handed justice! What holy impartiality! In every case of difference, all the facts on both sides were to be fully heard and patiently weighed. The mind was not to be warped by prejudice, predilection, or personal feeling of any kind. The judgment was to be formed, not by impressions, but by facts—clearly established, undeniable facts.

Personal influence was to have no weight whatever. The position and circumstances of either party in the cause were not to be considered. The case must be decided entirely upon its own merits. **“Ye shall hear the small as well as the great.”** The poor man was to have the same even-handed justice meted out to him as the rich; the stranger as one born in the land. No difference was to be allowed. How important is all this! How worthy of our attentive consideration! how full of deep and valuable instruction for us all!

True, we are not all called to be judges or elders or leaders; but the great moral principles laid down in the above quotation are of the very utmost value to every one of us, inasmuch as cases are continually occurring which call for their direct application. Wherever our lot may be cast, whatever our line of life or sphere of action, we are liable, alas! to meet with cases of difficulty and misunderstanding between our brethren,—cases of wrong, whether real or imaginary; and hence it is most needful to be divinely instructed as to how we ought to carry ourselves in respect to such.

Now, in all such cases, we cannot be too strongly impressed with the necessity of having our judgment based on facts — all the facts on both sides. We must not allow ourselves to be guided by our own impressions, for we all know that mere impressions are most untrustworthy.

They may be correct, and they may be utterly false. Nothing is more easily received and conveyed than a false impression, and therefore any judgment based on mere impressions is worthless. We must have solid, clearly established facts—facts established by two or three witnesses, as Scripture so distinctly enforces. (Deuteronomy 17:6; Matthew 18:16; II Corinthians 13:1; I Timothy 5:19).

But further, we must never be guided in judgment by an *ex parte* statement. Everyone is liable, even with the best intentions, to give a color to his statement of a case. It is not that he would intentionally make a false statement, or tell a deliberate lie; but through inaccuracy of memory, or one cause or another, he may not present the case as it really is. Some fact may be omitted, and that one fact may so affect all the other facts as to alter their bearing completely.

“*Audi alteram partem*” (“Hear the other side”) is a wholesome motto. And not only hear the other side, but hear all the facts on both sides, and thus you will be able to form a sound and righteous judgment.

We may set it down as a standing rule, that any judgment formed without an accurate knowledge of all the facts is perfectly worthless.

**“Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him.”**

Seasonable, needed words, most surely, at all times, in all places, and under all circumstances. May we apply our hearts to them.

And how important the admonition in verse 17!

**“Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man.”**

How these words discover the poor human heart! How prone we are to respect persons – to be swayed by personal influence – to attach importance to position and wealth to be afraid of the face of man! What is the divine antidote against all these evils? Just this: the fear of God.

If we set the Lord before us, at all times, it will effectually deliver us from the pernicious influence of partiality, prejudice, and the fear of men. It will lead us to wait humbly and patiently on the Lord for guidance and counsel in all that may come before us, and thus we shall be preserved from forming hasty and one-sided judgments of men and things – that fruitful source of mischief amongst the Lord’s people in all ages.

### The Mission of the Spies

We shall now dwell for a few moments on the very affecting manner in which Moses brings before the congregation all the circumstances connected with the mission of the spies, which, like the appointment of the judges, is in perfect keeping with; the scope and object of the book.

This is only what we might expect. There is not, there could not be a single sentence of useless repetition in the divine volume; still less could there be a single flaw, a single discrepancy, a single contradictory statement. The Word of God is absolutely perfect – perfect as a whole, perfect in all its parts. We must firmly hold and faithfully confess this in the face of this infidel age.

We speak not of human translations of the Word of God, in which there must be more or less of imperfection; though even here, we cannot but be “filled with wonder, love, and praise” when we mark the way in which our God so manifestly presided over our excellent English translation, so that the poor man at the back of a mountain may be assured of possessing, in his common English Bible, the revelation of God to his soul.

And most surely we are warranted in saying that this is just what we might look for at the hands of our God.

**It is but reasonable to infer that the One who inspired the writers of the Bible would also watch over the translation of it; for inasmuch as He gave it originally, in His grace, to those who could read Hebrew and Greek, so would He not, in the same grace, give it in every language under Heaven?**

Blessed forever be His holy name, it is His gracious desire to speak to every man in the very tongue in which he was born, – to tell us the sweet tale of His grace – the glad tidings of salvation in the very accents in which our mothers whispered into our infant ears those words of love that went right home to our very hearts. (See Acts 2:5-8).

Oh that men were more impressed and affected with the truth and power of all this, and then we should not be troubled with so many foolish and unlearned questions about the Bible.

Let us now hearken to the account given by Moses of the mission of the spies – its origin and its result.

We shall find it full of most weighty instruction, if only the ear be open to hear and – the heart duly prepared to ponder.

**“And I commanded you at that time all the things which ye should do.”**

The path of simple obedience was plainly set before them. They had but to tread it with an obedient heart and firm step. They had not to reason about consequences, or weigh the results; all these they had just to leave in the hands of God, and move on with steady purpose in the blessed path of obedience.

**“And when we departed from Horeb, we went through all that great and terrible wilderness, which ye saw by the way of the mountain of the Amorites, as the Lord our God commanded us; and we came to Kadesh-barnea.**

**“And I said unto you, ‘Ye are come unto the mountain of the Amorites, which the Lord our God doth give unto us. Behold, the Lord thy God hath set the land before thee: go up and possess it, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not, neither be discouraged.’ “**

Here was their warrant for entering upon immediate possession.

The Lord their God had given them the land and set it before them. It was theirs by His free gift – the gift of His sovereign grace, in pursuance of the covenant made with their fathers. It was His eternal purpose to possess the land of Canaan through the seed of Abraham His friend. This ought to have been enough to set their hearts perfectly at rest, not only as to the character of the land, but also as to their entrance upon it. There was no need of spies. Faith never wants to spy what God has given. It argues that what He has given must be worth having, and that He is able to put us in full possession of all that His grace has bestowed. Israel might have concluded that the same hand that had conducted them “**through all that great and terrible wilderness**” could bring them in and plant them in their destined inheritance.

So Faith would have reasoned; for it always reasons from God down to circumstances, never from circumstances up to God.

**“If God be for us, who can be against us?”**

This is Faith’s argument, grand in its simplicity and simple in its moral grandeur. When God fills the whole range of the soul’s vision, difficulties are little accounted of. They are either not seen, or, if seen, they are viewed as occasions for the display of divine power. Faith exults in seeing God triumphing over difficulties.

But, alas! The people were not governed by faith on the occasion now before us, and therefore they had recourse to spies.

Of this Moses reminds them, and that, too, in language at once most tender and faithful – **“And ye came near unto me, everyone of you, and said, ‘We will send men before us, and they shall search us out the land, and bring us word again, by what way we must go up, and into what cities we shall come.’ “**

Surely, they might well have trusted God for all this. The One who had brought them up out of Egypt, made a way for them through the sea, guided them through the trackless desert, was fully able to bring them into the land. But no; they would send spies, simply because their hearts had not simple confidence in the true, the living, the almighty God.

Here lay the moral root of the matter; and it is well that the reader should thoroughly seize this point.

True it is that, in the history given in Numbers, the Lord told Moses to send the spies; but why? Because of the moral condition of the people.

And here we see the characteristic difference and yet the lovely harmony of the two books. Numbers gives us the public history, Deuteronomy the secret source of the mission of the spies; and as it is in perfect keeping with Numbers to give us the former, so it is in perfect keeping with Deuteronomy to give us the latter. The one is the complement of the other. We could not fully understand the subject had we only the history given in Numbers. It is the touching commentary given in Deuteronomy which completes the picture. How perfect is Scripture! All we need is the eye anointed to see and the heart prepared to appreciate its moral glories.

It may be, however, that the reader still feels some difficulty in reference to the question of the spies. He may feel disposed to ask how it could be wrong to send them when the Lord told them to do so. The answer is, The wrong was not in the act of sending them when they were told, but in the wish to send them at all. The wish was the fruit of unbelief, and the command to send them was because of that unbelief.

We may see something of the same in the matter of divorce in Matthew 19 – **“The Pharisees also came unto Him, tempting Him, and saying unto Him, ‘Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?’ And He answered and said unto them, ‘Have ye not heard, that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, for this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.’ They say unto Him, ‘Why did Moses, then, command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, ‘Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it was not so.’ “**

It was not in keeping with God’s original institution, or according to His heart, that a man should put away his wife; but, in consequence of the hardness of the human heart, divorce was permitted by the lawgiver. Is there any difficulty in this? Surely not; unless the heart is bent on making one. Neither is there any difficulty in the matter of the spies.

Israel ought not to have needed them: simple faith would never have thought of them But the Lord saw the real condition of things and issued a command accordingly; just as, in after ages, He saw the heart of the people bent on having a king, and He commanded Samuel to give them one – **“And the Lord said unto Samuel, ‘Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee; for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken Me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.’“** (I Samuel 8:7-9).

Thus we see that the mere granting of a desire is no proof whatever that such desire is according to the mind of God. Israel ought not to have asked for a king. Was not the Lord sufficient? was not He their King? could not He, as He had ever done, led them forth to battle and fight for them? Why seek an arm of flesh? why turn away from the living, the true, the almighty God to lean on a poor fellow-worm? What power was there in a king but that which God might see fit to bestow upon him? None whatever.

All the power, all the wisdom, all real good, was in the Lord their God; and it was there for them – there at all times, to meet their every need. They had but to lean upon His almighty arm – to draw upon His exhaustless resources, to find all their springs in Him. When they did get a king, according to their hearts’ desire, what did he do for them? **“All the people followed him trembling.”**

The more closely we study the melancholy history of Saul's reign, the more we see that he was, almost from the very outset, a positive hindrance rather than a help. We have but to read his history, from first to last, in order to see the truth of this. His whole reign was a lamentable failure, aptly and forcibly set forth in two glowing sentences of the prophet Hosea – **"I gave thee a king in Mine anger, and took him away in My wrath."**

In a word, he was the answer to the unbelief and self-will of the people, and therefore all their brilliant hopes and expectations respecting him were most lamentably disappointed. He failed to answer the mind of God, and, as a necessary consequence, he failed to meet the people's need. He proved himself wholly unworthy of the crown and sceptre, and his ignominious fall on Mount Gilboa was in melancholy keeping with his whole career.

Now, when we come to consider the mission of the spies, we find it too, like the appointment of a king, ending in complete failure and disappointment.

It could not be otherwise, inasmuch as it was the fruit of unbelief.

True, God gave them spies, and Moses, with touching grace, says, **"The saying pleased me well; and I took twelve men of you, one of a tribe,"** – it was Grace coming down to the condition of the people and consenting to a plan which was suited to that condition; but this by no means proves that either the plan or the condition was according to the mind of God.

Blessed be His name, He can meet us in our unbelief though He is grieved and dishonored by it. He delights in a bold, artless faith; it is the only thing in all this world that gives Him His proper place. Hence, when Moses said to the people, **"Behold, the Lord thy God hath set the land before thee: go up and possess it, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not, neither be discouraged,"** what would have been the proper response from them?

**Here we are: lead on, almighty Lord – lead on to victory. Thou art enough. With Thee as our leader, we move on with joyful confidence. Difficulties are nothing to Thee, and therefore they are nothing to us. Thy word and Thy presence are all we want. In these we find at once our authority and power. It matters not in the least to us who or what may be before us: mighty giants, towering walls, frowning bulwarks – what are they all in the presence of the Lord God of Israel, but as withered slaves before the whirlwind? Lead on, O Lord.**

This would have been the language of Faith; but, alas! it was not the language of Israel on the occasion before us. God was not sufficient for them. They were not prepared to go up, leaning on His arm alone: they were not satisfied with His report of the land; they would send spies. Any thing for the poor human heart but simple dependence upon the one living and true God. The natural man cannot trust God, simply because he does not know Him. **"They that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee."**

God must be known, in order to be trusted;  
and the more fully He is trusted, the better He becomes known.



There is nothing in all this world so truly blessed as a life of simple faith; but it must be a reality and not a mere profession. It is utterly vain to talk of living by faith, while the heart is secretly resting on some creature-prop. The true believer has to do exclusively with God. He finds in Him all his resources. It is not that he undervalues the instruments or the channels which God is pleased to use; quite the reverse. He values them exceedingly; and cannot but value them, as the means which God uses for his help and blessing; but he does not allow them to displace God. The language of his heart is, **“My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from Him. He only is my rock.”**

There is peculiar force in the word **“only.”** It searches the heart thoroughly. To look to the creature, directly or indirectly, for the supply of any need, is, in principle, to depart from the life of faith; and, oh! it is miserable work, this looking, in any way, to creature-streams. It is just as morally degrading as the life of faith is morally elevating. And not only is it degrading, but disappointing. Creature-props give way, and creature-streams run dry; but they that trust in the Lord shall never be confounded, and never want any good thing. Had Israel trusted the Lord instead of sending spies, they would have had a very different tale to tell; but spies they would send, and the whole affair proved a most humiliating failure.

**“And they turned, and went up into the mountain, and came unto the valley of Eschol, and searched it out. And they took of the fruit of the land in their hands, and brought it down unto us, and brought us word again, and said, ‘It is a good land which the Lord our God doth give us.’ “**

How could it possibly be otherwise when God was giving it? Did they want spies to tell them that the gift of God was good? Assuredly, they ought not. An artless faith would have argued thus: Whatever God gives must be worthy of Himself; we want no spies to assure us of this. But, ah! this artless faith is an uncommonly rare gem in this world; and even those who possess it know but little of its value or how to use it.

It is one thing to talk of the life of faith, and another thing altogether to live it, – the theory is one thing, the living reality quite another. But let us never forget that it is the privilege of every child of God to live by faith, and, further, that the life of faith takes in everything that the believer can possibly need, from the starting-post to the goal of his earthly career. We have already touched upon this important point; it cannot be too earnestly or constantly insisted upon.

With regard to the mission of the spies,  
the reader will note with interest the way in which Moses refers to it.

He confines himself to that portion of their testimony which was according to truth; he says nothing about the ten infidel spies. This is in perfect keeping with the scope and object of the book. Everything is brought to bear, in a moral way, on the conscience of the congregation. He reminds them that they themselves had proposed to send the spies; and yet, although the spies had placed before them the fruit of the land, and borne testimony to its goodness, they would not go up – **“Notwithstanding ye would not go up, but rebelled against the commandment of the Lord your God.”**

There was no excuse whatever. It was evident that their hearts were in a state of positive unbelief and rebellion, and the mission of the spies, from first to last, only made this fully manifest.

**“And ye murmured in your tents, and said, ‘Because the Lord hated us’ – a terrible lie on the very face of it! – ‘He hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us.’ “**

What a strange proof of hatred! How utterly absurd are the arguments of unbelief! Surely, had He hated them, nothing was easier than to leave them to die amid the brick kilns of Egypt, beneath the cruel lash of Pharaoh’s taskmasters. Why take so much trouble about them?

- Why those ten plagues sent upon the land of their oppressors?
- Why, if He hated them, did He not allow the waters of the Red Sea to overwhelm them as they had overwhelmed their enemies?
- Why had He delivered them from the sword of Amalek?

In a word, why all these marvelous triumphs of grace on their behalf if He hated them?

Ah! if they had not been governed by a spirit of dark and senseless unbelief, such a brilliant array of evidence would have led them to a conclusion the direct opposite of that to which they gave utterance.

There is nothing beneath the canopy of Heaven so stupidly irrational as unbelief; and, on the other hand, there is nothing so sound, clear, and logical as the simple argument of a childlike faith. May the reader ever be enabled to prove the truth of this.

**“And ye murmured in your tents.”**

Unbelief is not only a blind and senseless reasoner, but a dark and gloomy murmurer. It neither gets to the right side of things nor the bright side of things. It is always in the dark – always in the wrong, simply because it shuts out God, and looks only at circumstances. They said, **“Whither shall we go up? our brethren have discouraged our hearts, saying, ‘The people is greater and taller than we’ – but they were not greater than the Lord – ‘and the cities are great and walled up to heaven’ – the gross exaggeration of unbelief – ‘and moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakims there.’ “**

Now, Faith would say, Well, what though the cities be walled up to Heaven, our God is above them, for He is in Heaven. What are great cities or lofty walls to Him who formed the universe, and sustains it by the Word of His power? What are Anakims in the presence of the almighty God? If the land were covered with walled cities from Dan to Beersheba, and if the giants were as numerous as the leaves of the forest, they would be as the chaff of the threshing-floor before the One who has promised to give the land of Canaan to the seed of Abraham, His friend, for an everlasting possession. But Israel had not faith, as the inspired apostle tells us in the third chapter of Hebrews, **“They could not enter in because of unbelief.”**

Here lay the great difficulty. The walled cities and the terrible Anakims would soon have been disposed of had Israel only trusted God. He would have made very short work of all these; but, ah! That deplorable unbelief! it ever stands in the way of our blessing.

It hinders the outshining of the glory of God; it casts a dark shadow over our souls, and robs us of the privilege of proving the all-sufficiency of our God to meet our every need and remove our every difficulty.

Blessed be His name, He never fails a trusting heart. It is His delight to honor the very largest drafts that Faith hands in at His exhaustless treasury. His assuring word to us ever is, **“Be not afraid; only believe.”** And again, **“According to your faith be it unto you.”** Precious soul-stirring words! May we all realize more fully their living power and sweetness. We may rest assured of this, we can never go too far in counting on God; it would be a simple impossibility. Our grand mistake is that we do not draw more largely upon His infinite resources. **“Said I not unto thee that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?”**

Thus we can see why it was that Israel failed to see the glory of God on the occasion before us, they did not believe.

The mission of the spies proved a complete failure. As it began, so it ended – in the most deplorable unbelief. God was shut out: difficulties filled their vision.

**“They could not enter in.”**

They could not see the glory of God. Harken to the deeply affecting words of Moses. It does the heart good to read them. They touch the very deepest springs of our renewed being – **“Then I said unto you, ‘Dread not, neither be afraid of them. The Lord your God which goeth before you, He shall fight for you’** – only think of God fighting for people! think of the Lord as a Man of war! – **‘He shall fight for you, according to all that He did for you in Egypt before your eyes; and in the wilderness, where thou hast seen how that the Lord thy God bore thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place.’ Yet in this thing ye did not believe the Lord your God, who went in the way before you, to search you out a place to pitch your tents in, in fire by night, to show you by what way ye should go, and in a cloud by day.”**

What moral force, what touching sweetness in this appeal!

How clearly we can see here, as indeed on every page of the book, that Deuteronomy is not a barren repetition of facts, but a most powerful commentary on those facts.

It is well that the reader should be thoroughly clear as to this. If in the book of Exodus or Numbers the inspired lawgiver records the actual facts of Israel’s wilderness-life, in the book of Deuteronomy he comments on those facts with a pathos that quite melts the heart. And here it is that the exquisite style of the Lord’s acts is pointed out and dwelt upon with such inimitable skill and delicacy.

Who could consent to give up the lovely figure set forth in the words, “**As a man doth bear his son**”?

Here we have the style of the action. Could we do without this? Assuredly not. It is the style of an action that touches the heart, because it is the style that so peculiarly expresses the heart: If the power of the hand or the wisdom of the mind is seen in the substance of an action, the love of the heart comes out in the style. Even a little child can understand this, though he might not be able to explain it.

But, alas! Israel could not trust God to bring them into the land.

Notwithstanding the marvelous display of His power, His faithfulness, His goodness, and loving-kindness, from the brick-kilns of Egypt to the very borders of the land of Canaan, yet they did not believe. With an array of evidence which ought to have satisfied any heart, they still doubted.

**“And the Lord heard the voice of your words, and was wroth, and sware, saying, ‘Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see that good land, which I sware to give unto your fathers, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it; and to him will I give the land that he hath trodden upon, and to his children, because he hath wholly followed the Lord.’ “**

**“Said I not unto thee that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?”**

Such is the divine order. Men will tell you that seeing is believing, but in the kingdom of God, believing is seeing.

Why was it that not a man of that evil generation was allowed to see the good land? Simply because they did not believe in the Lord their God. On the other hand, why was Caleb allowed to see and take possession? Simply because he believed.

Unbelief is ever the great hindrance in the way of our seeing the glory of God – **“He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.”**

If Israel had only believed, only trusted the Lord their God, only confided in the love of His heart and in the power of His arm, He would have brought them in and planted them in the mountain of His inheritance.

And just so is it with the Lord’s people now.

There is no limit to the blessings which we might enjoy, could we only count more fully upon God. **“All things are possible to him that believeth.”**

Our God will never say, You have drawn too largely; you expect too much. Impossible. It is the joy of His loving heart to answer the very largest expectations of Faith.

Let us, then, draw largely. **“Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.”**

The exhaustless treasury of Heaven is thrown open to Faith.

- **“All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.”**
- **“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.”**

Faith is the divine secret of the whole matter – the mainspring of Christian life from first to last. Faith wavers not, staggers not:

Unbelief is ever a waverer and a staggerer, and hence it never sees the glory of God, never sees His power. It is deaf to His voice and blind to His actings; it depresses the heart and weakens the hands; it darkens the path and hinders all progress. It kept Israel out of the land of Canaan for forty years; and we have no conception of the amount of blessing, privilege, power and usefulness which we are constantly missing through its terrible influence.

If faith were in more lively exercise in our hearts, what a different condition of things we should witness in our midst.

- What is the secret of the deplorable deadness and barrenness throughout the wide field of Christian profession?
- How are we to account for our impoverished condition, our low tone, our stunted growth?
- Why is it that we see such poor results in every department of Christian work?
- Why are there so few genuine conversions?
- Why are our evangelists so frequently cast down by reason of the paucity of their sheaves?
- How are we to answer all these questions?
- What is the cause?
- Will anyone attempt to say it is not our unbelief?

No doubt, our divisions have much to do with it; our worldliness, our carnality, our self-indulgence, our love of ease. But what is the remedy for all these evils? How are our hearts to be drawn out in genuine love to all our brethren? By faith, that precious principle **“that worketh by love.”**

Thus the blessed apostle says to the dear young converts at Thessalonica, **“Your faith groweth exceedingly.”** And what then? **“The love of everyone of you all toward each other aboundeth.”** Thus it must ever be.

Faith puts us into direct contact with the eternal spring of love in God Himself, and the necessary consequence is that our hearts are drawn out in love to all who belong to Him – all in whom we can, in the very feeblest way, trace His blessed image. We cannot possibly be near the Lord and not love all who in every place call upon His name out of a pure heart. The nearer we are to Christ, the more intensely we must be knit, in true brotherly love, to every member of His body.

Then as to worldliness, in all its varied forms, how is it to be overcome?

Hear the reply of another inspired apostle – **“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?”**

The new man, walking in the power of faith, lives above the world, above its motives, above its objects, its principles, its habits, its fashions; he has nothing in common with it. Though in it, he is not of it; he moves right athwart its current; he draws all his springs from Heaven; his life, his hope, his all is there, and he ardently longs to be there himself when his work on earth is done.

Thus we see what a mighty principle faith is. It purifies the heart, it works by love, and it overcomes the world. In short, it links the heart in living power with God Himself, and this is the secret of true elevation, holy benevolence, and divine purity. No marvel, therefore, that Peter calls it **“precious faith,”** for truly it is precious beyond all human thought. See how this mighty principle acted in Caleb, and the blessed fruit it produced. He was permitted to realize the truth of those words, uttered hundreds of years afterwards, **“According to your faith be it unto you.”**

He believed that God was able to bring them into the land, and that all the difficulties and hindrances were simply bread for faith. And God, as He ever does, answered his faith.

**“Then the children of Judah came unto Joshua in Gilgal; and Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite said unto him, ‘Thou knowest the thing that the Lord said unto Moses the man of God concerning me and thee in Kadesh-barnea. Forty years old was I when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh-barnea to espay out the land; and I brought him word again as it was in my heart’ – the simple testimony of a bright and lovely faith – ‘Nevertheless my brethren that went up with me made the heart of the people melt; but I wholly followed the Lord my God. And Moses swore on that day, saying, Surely the land whereon thy feet have trodden shall be thine inheritance, and thy children’s forever, because thou hast wholly followed the Lord my God. And now, behold, the Lord hath kept me alive, as He said, these forty and five years, ever since the Lord spake this word unto Moses, while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness; and now, lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me; as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in. Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the Lord spake in that day; for thou heardest in that day how the Anakims were there, and that the cities were great and fenced: if so be the Lord will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the Lord said.’ “**

How refreshing are the utterances of an artless faith! How edifying! how truly encouraging!

How vividly they contrast with the gloomy, depressing, withering accents of dark, God-dishonoring unbelief!

**“And Joshua blessed him, and gave unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh Hebron for an inheritance. Hebron therefore became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite unto this day, because that he wholly followed the Lord God of Israel” (Joshua 15).**

Caleb, like his father Abraham, was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and we may say, with all possible confidence, that inasmuch as faith ever honors God, He ever delights to honor faith; and we feel persuaded that if only the Lord's people could more fully confide in God, if they would but draw more largely upon His infinite resources, we should witness a totally different condition of things from what we see around us.

**“Said I not unto thee that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?”**

Oh for a more lively faith in God – a bolder grasp of His faithfulness, His goodness, and His power! Then we might look for more glorious results in the Gospel-field; more zeal, more energy, more intense devotedness in the Church of God; and more of the fragrant fruits of righteousness in the life of believers individually.

We shall now, for a moment, look at the closing verses of our chapter, in which we shall find some very weighty instruction.

And, first of all, we see the actings of divine government displayed in a most solemn and impressive manner. Moses refers, in a very touching way, to the fact of his exclusion from the Promised Land – **“Also the Lord was angry with me for your sakes, saying, ‘Thou also shalt not go in thither.’”**

Mark the words, **“for your sakes.”**

It was very needful to remind the congregation that it was on their account that Moses, that beloved and honored servant of the Lord, was prevented from crossing the Jordan, and setting his foot upon the land of Canaan. True, **“he spake unadvisedly with his lips,”** but **“they provoked his spirit”** to do so. This ought to have touched them to the quick. They not only failed, through unbelief, to enter in themselves, but they were the cause of his exclusion, much as he longed to see **“that goodly mountain and Lebanon”** (See Psalm 106:32).

But the government of God is a grand and awful reality. Let us never for one moment forget this. The human mind may marvel why a few ill-advised words, a few hasty sentences, should be the cause of keeping such a beloved and honored servant of God from that which he so ardently desired; but it is our place to bow the head in humble adoration and holy reverence, not to reason or judge.

**“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”**

Most surely. He can make no mistake.

- **“Great and marvelous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of nations.”**

- **“God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints; and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him.”**

- **“Our God is a consuming fire;”** and

- **“it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”**

Does it in any wise interfere with the action and range of the divine government that we, as Christians, are under the reign of grace? By no means. It is as true to-day as ever it was that **“whatsoever a man soweth, that shall He also reap.”**

Hence, therefore, it would be a serious mistake for anyone to draw a plea from the freedom of divine grace to trifle with the enactments of divine government.

The two things are perfectly distinct, and should never be confounded.

- Grace can pardon-freely, fully, eternally; but the wheels of the Lord’s governmental chariot roll on, in crushing power and appalling solemnity.
- Grace pardoned Adam’s sin; but Government drove him out of Eden, to earn a living by the sweat of his brow, amid the thorns and thistles of a cursed earth:
- Grace pardoned David’s sin, but the Sword of Government hung over his house to the end,- Bathsheba was the mother of Solomon, but Absalom rose in rebellion.

So with Moses; Grace brought him to the top of Pisgah and showed him the land, but Government sternly and absolutely forbade his entrance thither. Nor does it in the least touch this weighty principle to be told that Moses, in his official capacity as the representative of the legal system, could not bring the people into the land. This is quite true; but it leaves wholly untouched the solemn truth now before us. Neither in the twentieth chapter of Numbers nor in the first chapter of Deuteronomy have we anything about Moses in his official capacity. It is himself personally we have before us, and he is forbidden to enter the land because of having spoken unadvisedly with his lips.

It will be well for us all to ponder deeply, as in the immediate presence of God, this great practical truth. We may rest assured that the more truly we enter into the knowledge of grace, the more we shall feel the solemnity of government, and entirely justify its enactments. Of this we are most fully persuaded. But there is imminent danger of taking up, in a light and careless manner, the doctrines of grace while the heart and the life are not brought under the sanctifying influence of those doctrines. This has to be watched against with holy jealousy.

There is nothing in all this world more awful  
than mere fleshly familiarity with the theory of salvation by grace.

It opens the door for every form of licentiousness. Hence it is that we feel the necessity of pressing upon the conscience of the reader the practical truth of the government of God. It is most salutary at all times, but particularly so in this our day, when there is such a fearful tendency to turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness. We shall invariably find that those who most fully enter into the deep blessedness of being under the reign of grace, do also most thoroughly justify the actings of divine government.

But we learn, from the closing lines of our chapter, that the people were by no means prepared to submit themselves under the governmental hand of God; in short, they would neither have grace nor government.



When invited to go up at once and take possession of the land, with the fullest assurances of the divine presence and power with them, they hesitated and refused to go.

They gave themselves up completely to a spirit of dark unbelief.

- In vain did Joshua and Caleb sound in their ears the most encouraging words,
- In vain did they set before their eyes the rich fruit of the goodly land,
- In vain did Moses seek to move them by the most soul-stirring words.

They would not go up when they were told to go. And what then? They were taken at their word. According to their unbelief, so was it unto them. **“Moreover, your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall go in thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it. But as for you, turn you, and take your journey into the wilderness, by the way of the Red Sea.”**

How sad! and yet how else could it be?

If they would not, in simple faith, go up into the land, there remained nothing for them but turning back into the wilderness. But to this they would not submit. They would neither avail themselves of the provisions of grace nor bow to the sentence of judgment – **“Then ye answered and said unto me, ‘We have sinned against the Lord; we will go up and fight, according to all that the Lord our God commanded us.’ And when ye had girded on every man his weapon of war, ye were ready to go up into the hill.”**

This looked like contrition and self-judgment; but it was hollow and false.

It is a very easy thing to say, **“We have sinned.”**

Saul said it in his day; but he said it without heart, without any genuine sense of what he was saying.

We may easily gather the force and value of the words **“I have sinned”** from the fact that they were immediately followed by **“Honor me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people.”**

What a strange contradiction! **“I have sinned,”** yet **“Honor me.”**

If he had really felt his sin, how different his language would have been! how different his spirit, style, and deportment! but it was all a solemn mockery.

Only conceive a man full of himself, making use of a form of words, without one atom of true heart feeling; and then, in order to get honor for himself, going through the empty formality of worshipping God. What a picture!

Can any thing be more sorrowful? How terribly offensive to Him who desires truth in the inward parts, and who seeks those to worship Him who worship Him in spirit and in truth!

The feeblest breathings of a broken and contrite heart are precious to God; but, oh, how offensive to Him are the hollow formalities of a mere religiousness, the object of which is to exalt man in his own eyes and in the eyes of his fellows! How perfectly worthless is the mere lip-confession of sin where the heart does not feel it!

As a recent writer has well remarked,

“It is an easy thing to say, ‘**We have sinned,**’ but how often we have to learn that it is not the quick, abrupt confession of sin which affords evidence that sin is felt! It is rather a proof of hardness of heart. The conscience feels that a certain act of confessing the sin is necessary, but perhaps there is hardly anything which more hardens the heart than the habit of confessing sin without feeling it. This, I believe, is one of the great snares of Christendom from of old and now, that is, the stereotyped acknowledgment of sin – the mere habit of hurrying through a formula of confession to God. I dare say we have almost all done so, without referring to any particular mode; for, alas! there is formality enough; and without having written forms, the heart may frame forms of its own, as we may have observed, if not known it, in our own experience, without finding fault with other people.” – *“Lectures Introductory to the Pentateuch,”* by W. Kelly.

Thus it was with Israel at Kadesh.

Their confession of sin was utterly worthless; there was no truth in it. Had they felt what they were saying, they would have bowed to the judgment of God, and meekly accepted the consequence of their sin. There is no finer proof of true contrition than quiet submission to the governmental dealings of God. Look at the case of Moses. See how he bowed his head to the divine discipline.

“**The Lord,**” he says, “**was angry with me for your sakes, saying, ‘Thou also shalt not go in thither. But Joshua the son of Nun, which standeth before thee, he shall go in thither: encourage him; for he shall cause Israel to inherit it.’**”

Here, Moses shows them that they were the cause of his exclusion from the land; and yet he utters not a single murmuring word, but meekly bows to the divine judgment, not only content to be superseded by another, but ready to appoint and encourage his successor.

There is no trace of jealousy or envy here. It was enough for that beloved and honored servant if God was glorified and the need of the congregation met. He was not occupied with himself or his own interests, but with the glory of God and the blessing of His people.

But the people manifested a very different spirit.

“**We will go up and fight.**” How vain! How foolish! When commanded by God and encouraged by His true-hearted servants to go up and possess the land, they replied, “**Whither shall we go up?**” and when commanded to turn back into the wilderness, they replied, “**We will go up and fight.**”

**“And the Lord said unto me, ‘Say unto them, Go not up, neither fight; for I am not among you; lest ye be smitten before your enemies.’ So I spake unto you; and ye would not hear, but rebelled against the commandment of the Lord, and went presumptuously up into the hill. And the Amorites, which dwelt in that mountain, came out against you, and chased you, as bees do, and destroyed you in Seir, even unto Hormah.”**

It was quite impossible for the Lord to accompany them along the path of self-will and rebellion; and, most assuredly, Israel, without the divine presence, could be no match for the Amorites. If God be for us and with us, all must be victory; but we cannot count on God if we are not treading the path of obedience. It is simply the height of folly to imagine that we can have God with us if our ways are not right.

**“The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runneth into it and is safe.”**

But if we are not walking in practical righteousness, it is wicked presumption to talk of having the Lord as our strong tower.

Blessed be His name, He can meet us in the very depths of our weakness and failure, provided there be the genuine and hearty confession of our true condition; but to assume that we have the Lord with us while we are doing our own will and walking in palpable unrighteousness, is nothing but wickedness and hardness of heart.

**“Trust in the Lord, and do good”** – this is the divine order; but to talk of trusting in the Lord while doing evil, is to turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and place ourselves completely in the hands of the devil, who only seeks our moral ruin.

**“The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him.”**

When we have a good conscience, we can lift up the head and move on through all sorts of difficulties; but to attempt to tread the path of faith with a bad conscience, is the most dangerous thing in this world. We can only hold up the shield of faith when our loins are girt with truth, and the breast covered with the breastplate of righteousness.

It is of the utmost importance that Christians should seek to maintain practical righteousness, in all its branches.

There is immense moral weight and value in these words of the blessed apostle Paul, **“Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and men.”**

He ever sought to wear the breastplate, and to be clothed in that white linen which is the righteousness of saints.

And so should we.

It is our holy privilege to tread, day by day, with firm step, the path of duty, the path of obedience, the path on which the light of God's approving countenance ever shines; then, assuredly, we can count on God, lean upon Him, draw from Him, find all our springs in Him, wrap ourselves up in His faithfulness, and thus move on, in peaceful communion and holy worship, toward our heavenly home.

It is not, we repeat, that we cannot look to God in our weakness, our failure, and even when we have erred and sinned. Blessed be His name, we can; and His ear is ever open to our cry.

- **“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”** (I John 1).

- **“Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice; let Thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If Thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared”** (Psalm 130).

There is absolutely no limit to divine forgiveness, inasmuch as there is no limit to the extent of the atonement, no limit to the virtue and efficacy of the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, which cleanseth from all sin; no limit to the prevalence of the intercession of our adorable Advocate, our great High Priest, who is able to save to the uttermost-right through and through to the end – them that come unto God by Him. All this is most blessedly true; it is largely taught and variously illustrated throughout the volume of inspiration; but the confession of sin, and the pardon thereof, must not be confounded with practical righteousness.

There are two distinct conditions in which we may call upon God: we may call upon Him in deep contrition and be heard, or we may call upon Him with a good conscience and an uncondemning heart and be heard. But the two things are very distinct; and not only are they distinct in themselves, but they both stand in marked contrast with that indifference and hardness of heart which would presume to count on God in the face of positive disobedience and practical unrighteousness.

It is this which is so dreadful in the sight of the Lord, and which must bring down His heavy judgment.

- practical righteousness He owns and approves;
- confessed sin He can freely and fully pardon;
- but to imagine that we can put our trust in God while our feet are treading the path of iniquity, is nothing short of the most shocking impiety.

**“Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these. For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor; if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, forever and ever.**

**“Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; and come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, ‘We are delivered to do all these abominations?’”** (Jeremiah 7).

God deals in moral realities.

He desires truth in the inward parts; and if men will presume to hold the truth in unrighteousness, they must look out for His righteous judgment.

It is the thought of all this that makes us feel the awful condition of the professing church. The solemn passage which we have just culled from the prophet Jeremiah, though bearing primarily upon the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, has a very pointed application to Christendom.

We find, in the third chapter of II Timothy, that all the abominations of heathenism, as detailed in the close of Romans 1, are reproduced in the last days under the garb of the Christian profession, and in immediate connection with **“a form of godliness.”**

What must be the end of such a condition of things? Unmitigated wrath.

The very heaviest judgments of God are reserved for that vast mass of baptized profession which we call Christendom.

The moment is rapidly approaching when all the beloved and blood-bought people of God shall be called away out of this dark and sinful, though so-called “Christian world,” to be forever with the Lord, in that sweet home of love prepared in the Father’s house.

Then the **“strong delusion”** shall be sent upon Christendom – upon those very countries where the light of a full-orbed Christianity has shone, where a full and free Gospel has been preached, where the Bible has been circulated by millions, and where all, in some way or another, profess the name of Christ and call themselves Christians.

And what then? – what is to follow this **“strong delusion”**? Any fresh testimony? any further overtures of mercy? any further effort of long-suffering grace? Not for Christendom! not for the rejecters of the Gospel of God! not for Christless, Godless professors of the hollow and worthless forms of Christianity!

The heathen shall hear **“the everlasting Gospel”** – **“the Gospel of the kingdom;”** but as for that terrible thing, that most frightful anomaly called Christendom – **“the vine of the earth”** – nothing remains but the wine-press of the wrath of Almighty God, the blackness and darkness forever, the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.

Reader, these are the true sayings of God. Nothing would be easier than to place before your eyes an array of Scripture proof perfectly unanswerable: this would be foreign to our present object.

The New Testament, from cover to cover, sets forth the solemn truth above enunciated; and every system of theology under the sun that teaches differently will be found, on this point at least, to be totally false.

**~ end of chapter 1 ~**

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