

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

WE now approach one of the most profound and comprehensive sections of the book of Deuteronomy, in which the inspired writer presents to our view what we may call the three great cardinal feasts of the Jewish year, namely, the passover, Pentecost, and tabernacles; or, redemption, the Holy Ghost, and the glory.

We have here a more condensed view of those lovely institutions than that given in Leviticus 23, where we have, if we count the Sabbath, eight feasts; but if we view the Sabbath as distinct, and having its own special place as the type of God's own eternal rest, then there are seven feasts, namely, the passover, the feast of unleavened bread, the feast of first-fruits, Pentecost, trumpets, the day of atonement, and tabernacles.

Such is the order of feasts in the book of Leviticus, which, as we have ventured to remark in our studies on that most marvelous book, may be called "The priest's guide-book." But in Deuteronomy, which is pre-eminently the people's book, we have less of ceremonial detail, and the lawgiver confines himself to those great moral and national landmarks which, in the very simplest manner, as adapted to the people, present the past, the present, and the future.

"Observe the month of Abib, and keep the passover unto the Lord thy God; for in the month of Abib the Lord thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by -night. Thou shalt therefore sacrifice the passover unto the Lord thy God, of the flock and the herd, in the place which the Lord shall choose to place His name there. Thou shalt eat no leavened bread with it; seven days shalt thou eat unleavened bread therewith, even the bread of affliction. for thou earnest forth out of the land of Egypt in haste: that thou mayest remember the day when thou earnest forth out of the land of Egypt all the days of thy life. And there shall be no leavened bread seen with thee in all thy coasts seven days; neither shall there any thing of the flesh, which thou sacrificedst the first day at even, remain all night until the morning. Thou mayest not sacrifice the passover within any of thy gates which the Lord thy God giveth thee"-as if it were a matter of no importance where, provided the feast were kept – "but. at the place which the Lord thy God shall choose to place His name in, there [and no where else,] thou shalt sacrifice the passover at even, at the going down of the sun, at the season that thou earnest forth out of Egypt. And thou shalt roast and eat it in the place which the Lord thy God shall choose, and thou shalt turn in the morning, and go unto thy tents. Six days thou shalt eat unleavened bread; and on the seventh day shall be a solemn assembly to the Lord thy God; thou shalt do no work therein" (Ver. 1-8).

Having, in our “*Notes on Exodus*,” gone somewhat fully into the great leading principles of this foundation-feast, we must refer the reader to that volume if he desires to study the subject. But there are certain features peculiar to Deuteronomy to which we feel it our duty to call his special attention; and, in the first place, we have to notice the remarkable emphasis laid upon “**the place**” where the feast was to be kept.

This is full of interest and practical moment. The people were not to choose for themselves. It might, according to human thinking, appear a very small matter how or where the feast was kept, provided it was kept at all. But, be it carefully noted and deeply pondered by the reader, human thinking had nothing whatever to do in the matter; it was divine thinking and divine authority altogether. God had a right to prescribe .and definitively settle where He would meet His people; and this He does in the most distinct and emphatic manner, in the above passage, where, three times over, He inserts the weighty clause, “**In the place which the Lord thy God shall choose.**”

Is this vain repetition? Let no one dare to think, much less to assert it. It is most necessary emphasis. Why most necessary? Because of our ignorance, our indifference, and our willfulness. God, in His infinite goodness, takes special pains to impress upon the heart, the conscience, and the understanding of His people that He would have one place in particular where the memorable and most significant feast of the passover was to be kept.

And be it remarked that it is only in Deuteronomy that the place of celebration is insisted upon. We have nothing about it in Exodus, because there it was kept in Egypt., we have nothing about it in Numbers, because there it was kept in the wilderness., but in Deuteronomy it is authoritatively and definitively settled, because there we have the instructions for the land.

Another striking proof that Deuteronomy is very far indeed from being a barren repetition of its predecessors.

The all- important point in reference to “**the place**,” so prominently and so peremptorily insisted upon in all the three great solemnities recorded in our chapter, is this: God would gather His beloved people around Himself, that they might feast together in His presence, that He might rejoice in them and they in Him and in one another. All this could only be in the one special place of divine appointment.

All who desired to meet the Lord and to meet His people – all who desired worship and communion according to God, would thankfully betake themselves to the divinely appointed center. Self-will might say, Can we not keep the feast in the bosom of our families? What need is there of a long journey? Surely if the heart is right, it cannot matter much as to the place. To all this we reply that the clearest, finest, and best proof of the heart being right would be found in the simple, earnest desire to do the will of God. It was quite sufficient for everyone who loved and feared God that He had appointed a place where He would meet His people; there they would be found, and no where else. His presence it was that could alone impart joy, comfort, strength, and blessing to all their great national reunions. It was not the mere fact of a large number of people gathering together, three times a year, to feast and rejoice together; this might minister to human pride, self-complacency, and excitement.

But to flock together to meet the Lord, to assemble in His blessed presence, to own the place where He had recorded His Name, this would be the deep joy of every truly loyal heart throughout the twelve tribes of Israel. For anyone willfully to abide at home, or to go any where else than to the one divinely appointed place, would not only be to neglect and insult the Lord, but actually to rebel against His supreme authority.

And now, having briefly spoken of the place, we may, for a moment, glance at the mode of celebration. This, too, is, as we might expect, quite characteristic of our book.

The leading feature here is “**the unleavened bread.**”

But the reader will specially note the interesting fact that this, bread is styled “**The bread of affliction.**” Now, what is the meaning of this? We all understand that unleavened bread is the type of that holiness of heart and life so absolutely essential to the enjoyment of true communion with God. We are not saved by personal holiness, but, thank God, we are saved to it. It is not the ground of our salvation, but it is an essential element in our communion. Allowed leaven is the death-blow to communion and worship.

We must never, for one moment, lose sight of this great cardinal principle in that life of personal holiness and practical godliness which, as redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, we are called, bound, and privileged to live from day to day, in the midst of the scenes and circumstances through which we are journeying home to our eternal rest in the heavens. To speak of communion and worship while living in known sin is the melancholy proof that we know nothing of either the one or the other.

In order to enjoy communion with God or the communion of saints, and in order to worship God in spirit and in truth, we must be living a life of personal holiness, a life of separation from all known evil. To take our place in the assembly of God’s people, and appear to take part in the holy fellowship and worship pertaining thereto, while living in secret sin, or allowing evil in others, is to defile the assembly, grieve the Holy Ghost, sin against Christ, and bring down upon us the judgment of God, who is now judging His house and chastening His children in order that they may not ultimately be condemned with the world.

All this is most solemn, and calls for the earnest attention of all who really desire to walk with God and serve Him with reverence and godly fear. It is one thing to have the doctrine of the type in the region of our understanding, and another thing altogether to have its great moral lesson engraved on the heart and worked out in the life.

May all who profess to have the blood of the Lamb sprinkled on their conscience seek to keep the feast of unleavened bread. “**Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us; therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth**” (I Corinthians 5:6-8).

But what are we to understand by “**the bread of affliction**”? Should we not rather look for joy, praise, and triumph in connection with a feast in memory of deliverance from Egyptian bondage and misery? No doubt there is very deep and real joy, thankfulness, and praise in idealizing the blessed truth of our full deliverance from our former condition, with all its accompaniments and all its consequences; but it is very plain that these were not the prominent features of the paschal feast—indeed, they are not even named. We have “**the bread of affliction**,” but not a word about joy, praise, or triumph.

Now, why is this? what great moral lesson is conveyed to our hearts by the bread of affliction? We believe it sets before us those deep exercises of heart which the Holy Ghost produces by bringing powerfully before us what it cost our adorable Lord and Saviour to deliver us from our sins and from the judgment which those sins deserved. Those exercises are also typified by the “**bitter herbs**” of Exodus 12, and they are illustrated again and again in the history of God’s people of old, who were led, under the powerful action of the Word and Spirit of God, to chasten themselves and “**afflict their souls**” in the divine presence.

And be it remembered that there is not a tinge of the legal element or of unbelief in these holy exercises – far from it. When an Israelite partook of the bread of affliction, with the roasted flesh of the Passover, did it express a doubt or a fear as to his full deliverance? Impossible! How could it? He was in the land; he was gathered to God’s own center – His own very presence. How could he, then, doubt his full and final deliverance from the land of Egypt? The thought is simply absurd.

But although he had no doubts or fears as to his deliverance, yet had he to eat the bread of affliction; it was an essential element in his paschal feast, “**For thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt in haste, that thou mayest remember the day when thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt all the days of thy life.**”

This was very deep and real work. They were never to forget their exodus out of Egypt, but to keep up the remembrance of it, in the promised land, throughout all generations. They were to commemorate their deliverance by a feast emblematical of those holy exercises which ever characterize true, practical, Christian piety.

We would very earnestly commend to the serious attention of the Christian reader the whole line of truth indicated by “**the bread of affliction.**” We believe it is much needed by those who profess great familiarity with what are called the doctrines of grace.

There is very great danger, especially to young professors, while seeking to avoid legality and bondage, of running into the opposite extreme of levity – a most terrible snare. Aged and experienced Christians are not so liable to fall into this sad evil; it is the young amongst us who so need to be most solemnly warned against it. They hear, it may be, a great deal about salvation by grace, justification by faith, deliverance from the law, and all the peculiar privileges of the Christian position. Now, we need hardly say that all these are of cardinal importance; and it would be utterly impossible for anyone to hear too much about them. Would they were more spoken about, written about and preached about!

Thousands of the Lord's beloved people spend all their days in darkness, doubt, and legal bondage, through ignorance of those great foundation-truths. But while all this is perfectly true, there are, on the other hand, many – alas! too many – who have a merely intellectual familiarity with the principles of grace, but (if we are to judge from their habits and manners, their style and deportment – the only way we have of judging) who know but little of the sanctifying power in the heart and in the life.

Now, to speak according to the teaching of the paschal feast, it would not have been according to the mind of God for anyone to attempt to keep that feast without the unleavened bread, even the bread of affliction. Such a thing would not have been tolerated in Israel of old. It was an absolutely essential ingredient. And so, we may rest assured, it is an integral part of that feast which we, as Christians, are exhorted to keep, to cultivate personal holiness and that condition of soul which is so aptly expressed by the “**bitter herbs**” of Exodus 12, or the Deuteronomic ingredient – “**the bread of affliction,**” which latter would seem to be the permanent figure for the land.

In a word, then, we believe there is a deep and urgent need amongst us of those spiritual feelings and affections, those profound exercises of soul, which the Holy Ghost would produce by unfolding to our hearts the sufferings of Christ – what it cost Him to put our sins away – what He endured for us when passing under the billows and waves of God's righteous wrath against our sins.

We are sadly lacking – if one may be permitted to speak for others – in that deep contrition of heart which flows from spiritual occupation with the sufferings and death of our precious Saviour. It is one thing to have the blood of Christ sprinkled on the conscience, and another thing to have the death of Christ brought home, in a spiritual way, to the heart, and the Cross of Christ applied, in a practical way, to our whole course and character.

- How is it that we can so lightly commit sin, in thought, word, and deed?
- How is it that there is so much levity,

- So much unsubduedness,
- So much self-indulgence,
- So much carnal ease,
- So much that is merely frothy and superficial?

Is it not because that ingredient typified by “**the bread of affliction**” is lacking in our feast? We cannot doubt it. We fear there is a very deplorable lack of depth and seriousness in our Christianity. There is too much flippant discussion of the profound mysteries of the Christian faith, too much head-knowledge without the inward power.

All this demands the serious attention of the reader. We cannot shake off the impression that not a little of this melancholy condition of things is but too justly traceable to a certain style of preaching the Gospel, adopted, no doubt, with the very best intentions, but none the less pernicious in its moral effects. It is all right to preach a simple Gospel. It cannot, by any possibility, be put more simply than God the Holy Ghost has given it to us in Scripture.

All this is fully admitted; but, at the same time, we are persuaded there is a very serious defect in the preaching of which we speak. There is a want of spiritual depth, a lack of holy seriousness.

In the effort to counteract legality, there is that which tends to levity. Now, while legality is a great evil, levity is much greater. We must guard against both. We believe grace is the remedy for the former, truth for the latter; but spiritual wisdom is needed to enable us rightly to adjust and apply these two.

If we find a soul deeply exercised under the powerful action of truth, thoroughly plowed up by the mighty ministry of the Holy Ghost, we should pour in the deep consolation of the pure and precious grace of God, as set forth in the divinely efficacious sacrifice of Christ. This is the divine remedy for a broken heart, a contrite spirit, a convicted conscience. When the deep furrow has been made by the spiritual plowshare, we have only to cast in the incorruptible seed of the Gospel of God, in the assurance that it will take root, and bring forth fruit in due season.

But, on the other hand, if we find a person going on in a light, airy, unbroken condition, using very high-flown language about grace, talking loudly against legality, and seeking, in a merely human way, to set forth an easy way of being saved, we consider this to be a case calling for a very solemn application, of truth to the heart and conscience.

Now, we greatly fear there is a vast amount of this last named element abroad in the professing church. To speak according to the language of our type, there is a tendency to separate the passover from the feast of unleavened bread – to rest in the fact of being delivered from judgment and forget the roasted lamb, the bread of holiness, and the bread of affliction.

In reality, they never can be separated, inasmuch as God has bound them together; and hence we do not believe that any soul can be really in the enjoyment of the precious truth that “**Christ our passover is sacrificed for us,**” who is not seeking to “**keep the feast.**”

When the Holy Spirit unfolds to our hearts something of the deep blessedness, preciousness, and efficacy of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, He leads us to meditate upon the soul-subduing mystery of His sufferings – to ponder in our hearts all that He passed through for us, all that it cost Him to save us from the eternal consequences of that which we, alas! So often lightly commit.

Now, this is very deep and holy work, and leads the soul into those exercises which correspond with “**the bread of affliction**” in the feast of unleavened bread. There is a wide difference between the feelings produced by dwelling upon our sins and those which flow from dwelling upon the sufferings of Christ to put those sins away.

True, we can never forget our sins, never forget the hole of the pit from whence we were digged; but it is one thing to dwell upon the pit, and another and a deeper thing altogether to dwell upon the grace that digged us out of it, and what it cost our precious Saviour to do it. It is this latter we so much need to keep continually in the remembrance of the thoughts of our hearts. We are so terribly volatile, so ready to forget.

We need to look very earnestly to God to enable us to enter more deeply and practically into the sufferings of Christ, and into the application of the Cross to all that in us which is contrary to Him. This will impart depth of tone, tenderness of spirit, an intense breathing after holiness of heart and life, practical separation from the world, in its every phase, a holy subduedness, jealous watchfulness over ourselves, our thoughts, our words, our ways, our whole deportment in daily life. In a word, it would lead to a totally different type of Christianity from what we see around us, and what, alas! we exhibit in our own personal history.

May the Spirit of God graciously unfold to our hearts, by His own direct and powerful ministry, more and more of what is meant by **“the roasted lamb,”** the **“unleavened bread,”** and **“the bread of affliction.”** *

*** For further remarks on the passover and the feast of unleavened bread, the reader is referred to Exodus 12. and Numbers 9. Specially in the latter – the connection between the passover and the Lord’s supper. This is a point of deepest interest and immense practical importance. The passover looked forward to the death of Christ; the Lord’s supper looks back to it. What the former was to a faithful Israelite, the latter is to the Church. If this were more fully seen, it would greatly tend to meet the prevailing laxity, indifference, and error as to the table and supper of the Lord.**

To anyone who lives habitually in the holy atmosphere of Scripture, it must seem strange indeed to mark the confusion of thought and the diversity of practice in reference to a subject so very important, and one so simply and clearly presented in the Word of God.

It can hardly be called in question, by anyone who bows to Scripture, that the apostles and the early Church assembled on the first day of the week to break bread. There is not a shadow of warrant in the New Testament for confining that most precious ordinance to once a month, once a quarter, or once in six months. This can only be viewed as a human interference with a divine institution. We are aware that much is sought to be made of the words, “As oft as ye do it;” but we do not see how any argument based on this clause can stand for a moment in the face of apostolic precedent in Acts 20:7. The first day of the week is unquestionably the day for the Church to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. Does the Christian reader admit this? If so, does he act upon it?

It is a serious thing to neglect a special ordinance of Christ, and one appointed by Him the same night in which He was betrayed, under circumstances so deeply affecting. Surely, all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity would desire to remember Him in this special way, according to His own word – “This do in remembrance of me.” Can we understand any true lover of Christ living in the habitual neglect of this precious memorial? If an Israelite of old neglected the passover, he would have been “cut off.” But this was law, and we are under grace. True; but is that a reason for neglecting our Lord’s commandment?

We would commend this subject to the reader’s careful attention. There is much more involved in it than most of us are aware. We believe the entire history of the Lord’s Supper for the last eighteen centuries is full of interest and instruction.

We may see in the way in which the Lord's table has been treated a striking moral index of the Church's real condition. In proportion as the Church departed from Christ and His Word did she neglect and pervert the precious institution of the Lord's supper; and on the other hand, just as the Spirit of God wrought, at any time, with special power in the Church, the Lord's supper has found its true place in the hearts of His people.

But we cannot pursue this subject further in a foot-note; we have ventured to suggest it to the reader, and we trust he may be led to follow it up for himself. We believe he will find it a most profitable and suggestive study.

The Feast of Pentecost

We shall now briefly consider the feast of Pentecost, which stands next in order to the passover. **“Seven weeks shalt thou number unto thee; begin to number the seven weeks from such time as thou beginnest to put the sickle to the corn. And thou shalt keep the feast of weeks unto the Lord thy God with a tribute of a free-will offering of thine hand, which thou shalt give unto the Lord thy God, according as the Lord thy God hath blessed thee; and thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maid-servant, and the Levite that is within thy gates, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are among you, in the place which the Lord thy God hath chosen to place His name there. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt; and thou shalt observe and do these statutes”** (Ver. 9-12).

Here we have the well-known and beautiful type of the day of Pentecost. The passover sets forth the death of Christ; the sheaf of first-fruits is the striking figure of a risen Christ; and in the feast of weeks, we have prefigured before us the descent of the Holy Ghost, fifty days after the resurrection.

We speak, of course, of what these feasts convey to us, according to the mind of God, irrespective altogether of the question of Israel's apprehension of their meaning.. It is our privilege to look at all these typical institutions in the light of the New Testament; and when we so view them, we are filled with wonder and delight at the divine perfectness, beauty, and order of all those marvelous types.

And not only so, but – what is of immense value to us – we see how the Scriptures of the New Testament dovetail, as it were, into those of the Old; we see the lovely unity of the divine Volume, and how manifestly it is one Spirit that breathes through the whole, from beginning to end. In this way we are inwardly strengthened in our apprehension of the precious truth of the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, and our hearts are fortified against all the blasphemous attacks of infidel writers.

Our souls are conducted to the top of the mountain where the moral glories of the Volume shine upon us in all their heavenly luster, and from whence we can look down and see the clouds and chilling mists of infidel thought rolling beneath us. These clouds and mists cannot affect us, inasmuch as they are far away below the level on which, through infinite grace, we stand.

Infidel writers know absolutely nothing of the moral glories of Scripture; but one thing is awfully certain, namely, that one moment in eternity will completely revolutionize the thoughts of all the infidels and atheists that have ever raved or written against the Bible and its Author.

Now? in looking at the deeply interesting feast of weeks, or Pentecost, we are at once struck with the difference between it and the feast of unleavened bread. In the first place, we read of “**a free-will offering.**” Here we have a figure of the Church, formed by the Holy Ghost and presented to God as “**a kind of first-fruits of His creatures.**”

We have dwelt upon this feature of the type in the “**Notes on Leviticus,**” chapter 23, and shall not therefore enter upon it here, but confine ourselves to what is purely Deuteronomic. The people were to present a tribute of a free-will offering of their hand, according as the Lord their God had blessed them. There was nothing like this at the passover, because that sets forth Christ offering Himself for us, as a sacrifice, and not our offering anything.

We remember our deliverance from sin and Satan, and what that deliverance cost; we meditate upon the deep and varied sufferings of our precious Saviour as prefigured by the roasted lamb; we remember that it was our sins that were laid upon Him. He was bruised for our iniquities – judged in our stead, and this leads to deep and hearty contrition, or, what we may call true Christian repentance. For we must never forget that repentance is not a mere transient emotion of a sinner when his eyes are first opened, but an abiding moral condition of the Christian, in view of the Cross and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. If this were better understood and more fully entered into, it would impart a depth and solidity to the Christian life and character in which the great majority of us are lamentably deficient.

But in the feast of Pentecost, we have before us the power of the Holy Ghost, and the varied effects of His blessed presence in us and with us. He enables us to present our bodies and all that we have as a free-will offering unto our God, according as He hath blessed us. This, we need hardly say, can only be done by the power of the Holy Ghost; and hence the striking type of it is presented, not in the passover, which prefigures the death of Christ; not in the feast of unleavened bread, which sets forth the moral effect of that death upon us, in repentance, self-judgment, and practical holiness; but in Pentecost, which is the acknowledged type of the precious gift of the Holy Ghost.

Now, it is the Spirit who enables us to enter into the claims of God upon us – claims which are to be measured only by the extent of the divine blessing.

He gives us to see and understand that all we are and all we have belong to God. He gives us to delight in consecrating ourselves-spirit, soul, and body – to God. It is truly” a free-will offering.” It is not of constraint, but willingly. There is not an atom of bondage, for” where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

In short, we have here the lovely spirit and moral character of the entire Christian life and service.

A soul under law cannot understand the force and beauty of this. Souls under the law never received the Spirit. The two things are wholly incompatible. Thus the apostle says to the poor misguided assemblies of Galatia, **“This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by works of law, or by the hearing of faith? . . . He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth He it by works of law, or by the hearing of faith?”**

The precious gift of the Spirit is consequent upon the death, resurrection, ascension, and glorification of our adorable Lord and Saviour JESUS Christ, and consequently can have nothing whatever to do with **“works of law”** in any shape or form. The presence of the Holy Ghost on earth, His dwelling with and in all true believers, is a grand characteristic truth of Christianity. It was not, and could not be, known in Old Testament times. It was not even known by the disciples in our Lord’s lifetime. He Himself said to them, on the eve of His departure, **“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth; it is expedient [or profitable – *συμφερει*] for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you”** (John 16:7).

This proves, in the most conclusive manner, that even the very men who enjoyed the high and precious privilege of personal companionship with the Lord Himself were to be put in an advanced position by His going away and the coming of the Comforter. Again, we read, **“If ye love Me, keep My commandments; and I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him; but ye know Him, for He dwelleth with you and shall be in you.”**

We cannot, however, attempt to go elaborately into this immense subject here; our space does not admit of it, much as we should delight in it. We must confine ourselves to one or two points suggested by the feast of weeks, as presented in our chapter. We have referred to the very interesting fact that the Spirit of God is the living spring and power of the life of personal devotedness and consecration beautifully prefigured by **“the tribute of a free-will offering.”**

The sacrifice of Christ is the ground, the presence of the Holy Ghost is the power, of the Christian’s dedication of himself – spirit, soul, and body – to God. **“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service”** (Romans 12:1).

But there is another point of deepest interest presented in verse 11 of our chapter, - **“And thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God.”**

We have no such word in the paschal feast, or in the feast of unleavened bread. It would not be in moral keeping with either of these solemnities. True it is, the passover lies at the very foundation of all the joy we can or ever shall realize here or hereafter; but we must ever think of the death of Christ, His sufferings, His sorrows – all that He passed through when the waves and billows of God’s righteous wrath passed over His soul. It is upon these profound mysteries that our hearts are, or ought to be, mainly fixed when we surround the Lord’s table and keep that feast by which we show the Lord’s death until He come.

Now, it is plain to the spiritual and thoughtful reader that the feelings proper to such a holy and solemn institution are not of a jubilant character. We certainly can and do rejoice that the sorrows and sufferings of our blessed Lord are over, and over forever – that those terrible hours are passed, never to return; but what we recall in the feast is not simply their being over, but their being gone through, and that for us. “**Ye do show the Lord’s death;**” and we know that whatever may accrue to us from that precious death, yet when we are called to meditate upon it, our joy is chastened by those profound exercises of soul which the Holy Spirit produces by unfolding to us the sorrows, the sufferings, the Cross, and passion of our blessed Saviour.

Our Lord’s words are, “**This do in remembrance of Me;**” but what we especially remember in the supper is, Christ suffering and dying for us; what we show, is His death; and with these solemn realities before our souls, in the power of the Holy Ghost, there will, there must be, holy subduedness and seriousness.

We speak, of course, of what becomes the immediate occasion of the celebration of the supper – the suited feelings and affections of such a moment. But these must be produced by the powerful ministry of the Holy Ghost.

It can be of no possible use to seek, by any pious efforts of our own, to work ourselves up to a suitable state of mind. This would be ascending by steps to the altar, a thing most offensive to God. It is only by the Holy Spirit’s ministry that we can worthily celebrate the holy supper of the Lord. He alone can enable us to put away all levity, all formality, all mere routine, all wandering thoughts, and to discern the body and blood of the Lord in those memorials which, by His own appointment, are laid on His table. But in the feast of Pentecost, rejoicing was a prominent feature.

We hear nothing of “**bitter herbs**” or “**bread of affliction**” on this occasion, because it is the type of the coming of the other Comforter – the descent of the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father, and sent down by the risen, ascended, and glorified Head in the heavens, to fill the hearts of His people with praise, thanksgiving, and triumphant joy – yea, to lead them into full and blessed fellowship with their glorified Head, in His triumph over sin, death, hell, Satan, and all the powers of darkness.

The Spirit’s presence is connected with liberty, light, power, and joy. Thus we read, “**The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost.**”

Doubts, fears, and legal bondage flee away
before the precious ministry of the Holy Ghost.

But we must distinguish between His work and His indwelling – His quickening and His sealing.

The very first dawn of conviction in the soul is the fruit of the Spirit’s work. It is His blessed operation that leads to all true repentance, and this is not joyful work. It is very good, very needful, absolutely essential; but it is not joy – nay, it is deep sorrow. But when, through grace, we are enabled to believe in a risen and glorified Saviour, then the Holy Ghost comes and takes up His abode in us, as the seal of our acceptance and the earnest of our inheritance.

Now, this fills us with joy unspeakable and full of glory; and being thus filled ourselves, we become channels of blessing to others.

“He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive; for the Holy Ghost was not yet, because that Jesus was not yet glorified.”

The Spirit is the spring of power and joy in the heart of the believer. He fits, fills, and uses us as His vessels in ministering to poor thirsty, needy souls around us. He links us with the Man in the glory, maintains us in living communion with Him, and enables us to be, in our feeble measure, the expression of what He is.

Every movement of the Christian should be redolent with the fragrance of Christ. For one who professes to be a Christian to exhibit unholy tempers, selfish ways, a grasping, covetous, worldly spirit, envy and jealousy, pride and ambition, is to belie his profession, dishonor the holy name of Christ, and bring reproach upon that glorious Christianity which he professes, and of which we have the lovely type in the feast of weeks – a feast preeminently characterized by a joy which had its source in the goodness of God, and which flowed out far and wide, and embraced in its hallowed circle every object of need.

“Thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maid-servant, and the Levite that is within thy gates, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are among you.”

How lovely! How perfectly beautiful! Oh that its antitype were more faithfully exhibited amongst us!

Where are those streams of refreshing which ought to flow from the Church of God? where those unblotted epistles of Christ known and read of all men? Where can we see a practical exhibition of Christ in the ways of His people – something to which we could point and say, There is true Christianity?

Oh, may the Spirit of God stir up our hearts to a more intense desire after conformity to the image of Christ, in all things!

May He clothe with His own mighty power the Word of God, which we have in our hands and in our homes, that it may speak to our hearts and consciences, and lead us to judge ourselves, our ways, and our associations by its heavenly light, so that there may be a thoroughly devoted band of witnesses gathered out to His name, to wait for His appearing. Will the reader join us in asking for this?

The Feast of Tabernacles

We shall now turn for a moment to the lovely institution of the feast of tabernacles, which gives such remarkable completeness to the range of truth presented in our chapter.

‘Thou shalt observe the feast of tabernacles seven days, after that thou hast gathered in thy corn and thy wine; and thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maid-servant, and the Levite, the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates. Seven days shalt thou keep a solemn feast unto the Lord thy God in the place which the Lord shall choose; because the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thine increase, and in all the works of thine hands, therefore thou shalt surely rejoice. Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God in the place which He shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the Lord empty; every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which He hath given thee’ (Ver. 13-17).

Here, then, we have the striking and beautiful type of Israel’s future. The feast of tabernacles has not yet had its anti type. The passover and Pentecost have had their fulfillment in the precious death of Christ and the descent of the Holy Ghost, but the third great solemnity points forward to the times of the restitution of all things, which God has spoken of by the mouth of all His holy prophets which have been since the world began.

And let the reader note particularly the time of the celebration of this feast. It was to be **“after thou hast gathered in thy corn and thy wine;”** in other words, it was after the harvest and the vintage. Now, there is a very marked distinction between these two things. The one speaks of grace, the other of judgment. At the end of the age, God will gather His wheat into His garner, and then will come the treading of the wine-press, in awful judgment.

We have in the fourteenth chapter of the book of Revelation a very solemn passage bearing upon the subject now before us. **“And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of Man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, ‘Thrust in thy sickle, and reap; for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.’ And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.”**

Here we have the harvest; and then **“another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire”** – the emblem of judgment – **“and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, ‘Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe.’ And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great wine-press of the wrath of God. And the wine-press was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the wine-press, even unto the horsebridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs”** -equal to the whole length of the land of Palestine!

Now, these apocalyptic figures set before us, in their own characteristic way, scenes which must be enacted previous to the celebration of the feast of tabernacles. Christ will gather His wheat into His heavenly garner, and after that He will come in crushing judgment upon Christendom.

Thus, every section of the volume of inspiration – Moses, the Psalms, the Prophets, the Gospels (or the acts of Christ), the Acts of the Holy Ghost, the Epistles, and Apocalypse – all go to establish, unanswerably, the fact that the world will not be converted by the Gospel, that things are not improving, and will not improve, but grow worse and worse. That glorious time prefigured by the feast of tabernacles must be preceded by the vintage, the treading of the winepress of the wrath of almighty God.

Why, then, we may well ask, in the face of such an overwhelming body of divine evidence, furnished by every section of the inspired canon, will men persist in cherishing the delusive hope of a world converted by the Gospel? What mean “**gathered wheat and a trodden wine-press**”? Assuredly, they do not and cannot mean a converted world.

We shall perhaps be told that we cannot build anything upon Mosaic types and apocalyptic symbols. Perhaps not, if we had but types and symbols; but when the accumulated rays of inspiration’s heavenly lamp converge upon these types and symbols and unfold their deep meaning to our souls, we find them in perfect harmony with the voices of prophets and apostles, and the living teachings of our Lord Himself.

In a word, all speak the same language, all teach the same lesson, all bear the same unequivocal testimony to the solemn truth that at the end of this age, instead of a converted world, prepared for a spiritual millennium, there will be a vine covered and borne down with terrible clusters, fully ripe for the wine-press of the wrath of almighty God.

Oh, may the men and women of Christendom, and the teachers thereof, apply their hearts to these solemn realities! May these things sink down into their ears, and into the very depths of their souls, so that they may fling to the winds their fondly cherished delusion, and accept instead the plainly revealed and clearly established truth of God!

But we must draw this section to a close; and ere doing so, we would remind the Christian reader that we are called to exhibit in our daily life the blessed influence of all those great truths presented to us in the three interesting types on which we have been meditating.

Christianity is characterized by those three great formative facts – redemption, the presence of the Holy Ghost, and the hope of glory.

The Christian is redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, sealed by the Holy Ghost, and he is looking for the Saviour.

Yes, beloved reader, these are solid facts, divine realities, great formative truths. They are not mere principles or opinions, but they are designed to be a living power in our souls, and to shine in our lives. See how thoroughly practical were these solemnities on which we have been dwelling; mark what a tide of praise and thanksgiving and joy and blessing and active benevolence flowed from the assembly of Israel when gathered around the Lord in the place which He had chosen.

Praise and thanksgiving ascended to God, and the blessed streams of a large-hearted benevolence flowed forth to every object of need. **“Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God . . . And they shall not appear before the Lord empty; every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which He hath given thee.”**

Lovely words! They were not to come empty into the Lord’s presence; they were to come with the heart full of praise, and the hands full of the fruits of divine goodness to gladden the hearts of the Lord’s workmen and the Lord’s poor. All this was perfectly beautiful. The Lord would gather His people around Himself, to fill them to overflowing with joy and praise, and to make them His channels of blessing to others. They were not to remain under their vine and under their fig-tree, and there congratulate themselves upon the rich and varied mercies which surrounded them. This might be all right and good in its place, but it would not have fully met the mind and heart of God.

No; three times in the year they had to arise and betake themselves to the divinely appointed meeting-place, and there raise their hallelujahs to the Lord their God, and there, too, to minister liberally of that which He had bestowed upon them to every form of human need. God would confer upon His people the rich privilege of rejoicing the heart of the Levite, the stranger, the widow, and the fatherless. This is the work in which He Himself delights – blessed forever be His name – and He would share His delight with His people. He would have it to be known, seen, and felt that the place where He met His people was a sphere of joy and praise, and a center from whence streams of blessing were to flow forth in all directions.

Has not all this a voice and a lesson for the Church of God?

Does it not speak home to the writer and the reader of these lines? Assuredly it does. May we listen to it; may it tell upon our hearts. May the marvelous grace of God so act upon us that our hearts may be full of praise to Him, and our hands full of good works. If the mere types and shadows of our blessings were connected with so much thanksgiving and active benevolence, how much more powerful should be the effect of the blessings themselves!

But ah! the question is, Are we realizing the blessings? are we making our own of them? are we grasping them in the power of an artless faith?

Here lies the secret of the whole matter. Where do we find professing Christians in the full and settled enjoyment of what the passover prefigured, namely, full deliverance from judgment and this present evil world? Where do we find them in the full and settled enjoyment of their Pentecost, even the indwelling of the Holy Ghost – the seal, the earnest, the unction, and the witness?

Ask the vast majority of religious professors the plain question, **“Have you received the Holy Ghost?”** and see what answer you will get. What answer can the reader give? Can he say, Yes, thank God, I know I am washed in the precious blood of Christ, and sealed with the Holy Ghost? It is greatly to be feared that comparatively few of the vast multitudes of professors around us know any thing of these precious things, which nevertheless are the chartered privileges of the very simplest member of the body of Christ.

So also as to the feast of tabernacles, how few understand its meaning! True, it has not yet been fulfilled; but the Christian is called to live in the present power of that which it sets forth. **“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”** Our life is to be governed and our character formed by the combined influence of the **“grace”** in which we stand and the **“glory”** for which we wait.

But if souls are not established in grace – if they do not even know that their sins are forgiven – if they are taught that it is presumption to be sure of salvation, and that it is humility and piety to live in perpetual doubt and fear, and that no one can be sure of their salvation until they stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, how can they possibly take Christian ground, manifest the fruits of Christian life, or cherish proper Christian hope?

If an Israelite of old was in doubt as to whether he was a child of Abraham, a member of the congregation of the Lord, and in the land, how could he keep the feast of unleavened bread, Pentecost, or tabernacles? There would have been no sense, meaning, or value in such a thing; indeed, we may safely affirm that no Israelite would have thought for a moment of anything so utterly absurd.

How is it, then, that professing Christians – many of them, we cannot doubt, real children of God never seem to be able to enter upon proper Christian ground?

- They spend their days in doubt and fear, darkness and uncertainty.
- Their religious exercises and services, instead of being the outcome of life possessed and enjoyed, are entered upon and gone through more as a matter of legal duty, and as a moral preparation for the life to come.

Many truly pious souls are kept in this state all their days; and as to **“the blessed hope”** which grace has set before us, to cheer our hearts and detach us from present things, they do not enter into it or understand it; it is looked upon as a mere speculation, indulged in by a few visionary enthusiasts here and there.

They are looking forward to the day of judgment, instead of looking out for **“the bright and morning Star;”** they are praying for the forgiveness of their sins, and asking God to give them His Holy Spirit, where they ought to be rejoicing in the assured possession of eternal life, divine righteousness, and the Spirit of adoption.

All this is directly opposed to the simplest and clearest teaching of the New Testament; it is utterly foreign to the very genius of Christianity, subversive of the Christian’s peace and liberty, and destructive of all true and intelligent Christian worship, service, and testimony. It is plainly impossible that people can appear before the Lord with their hearts full of praise for privileges which they do not enjoy, or their hands full of the blessing which they have never realized.

We call the earnest attention of all the Lord’s people, throughout the length and breadth of the professing church, to this weighty subject. We entreat them to search the Scriptures, and see if they afford any warrant for keeping souls in darkness, doubt, and bondage all their days.

That there are solemn warnings, searching appeals, weighty admonitions, is most true, and we bless God for them, we need them, and should diligently apply our hearts to them; but let the reader distinctly understand that it is the sweet privilege of the very babes in Christ to know that their sins are all forgiven, that they are accepted in a risen Christ, sealed by the Holy Ghost, and heirs of eternal glory. Such, through infinite and sovereign grace, are their clearly established and assured blessings – blessings to which the love of God makes them welcome, for which the blood of Christ makes them fit, and as to which the testimony of the Holy Ghost makes them sure.

May the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls lead all His beloved people – the lambs and sheep of His blood-bought flock – to know, by the teaching of His HOLY SPIRIT, the things that are freely given to them of God; and may those who do know them, in measure, know them more fully, and exhibit the precious fruits of them in a life of genuine devotedness to Christ and His service. It is greatly to be feared that many of us who profess to be acquainted with the very highest truths of the Christian faith are not answering to our profession; we are not acting up to the principle set forth in verse 17 of our beautiful chapter – **“Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which He hath given thee.”**

We seem to forget that although we have nothing to do and nothing to give for salvation, we have much that we can do for the Saviour, and much that we can give to His workmen and to His poor. There is very great danger of pushing the do-nothing and give-nothing principle too far.

If in the days of our ignorance and legal bondage we worked and gave upon a false principle and with a false object, we surely ought not to do less and give less now that we profess to know that we are not only saved, but blessed with all spiritual blessings in a risen and glorified Christ. We have need to take care that we are not resting in the mere intellectual perception and verbal profession of these great and glorious truths, while the heart and conscience have never felt their sacred action, nor the conduct and character been brought under their powerful and holy influence.

We venture, in all tenderness and love, just to offer these practical suggestions to the reader for his prayerful consideration. We would not wound, offend, or discourage the very feeblest lamb in all the flock of Christ; and further, we can assure the reader that we are not casting a stone at anyone, but simply writing as in the immediate presence of God, and sounding in the ears of the Church a note of warning as to that which we deeply feel to be our common danger. We believe there is an urgent call, on all sides, to consider our ways, to humble ourselves before the Lord on account of our manifold failures, shortcomings, and inconsistencies, and to seek grace from Him to be more real, more thoroughly devoted, more pronounced in our testimony for Him, in this dark and evil day.

~ end of chapter 16 ~

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