

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO TO TWENTY-FIVE

THE portion of our book on which we now enter, though not calling for elaborate exposition, yet teaches us two very important practical lessons.

In the first place, many of the institutions and ordinances here set forth, prove and illustrate, in a most striking way, the terrible depravity of the human heart. They show us, with unmistakable distinctness, what man is capable of doing if left to himself. We must ever remember, as we read some of the paragraphs of this section of Deuteronomy, that God the Holy Ghost has indited them. We, in our fancied wisdom, may feel disposed to ask why such passages were ever penned. Can it be possible that they are actually inspired by the Holy Ghost? And of what possible value can they be to us? If they were written for our learning, then what are we to learn from them?

Our reply to all these questions is at once simple and direct; and it is this: The very passages which we might least expect to find on the page of inspiration teach us, in their own peculiar way, the moral material of which we are made, and the moral depths into which we are capable of plunging. And is not this of great moment?

Is it not well to have a faithful mirror held up before our eyes, in which we may see every moral trait, feature, and lineament perfectly reflected? Unquestionably. We hear a great deal about the dignity of human nature, and very many find it exceedingly hard to admit that they are really capable of committing some of the sins prohibited in the section before us, and in other portions of the divine volume; but we may rest assured that when God commands us not to commit this or that particular sin, we are verily capable of committing it. This is beyond all question.

Divine wisdom would never erect a dam if there was not a current to be resisted. There would be no necessity to tell an angel not to steal; but man has theft in his nature, and hence the command applies to him. And just so in reference to every other prohibited thing; the prohibition proves the tendency – proves it beyond all question. We must either admit this or imply the positive blasphemy that God has spoken in vain. But then, it may be said, and is said by many, that while some very terrible samples of fallen humanity are capable of committing some of the abominable sins prohibited in Scripture, yet all are not so. This is a most thorough mistake. Hear what the Holy Ghost says in the seventeenth chapter of the prophet Jeremiah. “**The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.**” Whose heart is he speaking of? Is it the heart of some atrocious criminal, or of some untutored savage? Nay; it is the human heart – the heart of the writer and of the reader of these lines.

Hear also what our Lord Jesus Christ says on this subject – **“Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.”** Out of what heart? Is it the heart of some hideously depraved and abominable wretch, wholly unfit to appear in decent society? Nay; it is out of the human heart – the heart of the writer and of the reader of these lines.

Let us never forget this; it is a wholesome truth for everyone of us. We all need to bear in mind that if God were to withdraw His sustaining grace for one moment, there is no depth of iniquity into which we are not capable of plunging; indeed, we may add – and we do it with deep thankfulness – it is His own gracious hand that preserves us, each moment, from becoming a complete wreck in every way, – physically, mentally, morally, spiritually, and in our circumstances. May we keep this ever in the remembrance of the thoughts of our hearts, so that we may walk humbly and watchfully, and lean upon that arm which alone can sustain and preserve us.

But we have said there is another valuable lesson furnished by this section of our book which now lies open before us. It teaches us, in a manner peculiar to itself, the marvelous way in which God provided for everything connected with His people. Nothing escaped His gracious notice; nothing was too trivial for His tender care.

No mother could be more careful of the habits and manners of her little child than the almighty Creator and moral Governor of the universe was of the most minute details connected with the daily history of His people. By day and by night, waking and sleeping, at home and abroad, He looked after them. Their clothing, their food, their manners and ways toward one another, how they were to build their houses, how they were to plow and sow their ground, how they were to carry themselves in the deepest privacy of their personal life, – all was attended to and provided for in a manner that fills us with wonder, love, and praise.

We may here see, in a most striking way, that there is nothing too small for our God to take notice of when His people are concerned.

He takes a loving, tender, fatherly interest in their most minute concerns. We are amazed to find the Most High God, the Creator of the ends of the earth, the Sustainer of the vast universe, condescending to legislate about the matter of a bird’s nest; and yet why should we be amazed when we know that it is just the same to Him to provide for a sparrow as to feed a thousand millions of people daily?

But there was one grand fact which was ever to be kept prominently before each member of the congregation of Israel, namely, the divine presence in their midst. This fact was to govern their most private habits, and give character to all their ways.

“The Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee; therefore shall thy camp be holy; that He see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee” (Chap. 23:14).

What a precious privilege to have the Lord walking in their midst! what a motive for purity of conduct, and refined delicacy in their personal and domestic habits! If He was in their midst to secure victory over their enemies, He was also there to demand holiness of life.

They were never for one moment to forget the august Person who walked up and down in their midst. Would the thought of this prove irksome to any? Only to as such as did not love holiness, purity, and moral order. Every true Israelite would delight in the thought of having One dwelling in their midst who could not endure aught that was unholy, unseemly, or impure. The Christian reader will be at no loss to seize the moral force and application of this holy principle.

It is our privilege to have God the Spirit dwelling in us, individually and collectively. Thus we read, in I Corinthians 6:19, **“What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?”** This is individual. Each believer is a temple of the Holy Ghost, and this most glorious and precious truth, is the ground of the exhortation given in Ephesians 4:30 – **“Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.”**

How very important to keep this ever in the remembrance of the thoughts of our hearts! what a mighty moral motive for the diligent cultivation of purity of heart and holiness of life! When tempted to indulge in any wrong current of thought or feeling, any unworthy manner of speech, any unseemly line of conduct, what a powerful corrective would be found in the realization of the blessed fact that the Holy Spirit dwells in our body as in His temple!

If only we could keep this ever before us, it would preserve us from many a wandering thought, many an unguarded and foolish utterance, many an unbecoming act. But not only does the Holy Spirit dwell in each individual believer, He also dwells in the Church collectively. **“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”** (I Corinthians 3:16).

It is upon this fact that the apostle grounds his exhortation in I Thessalonians 5:19, **“Quench not the Spirit.”**

How divinely perfect is Scripture? How blessedly it hangs together!

- The Holy Ghost dwells in us individually, hence we are not to grieve Him;
- He dwells in the assembly, hence we are not to quench Him, but give Him His right place, and allow full scope for His blessed operations.

May these great practical truths find a deep place in our hearts, and exert a more powerful influence over our ways, both in private life and in the public assembly.

The Dealings of God with His People of Old

We shall now proceed to quote a few passages from the section of our book which now lies open before us strikingly illustrative of the wisdom, goodness, tenderness, holiness, and righteousness which marked all the dealings of God with His people of old.

Take, for example, the very opening paragraph.

“Thou shalt not see thy brother’s ox or his sheep go astray, and hide thyself from them; thou shalt in any case bring them again unto thy brother. And if thy brother be not nigh unto thee, or if thou know him not, then thou shalt bring it unto thine own house, and it shall be with thee until thy brother seek after it, and thou shalt restore it to him again. In like manner shalt thou do with his ass; and so shalt thou do with his raiment; and with all lost thing of thy brother’s which he hath lost, and thou hast found, shalt thou do likewise; thou mayest not hide thyself. Thou shalt not see thy brother’s ass or his ox fall down by the way, and hide thyself from them; thou shalt surely help him to lift them up again” (Chap. 22:1-4).

Here the two lessons of which we have spoken are very distinctly presented.

What a deeply humbling picture of the human heart have we in that one sentence, **“Thou mayest not hide thyself”**! We are capable of the base and detestable selfishness of hiding ourselves from our brother’s claims upon our sympathy and succor – of shirking the holy duty of looking after his interests – of pretending not to see his real need of our aid. Such is man! – such is the writer!

But oh, how blessedly character of our God shines out in this passage! The brother’s ox, or his sheep, or his ass, was not (to use a modern phrase) to be thrust into pound for trespass; it was to be brought home, cared for, and restored, safe and sound, to the owner, without charge for damage.

And so with the raiment. How lovely is all this! how it breathes upon us the very air of the divine presence, the fragrant atmosphere of divine goodness, tenderness, and thoughtful love! What a high and holy privilege for any people to have their conduct governed and their character formed by such exquisite statutes and judgments!

Again, take the following passage, so beautifully illustrative of divine thoughtfulness: **“When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence.”**

The Lord would have His people thoughtful and considerate of others; and hence, in building their houses, they were not merely to think of themselves and their convenience, but also of others and their safety.

Cannot Christians learn something from this?

How prone we are to think only of ourselves, our own interests, our own comfort and convenience! How rarely it happens that in the building or furnishing of our houses we bestow a thought upon other people! We build and furnish for ourselves. Alas! Self is too much our object and motive-spring in all our undertakings; nor can it be otherwise unless the heart be kept under the governing power of those motives and objects which belong to Christianity.

We must live in the pure and heavenly atmosphere of the new creation in order to get above and beyond the base selfishness which characterizes fallen humanity. Every unconverted man, woman, and child on the face of the earth is governed simply by self in some shape or another. Self is the center, the object, the motive-spring, of every action.

True, some are more amiable, more affectionate, more benevolent, more unselfish, more disinterested, more agreeable, than others; but it is utterly impossible that “**the natural man**” can be governed by spiritual motives, or an earthly man be animated by heavenly objects. Alas! we have to confess, with shame and sorrow, that we who profess to be heavenly and spiritual are so prone to live for ourselves, to seek our own things, to maintain our own interests, to consult our own ease and convenience. We are all alive and on the alert when self, in any shape or form, is concerned.

All this is most sad and deeply humbling. It really ought not to be, and it would not be if we were looking more simply and earnestly to Christ as our great Exemplar and model in all things.

Earnest and constant occupation of heart with Christ is the true secret of all practical Christianity. It is not rules and regulations that will ever make us Christ-like in our spirit, manner, and ways. We must drink into His spirit, walk in His footsteps, dwell more profoundly upon His moral glories, and then we shall, of blessed necessity, be conformed to His image.

“**We all with open face beholding as in a glass [or mirroring – κατοπτριζομενοι] the glory, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord**” (II Corinthians 3).

Mingled Truth with error

We must now ask the reader to turn for a moment to the following very important practical instructions – full of suggestive power for all Christian workers: “**Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seeds, lest the fruit of thy seed which thou hast sown and the fruit of thy vineyard be defiled**” (Chap. 22:9).

What a weighty principle is here! Do we really understand it? Do we see its true spiritual application?

It is to be feared there is a terrible amount of “**mingled seed**” used in the so-called spiritual husbandry of the present day.

- how much of “**philosophy and vain deceit,**”
- how much of “**science falsely so called,**”
- how much of “**the rudiments of the world,**”

Do we find mixed up in the teaching and preaching throughout the length and breadth of the professing church!

How little of the pure, unadulterated seed of the Word of God, the “**incorruptible seed**” of the precious Gospel of Christ, is scattered broad-cast over the field of Christendom in this our day! How few, comparatively, are content to confine themselves within the covers of the Bible for the material of their ministry! Those who are, by the grace of God, faithful enough to do so, are looked upon as men of one idea, men of the old school, narrow, and behind the times.

Well, we can only say, with a full and glowing heart, God bless the men of one idea – men of the precious old school of apostolic preaching!

Most heartily do we congratulate them on their blessed narrowness, and their being behind these dark and infidel times.

We are fully aware of what we expose ourselves to in thus writing, but this does not move us. We are persuaded that every true servant of Christ must be a man of one idea, and that idea is Christ;

- He must belong to the very oldest school – the school of Christ;
- He must be as narrow as the truth of God; and
- He must, with stern decision, refuse to move one hair’s breadth in the direction of this infidel age.

We cannot shake off the conviction that the effort on the part of the preachers and teachers of Christendom to keep abreast of the literature of the day must, to a very large extent, account for the rapid advance of rationalism and infidelity. They have got away from the Holy Scriptures, and sought to adorn their ministry by the resources of philosophy, science, and literature. They have catered more for the intellect than for the heart and conscience.

The pure and precious doctrines of Holy Scripture, the sincere milk of the Word, the Gospel of the grace of God and of the glory of Christ, were found insufficient to attract and keep together large congregations.

As Israel of old despised the manna, got tired of it, and pronounced it light food, so the professing church grew weary of the pure doctrines of that glorious Christianity unfolded in the pages of the New Testament, and sighed for something to gratify the intellect and feed the imagination.

The doctrines of the Cross, in which the blessed apostle gloried, have lost their charm for the professing church, and any who would be faithful enough to adhere and confine themselves in their ministry to those doctrines might abandon all thought of popularity.

But let all the true and faithful ministers of Christ, all true workers in His vineyard, apply their hearts to the spiritual principle set forth in Deuteronomy 22:9; let them, with unflinching decision, refuse to make use of “**divers seeds**” in their spiritual husbandry; let them confine themselves, in their ministry, to “**the form of sound words,**” and ever seek “**rightly to divide the word of truth,**” that so they may not be ashamed of their work, but receive a full reward in that day when every man’s work shall be tried of what sort it is.

We may depend upon it, the Word of God – the pure seed – is the only proper material for the spiritual workman to use. We do not despise learning; far from it; we consider it most valuable in its right place. The facts of science, too, and the resources of sound philosophy, may all be turned to profitable account in unfolding and illustrating the truth of Holy Scripture. We find the blessed Master Himself and His inspired apostles making use of the facts of history and of nature in their public teaching; and who, in his sober senses, would think of calling in question the value and importance of a competent knowledge of the languages of Hebrew and Greek in the private study and public exposition of the Word of God?

But admitting all this, as we most fully do, it leaves wholly untouched the great practical principle before us – a principle to which all the Lord’s people and His servants are bound to adhere, namely, that the Holy Ghost is the only power, and Holy Scripture the only material, for all true ministry in the Gospel and the Church of God.

If this were more fully understood and faithfully acted upon, we should witness a very different condition of things throughout the length and breadth of the vineyard of Christ.

Here, however, we must close this section.

We have elsewhere sought to handle the subject of “**The Unequal Yoke,**” and shall not therefore dwell upon it here. *

* **See a pamphlet entitled “The Unequal Yoke”.**

The Israelite was not to plow with an ox and an ass together; neither was he to wear a garment of divers sorts, as of woolen and linen. The spiritual application of both these things is as simple as it is important. The Christian is not to link himself with an unbeliever for any object whatsoever, be it domestic, religious, philanthropic, or commercial; neither must he allow himself to be governed by mixed principles. His character must be formed and his conduct ruled by the pure and lofty principles of the Word of God.

Thus may it be with all who profess and call themselves Christians.

~ end of chapter 22-25 ~

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