

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF GENESIS

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

THESE chapters present to us the history of Jacob, at least the principal scenes in that history. The Spirit of God here sets before us the deepest instruction, first, as to God's purpose of infinite grace; and, secondly, as to the utter worthlessness and depravity of human nature.

There is a passage in Chapter 25 which I purposely passed over, in order to take it up here, so that we might have the truth in reference to Jacob fully before us. **“And Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord was entreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived. And the children struggled together within her: and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.”**

This is referred to in Malachi, where we read, **“I have loved you, saith the Lord; yet ye say, wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord: yet I have loved Jacob and hated Esau.”**

This is again referred to in Romans 9: **“For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth; it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger, as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.”**

Thus we have very distinctly before us, God's eternal purpose according to the election of grace.

There is much involved in this expression.

It banishes all human pretension from the scene, and asserts God's right to act as he will. This is of the very last importance. The creature can enjoy no real blessedness until he is brought to bow his head to sovereign grace. It becomes him so to do, inasmuch as he is a sinner, and as such utterly without claim to act or dictate.

The great value of finding oneself on this ground is, that it is then no longer a question of what we deserve to get, but simply of what God is pleased to give.

The prodigal might talk of being a servant, but he really did not deserve the place of a servant, if it were to be made a question of desert; and therefore he had only to take what the father was pleased to give,- and that was the very highest place, even the place of fellowship with himself. Thus it must ever be. "Grace all the work shall crown through everlasting days."

Happy for us that it is so.

As we go on, day by day, making fresh discoveries of ourselves, we need to have beneath our feet the solid foundation of God's grace: nothing else could possibly sustain us in our growing self-knowledge. The ruin is hopeless, and therefore the grace must be infinite: and infinite it is, having its source in God himself, its channel in Christ, and the power of application and enjoyment in the Holy Ghost.

The Trinity is brought out in connection with the grace that saves a poor sinner.

"Grace reigns through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord."

It is only in redemption that this reign of grace could be seen. We may see in creation the reign of wisdom and power; we may see in providence the reign of goodness and long-suffering; but only in redemption do we see the reign of grace, and that, too, on the principle of righteousness.

Now, we have in the person of Jacob a most striking exhibition of the power of divine grace; and for this reason, that we have in him a striking exhibition of the power of human nature.

In him we see nature in all its obliquity, and therefore we see grace in all its moral beauty and power. From the facts of his remarkable history, it would seem that, before his birth, at his birth, and after his birth, the extraordinary energy of nature, was seen.

Before his birth, we read, "**the children struggled together within her.**"

At his birth, we read, "**his hand took hold on Esau's heel.**"

And, after his birth,- yea, to the turning-point of his history, in Chapter 32, without any exception, - his course exhibits nothing but the most unamiable traits of nature; but all this only serves, like a dark background, to throw into relief the grace of him who condescends to call himself by the peculiarly touching name, "**the God of Jacob,**"- a name most sweetly expressive of free grace.

Let us now examine the chapters consecutively.

Chapter 27 exhibits a most humbling picture of sensuality, deceit, and cunning; and when one thinks of such things in connection with the people of God, it is sad and painful to the very last degree. Yet how true and faithful is the Holy Ghost! He must tell all out. He cannot give us a partial picture. If he gives us a history of man, he must describe man as he is, and not as he is not.

So, if he unfolds to us the character and ways of God, he gives us God as He is.

And this, we need hardly remark, is exactly what we need. We need the revelation of one perfect in holiness, yet perfect in grace and mercy, who could come down into all the depth of man's need, his misery and his degradation, and deal with him there, and raise him up out of it into full, unhindered fellowship with himself in all the reality of what he is.

This is what Scripture gives us.

God knew what we needed, and he has given it to us, blessed be his name!

And be it remembered that in setting before us in faithful love all the traits of a man's character, it is simply with a view to magnify the riches of divine grace and to admonish our souls. It is not by any means in order to perpetuate the memory of sins forever blotted out from his sight. The blots, the failures, and the errors of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, have been perfectly washed away, and they have taken their place amid "**the spirits of just men made perfect;**" but their history remains on the page of inspiration for the display of God's grace, and for the warning of God's people in all ages; and, moreover, that we may distinctly see that the blessed God has not been dealing with perfect men and women, but with those of "**like passions as we are;**" that he has been walking and bearing with the same failures, the same infirmities, the same errors, as those over which we mourn every day.

This is peculiarly comforting to the heart; and it may well stand in striking contrast with the way in which the great majority of human biographies are written, in which, for the most part, we find not the history of men, but of beings devoid of error and infirmity. Such histories have rather the effect of discouraging than of edifying those who read them.

They are rather histories of what men ought to be, than of what they really are, and they are therefore useless to us, - yea, not only useless, but mischievous.

Nothing can edify save the presentation of God dealing with man as he really is; and this is what the word gives us.

The chapter before us illustrates this very fully. Here we find the aged patriarch Isaac, standing as it were at the very portal of eternity, the earth and nature fast fading away from his view, yet occupied about "**savory meat,**" and about to act in direct opposition to the divine counsel, by blessing the older instead of the younger.

Truly this was nature, and nature with its "**eyes dim.**"

If Esau had sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, Isaac was about to give away the blessing for a mess of venison. How very humiliating:

But God's purpose must stand, and He will do all His pleasure.

Faith knows this; and, in the power of that knowledge, can wait for God's time. This nature never can do, but must set about gaining its own ends by its own inventions. These are the two grand points brought out in Jacob's history,- God's purpose of grace on the one hand; and, on the other, nature plotting and scheming to reach what that purpose would have infallibly brought about without any plot or scheme at all.

This simplifies Jacob's history amazingly, and not only simplifies it, but heightens the soul's interest in it also.

There is nothing, perhaps, in which we are so lamentably deficient, as in the grace of patient, self-renouncing dependence upon God.

Nature will be working in some shape or form, and thus, so far as in it lies, hindering the outshining of divine grace and power. God did not need the aid of such elements as Rebekah's cunning and Jacob's gross deceit, in order to accomplish his purpose.

He had said, "**the elder shall serve the younger.**"

This was enough,- enough for faith, but not enough for nature, which must ever adopt its own ways, and know nothing of what it is to wait on God.

Now, nothing can be more truly blessed than the position of hanging in child-like dependence upon God, and being entirely content to wait for His time. True it will involve trial; but the renewed mind learns some of its deepest lessons, and enjoys some of its sweetest experiences, while waiting on the Lord; and the more pressing the temptation to take ourselves out of his hands, the richer will be the blessing of leaving ourselves there.

It is so exceedingly sweet to find ourselves wholly dependent upon one who finds infinite joy in blessing us. It is only those who have tasted in any little measure the reality of this wondrous position that can at all appreciate it. The only one who ever occupied it perfectly and uninterruptedly was the Lord Jesus himself. He was ever dependent upon God, and utterly rejected every proposal of the enemy to be anything else.

His language was, "**In thee do I put my trust;**" and again, "**I was cast upon thee from the womb.**"

Hence, when tempted by the devil to make an effort to satisfy his hunger, his reply was, "**It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.**"

When tempted to cast himself from the pinnacle of the temple, his reply was, "**It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.**"

When tempted to take the kingdoms of the world from the hand of another than God, and by doing homage to another than him, his reply was, "**It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.**"

In a word, nothing could allure the perfect man from the place of absolute dependence upon God.

True, it was God's purpose to sustain his Son; it was His purpose that He should suddenly come to His temple; it was His purpose to give him the kingdoms of this world; but this was the very reason why the Lord Jesus would simply and uninterruptedly wait on God for the accomplishment of his purpose, in His own time, and in His own way.

He did not set about accomplishing His own ends. He left himself thoroughly at God's disposal.

He would only eat when God gave Him bread; He would only enter the temple when sent of God; He will ascend the throne when God appoints the time.

“Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” (Psalm 90).

This profound subjection of the Son to the Father is admirable beyond expression.

Though entirely equal with God, He took, as man, the place of dependence, rejoicing always in the will of the Father; giving thanks even when things seemed to be against Him; doing always the things which pleased the Father; making it His grand and unvarying object to glorify the Father; and finally, when all was accomplished, when He had perfectly finished the work which the Father had given, He breathed his spirit into the Father's hand, and His flesh rested in hope of the promised glory and exaltation.

Well, therefore, may the inspired apostle say, **“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus; who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”** (Philippians 2:5-11).

How little Jacob knew, in the opening of his history, of this blessed mind! How little was he prepared to wait for God's time and God's way! He much preferred Jacob's time and Jacob's way. He thought it much better to arrive at the blessing and the inheritance by all sorts of cunning and deception, than by simple dependence upon and subjection to God, whose electing grace had promised, and whose almighty power and wisdom would assuredly accomplish all for him.

But oh! how well one knows the opposition of the human heart to all this!

Any attitude for it save that of patient waiting upon God. It is almost enough to drive nature to distraction to find itself bereft of all resource but God. This tells us in language not to be misunderstood the true character of human nature.

In order to know what nature is, I need not travel into those scenes of vice and crime which justly shock all refined moral sense. No: all that is needful is just to try it for a moment in the place of dependence, and see how it will carry itself there.

It really knows nothing of God, and therefore cannot trust him; and herein lies the secret of all its misery and moral degradation. It is totally ignorant of the true God, and can therefore be naught else but a ruined and worthless thing. The knowledge of God is the source of life,-yea, is itself life; and until a man has life, what is he, or what can he be?

Now, in Rebekah and Jacob, we see nature taking advantage of nature in Isaac and Esau. It was really this. There was no waiting upon God whatever.

Isaac's eyes were dim: he could therefore be imposed upon, and they set about doing so, instead of looking to God, who would have entirely frustrated Isaac's purpose to bless the one whom God would not bless,- a purpose founded in nature, and most unlovely nature, for "**Isaac loved Esau,**" not because he was the first-born, but "**because he did eat of his venison.**" How humiliating!

But we are sure to bring unmixed sorrow upon ourselves when we take ourselves, our circumstances, or our destinies, out of the hands of God. *

*** We should ever remember, in a place of trial, that what we want is not a change of circumstances, but victory over self.**

Thus it was with Jacob, as we shall see in the sequel.

It has been observed by another, that "whoever observes Jacob's life, after he had surreptitiously obtained his father's blessing, will perceive that he enjoyed very little worldly felicity. His brother purposed to murder him, to avoid which he was forced to flee from his father's house; his uncle Laban deceived him, as he had deceived his father, and treated him with great rigor; after a servitude of twenty-one years, he was obliged to leave him in a clandestine manner, and not without danger of being brought back or murdered by his enraged brother; no sooner were these fears over, than he experienced the baseness of his son Reuben, in defiling his bed; he had next to bewail the treachery and cruelty of Simeon and Levi towards the Shechemites; then he had to feel the loss of his beloved wife; he was next imposed upon by his own sons, and had to lament the supposed untimely end of Joseph; and, to complete all, he was forced by famine to go into Egypt, and there died in a strange land. So just, wonderful, and instructive are all the ways of providence."

This is a true picture, so far as Jacob was concerned; but it only gives us one side, and that the gloomy side. Blessed be God, there is a bright side likewise; for God had to do with Jacob; and in every scene of his life, when Jacob was called to reap the fruits of his own plotting and crookedness, the God of Jacob brought good out of evil, and caused his grace to abound over all the sin and folly of his poor servant.

This we shall see as we proceed with his history.

I shall just offer a remark here upon Isaac, Rebekah, and Esau.

It is very interesting to observe how, notwithstanding the exhibition of nature's excessive weakness, in the opening of this 27th chapter, Isaac maintains by faith the dignity which God had conferred upon him. He blesses with all the consciousness of being endowed with power to bless.

He says, **"I have blessed him; yea, and he shall be blessed . . . Behold, I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants; and with corn and wine have I sustained him; and what shall I do now unto thee, my son?"**

He speaks as one who by faith, had at his disposal all the treasures of earth.

There is no false humility, no taking a low ground by reason of the manifestation of nature. True, he was on the eve of making a grievous mistake,- even of moving right athwart the counsel of God; still he knew God, and took his place accordingly, dispensing blessings in all the dignity and power of faith.

"I have blessed him; yea, and he shall be blessed." **"With corn and wine have I sustained him."**

It is the proper province of faith to rise above all one's own failure, and the consequences thereof, into the place where God's grace has set us.

As to Rebekah, she was called to feel all the sad results of her cunning actings.

She no doubt imagined she was managing matters most skillfully; but alas! she never saw Jacob again: so much for management! How different would it have been had she left the matter entirely in the hands of God. This is the way in which faith manages, and it is ever a gainer.

"Which of you, by taking thought, can add to his stature one cubit?"

We gain nothing by our anxiety and planning; we only shut out God, and that is no gain. It is a just judgment from the hand of God to be left to reap the fruits of our own devices; and I know of few things more sad than to see a child of God so entirely forgetting his proper place and privilege, as to take the management of his affairs into his own hands.

The birds of the air and the lilies of the field may well be our teachers when we so far forget our position of unqualified dependence upon God.

Then, again, as to Esau, the apostle calls him **"a profane person, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright,"** and **"afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no place of change of mind, though he sought it carefully with tears."**

Thus we learn what a profane person is, viz. one who would like to hold both worlds; one who would like to enjoy the present, without forfeiting his title to the future. This is by no means an uncommon case. It expresses to us the mere worldly professor, whose conscience has never felt the action of divine truth, and whose heart has never felt the influence of divine grace.

~ end of chapter 27 ~

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