

NOTES
ON
THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

by

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"Things new and old."

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by

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Appendix 2

Grace and Government

This title may possibly present a theme to which some of our readers have not given much of their attention; and yet few themes are more important.

Indeed, we believe that the difficulty felt in expounding many passages of Holy Scripture, and in interpreting many acts of divine providence, is justly traceable to a want of clearness as to the vast difference between GOD in grace and in government. Now, as it is our constant aim to meet the actual need of our readers, we purpose, in dependence upon the Spirit's teaching, to unfold a few of the leading passages of Scripture in which the distinction between grace and government is fully and clearly presented.

In the third chapter of the book of Genesis we shall find our first illustration - the first exhibition of divine grace and divine government.

Here, we find man a sinner - a ruined, guilty, naked sinner. But here, too, we find GOD in grace, to remedy the ruin, to cleanse the guilt, to clothe the nakedness. All this He does in His own way. He silences the serpent, and consigns him to eternal ignominy. He establishes His own eternal glory, and provides both life and righteousness for the sinner - all through the bruised Seed of the woman.

Now, this was grace - unqualified grace - free, unconditional, perfect grace - the grace of GOD.

The Lord GOD gives His Son to be, as "**the Seed of the woman**," bruised for man's redemption - to be slain to furnish a robe of divine righteousness for a naked sinner. This, I repeat, was grace of the most unmistakable nature. But then, be it carefully noted, that in immediate connection with this first grand display of grace, we have the first solemn act of divine government. It was grace that clothed the man. It was government that drove him out of Eden. "**Unto Adam also, and to his wife, did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them.**" Here we have an act of purest grace. But then we read: "**So He drove out the man: and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.**"

Here we have a solemn, soul-subduing act of government. The coat of skin was the sweet pledge of grace. The flaming sword was the solemn ensign of government. Adam was the subject of both. When he looked at the coat, he could think of divine grace - how GOD provided a robe to cover his nakedness; when he looked at the sword, he was reminded of divine, unflinching government.

Hence, therefore, the "**coat**" and the "**sword**" [The "**sword**" is the ensign of divine government; the cherubim are the invariable companions thereof. Both symbols are frequently used throughout the Word of GOD.] may be regarded as the earliest expression of "**grace**" and "**government.**"

True, these things appear before us in new forms as we pass down along the current of inspiration. Grace shines in brighter beams, and government clothes itself in robes of deeper solemnity. Moreover, both grace and government assume an aspect less enigmatic, as they develop themselves in connection with the personal history of the people of GOD from age to age; but still it is deeply interesting to find these grand realities so distinctly presented under the early figures of the coat and the sword.

The reader may perhaps feel disposed to ask, "How was it that the Lord GOD drove out the man, if He had previously forgiven him?" The same question may be asked in connection with every scene, throughout the entire book of GOD and throughout the entire history of the people of GOD, in which the combined action of grace and government is exemplified.

Grace forgives; but the wheels of government roll on in all their terrible majesty.

Adam was perfectly forgiven, but his sin produced its own results. The guilt of his conscience was removed, but not the "**sweat of his brow.**" He went out pardoned and clothed; but it was into the midst of "**thorns and thistles**" he went. He could feed in secret on the precious fruits of grace, while he recognised in public the solemn and unavoidable enactments of government.

Thus it was with Adam; thus it has been ever since; and thus it is at this moment. We should seek to get a clear understanding of this subject in the light of Scripture. It is well worthy of prayerful attention. It too frequently happens that grace and government are confounded, and, as a necessary consequence, grace is robbed of its charms, and government is shorn of its solemn dignities: the full and unqualified forgiveness of sins, which the sinner might enjoy on the

ground of free grace, is rarely apprehended, because the heart is occupied with the stern enactments of government.

The two things are as distinct as any two things can be; and this distinctness is as clearly maintained in the third chapter of Genesis as in any other section of the inspired volume.

Did the "**thorns and thistles**" with which Adam found himself surrounded on his expulsion from Eden interfere with that full forgiveness of which grace had previously assured him? Clearly not. His heart had been gladdened by the bright beams of the lamp of promise, and his person clothed in the robe which grace had fashioned for him ere he was sent forth into a cursed and groaning earth, there to toil and struggle by the just decree of the throne of government. GOD's government "**drove out the man**"; but not until GOD's grace had pardoned and clothed him. That sent him forth into a world of gloom; but not until this had placed in his hand the lamp of promise to cheer him through the gloom. He could bear the solemn decree of government in proportion as he experienced the rich provision of grace.

Thus much as to Adam's history in so far as it illustrates our thesis.

We shall now pass on to the ark and deluge, in the days of Noah, which, like the coat of skin and the flaming sword, exemplify in a striking way divine grace and divine government.

The inspired narrative of Cain and his posterity presents, in lines of unflinching faithfulness, the progress of man in his fallen condition; while the history of Abel and his immediate line unfolds to us, in glowing contrast, the progress of those who were called to live a life of faith in the midst of that scene into which the enactments of the throne of government had driven our first parents. The former pursued with headlong speed the downward course until their consummated guilt brought down the heavy judgment of the throne of government. The latter, on the contrary, pursued, through grace, an upward course, and were safely borne, through the judgment, into a restored earth.

Now, it is interesting to see that, before ever the governmental act of judgment proceeded, the elect family, and all with them, were safely shut in the ark, the vessel of grace. Noah, safe in the ark, like Adam clad in the coat, was the witness of the Lord's unqualified grace; and, as such, he could contemplate the throne of government, as it poured its appalling judgment upon a defiled world. GOD in grace saved Noah, ere GOD in government swept the earth with the besom of judgment. It is grace and government over again. That, acts in salvation; this, in judgment. GOD is seen in both. Every atom of the ark bore the sweet impress of grace; every wave of the deluge reflected the solemn decree of government.

We shall just select one case more from the book of Genesis - a deeply practical one - one in which the combined action of grace and government is seen in a very solemn and impressive way. I allude to the case of the patriarch Jacob.

The entire history of this instructive man presents a series of events illustrative of our theme. I shall merely refer to the one case of his deceiving his father for the purpose of supplanting his brother. The sovereign grace of GOD had, long before Jacob was born, secured to him a pre-eminence of which no man could ever deprive him; but, not satisfied to wait for GOD's time and way, he set about managing matters for himself.

What was the result? His entire after-life furnishes the admonitory reply.

- exile from his father's house;
- twenty years of hard servitude;
- his wages changed ten times;
- never permitted to see his mother again;
- fear of being murdered by his injured brother;
- dishonour cast upon his family;
- terror of his life from the Shechemites;
- deceived by his ten sons;
- plunged into deep sorrow by the supposed death of his favourite Joseph;
- apprehension of death by famine; and, finally,
- death in a strange land.

Reader, what a lesson is here! Jacob was a subject of grace - sovereign, changeless, eternal grace. This is a settled point. But then, he was a subject of government likewise; and be it well remembered that no exercise of grace can ever interfere with the onward movement of the wheels of government. That movement is resistless. Easier would it be to stem the ocean's rising tide with a feather, or to check the whirlwind with a spider's web, than to stay by any power, angelic, human, or diabolical, the mighty movement of the Lord's governmental chariot.

All this is deeply solemn. Grace pardons; yes, freely, fully and eternally pardons; but what is sown must be reaped.

A man may be sent by his master to sow a field with wheat, and through ignorance, dullness, or gross inattention, he sows some noxious weed. His master hears of the mistake, and, in the exercise of his grace, he pardons it - pardons it freely and fully. What then? Will the gracious pardon change the nature of the crop? Assuredly not; and hence, in due time, when golden ears should cover the field, the servant sees it covered with noxious weeds. Does the sight of the weeds make him doubt his master's grace? By no means. As the master's grace did not alter the nature of the crop, neither does the nature of the crop alter the master's grace and pardon flowing therefrom. The two things are perfectly distinct; nor would the principle be infringed even though the master were, by the application of extraordinary skill, to extract from the weed a drug more valuable than the wheat itself. It would still hold good that "**whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.**"

This will illustrate, in a feeble way, the difference between grace and government. The passage just quoted from the sixth of Galatians is a brief but most comprehensive statement of the great governmental principle - principle of the gravest and most practical nature - a principle of the widest application. "**Whatsoever a man soweth.**" It matters not who he is: as is your sowing, so will be your reaping. Grace pardons; nay, more, it may make you higher and happier than ever; but if you sow weeds in spring, you will not reap wheat in harvest. This is as plain as it is practical. It is illustrated and enforced both by Scripture and experience.

Look at the case of Moses.

He "**spoke unadvisedly with his lips**" at the waters of Meribah (Numbers 20). What was the result? The Lord's governmental decree prohibited his entrance into the promised land. But be it noted, while the decree of the throne kept him out of Canaan, the boundless grace of GOD brought him up to Pisgah (Deuteronomy 34), where he saw the land, not as it was taken by the hand of Israel, but as it had been given by the covenant of the Lord. And what then? The Lord buried His dear servant! What grace shines in this!

Truly, if the spirit is overawed by the solemn decree of the throne at Meribah, the heart is enraptured by the matchless grace on the top of Pisgah.

The Lord's government kept Moses out of Canaan. The Lord's grace dug a grave for Moses in the plains of Moab. Was there ever such a burial? May we not say that the grace that dug the grave of Moses is only outshone by the grace that occupied the grave of CHRIST? Yes; the Lord can dig a grave or make a coat; and, moreover, the grace that shines in these marvellous acts is only enhanced by being looked at in connection with the solemn enactments of the throne of government.

But again: look at David "in the matter of Uriah the Hittite."

Here we have a most striking exhibition of grace and government. In an evil hour David fell from his holy elevation. Under the blinding power of lust, he rushed into a deep and horrible pit of moral pollution. There, in that deep pit, the arrow of conviction reached his conscience, and drew forth from his broken heart those penitential accents, "**I have sinned against the Lord.**"

How were those accents met? By the clear and ready response of that free grace in which our GOD ever delights: "**The Lord hath put away thy sin.**"

This was absolute grace. David's sin was perfectly forgiven. There can be no question as to this. But whilst the soothing accents of grace fell on David's ears upon the confession of his guilt, the solemn movement of the wheels of government was heard in the distance. No sooner had mercy's tender hand removed the guilt, than "**the sword**" was drawn from the scabbard to execute the necessary judgment. This is deeply solemnising. David was fully pardoned, but Absalom rose in rebellion.

"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

The sin of sowing weeds may be forgiven, but the reaping must be according to the sowing. The former is grace, the latter is government. Each acts in its own sphere, and neither interferes with the other. The luster of the grace and the dignity of the government are both divine. David was permitted to tread the courts of the sanctuary as a subject of grace (II Samuel 12:20) ere he was called to climb the rugged sides of mount Olivet as a subject of government (II Samuel 15: 30); and we may safely assert that David's heart never had a deeper sense of divine grace than at the very time in which he was experiencing the righteous action of divine government.

Sufficient has now been said to open to the reader a subject which he can easily pursue for himself. The Scriptures are full of it; and human life illustrates it every day. How often do we see men in the fullest enjoyment of grace, knowing the pardon of all their sins, walking in unclouded

communion with GOD, and all the while suffering in body or estate the consequences of past follies and excesses. Here, again, you have grace and government. This is a deeply important and practical subject; it will be found to aid the soul very effectively in its study, not only of the page of inspiration, but also of the page of human biography.

A passage which is often erroneously adduced as an exhibition of grace is entirely an exhibition of government:

"And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation" (Exodus 34:6-7).

Were we to regard this passage as a presentation of GOD in the gospel, we should have a very limited view indeed of what the gospel is.

The gospel speaketh on this wise: **"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them"** (II Corinthians 5:19). **"Visiting iniquity"** and **"not imputing"** it are two totally different things. The former is GOD in government; the latter is GOD in grace. It is the same GOD, but a different manifestation.

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