

# NOTES ON THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

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## CHAPTER SIX

**“NOW THESE are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it: that thou mightest fear the Lord thy God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son’s son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey. Hear, Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord.”**

We have here presented to us that great cardinal truth which the nation of Israel was specially responsible to hold fast and confess, namely, the unity of the Godhead. This truth lay at the very foundation of the Jewish economy. It was the grand center around which the people were to rally. So long as they maintained this, they were a happy, prosperous, fruitful people; but when it was let go, all was gone. It was their great national bulwark, and that which was to mark them off from all the nations of the earth. They were called to confess this glorious truth in the face of an idolatrous world, with **“its gods many, and lords many.”**

It was Israel’s high privilege and holy responsibility to bear a steady witness to the truth contained in that one weighty sentence, **“The Lord our God is one Lord,”** in marked opposition to the false gods innumerable of the heathen around. Their father Abraham had been called out from the very midst of heathen idolatry, to be a witness to the one true and living God, to trust Him, to walk with Him, to lean on Him, and to obey Him.

If the reader will turn to the last chapter of Joshua, he will find a very striking allusion to this fact, and a very important use made of it, in his closing address to the people:

**“And Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and called for the elders of Israel, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers; and they presented themselves before God.**

**“And Joshua said unto all the people, ‘Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor; and they served other gods. And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed, and gave him Isaac.’”**

Here Joshua reminds the people of the fact that their fathers had served other gods – a very solemn and weighty fact most surely, and one which they ought never to have forgotten, inasmuch as the remembrance of it would have taught them their deep need of watchfulness over themselves, lest by any means they should be drawn back into that gross and terrible evil out of which God, in His sovereign grace and electing love, had called their father Abraham. It would have been their wisdom to consider that the self-same evil in which their fathers had lived, in the olden time, was just the one into which they themselves were likely to fall.

Having presented this fact to the people, Joshua brings before them, with uncommon force and vividness, all the leading events of their history, from the birth of their father Isaac, down to the moment in which he was addressing them; and then sums up with the following telling appeal: **“Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve Him in sincerity and in truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt), and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”**

Mark the repeated allusion to the fact that their fathers had worshiped false gods; and further, that the land into which the Lord had brought them had been polluted, from one end to the other, by the dark abominations of heathen idolatry.

Thus does this faithful servant of the Lord, evidently by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, seek to set before the people their danger of giving up the grand central and foundation truth of the one true and living God, and falling back into the worship of idols.

He urges upon them the absolute necessity of whole-hearted decision. **“Choose you this day’ whom ye will serve.”**

There is nothing like plain, out-and-out decision for God. It is due to Him always. He had proved Himself to be unmistakably for them in redeeming them from the bondage of Egypt, bringing them through the wilderness, and planting them in the land of Canaan; hence, therefore, that they should be wholly for Him was nothing more than their reasonable service.

How deeply Joshua felt all this for himself is evident from those very memorable words, **“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”**

Lovely words! Precious decision! National religion might, and, alas! did, go to ruin; but personal and family religion could, by the grace of God, be maintained every where and at all times. Thank God for this! May we never forget it.

**“Me and my house”** is Faith’s clear and delightful response to God’s **“Thou and thy house.”** Let the condition of the ostensible, professed people of God, at any given time, be what it may, it is the privilege of every true-hearted man of God to adopt and act upon this immortal decision: **“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”**

True, it is only by the grace of God, continually supplied, that this holy resolution can be carried out; but we may rest assured that where the bent of the heart is to follow the Lord fully, all needed grace will be ministered, day by day; for those encouraging words must ever hold good, **“My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”**

Let us now look for a moment at the apparent effect of Joshua’s soul-stirring appeal to the congregation. It seemed very promising. **“The people answered and said, ‘God forbid that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods; for the Lord our God, He it is that brought us up and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and which did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way wherein we went, and among all the people through whom we passed: and the Lord drave out from before us all the people, even the Amorites which dwelt in the land; therefore will we also serve the Lord, for He is our God.’”**

All this sounded very well, and looked very hopeful. They seemed to have a clear sense of the moral basis of the Lord’s claim upon them for implicit obedience. They could accurately recount all His mighty deeds on their behalf, and make very earnest and no doubt sincere protestations against idolatry, and promises of obedience to the Lord, their God.

But it is very evident that Joshua was not particularly sanguine about all this profession, for he **“said unto the people, ‘Ye cannot serve the Lord: for He is a Holy God; He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, then He will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that He hath done you good.’ And the people said unto Joshua, ‘Nay; but we will serve the Lord.’ And Joshua said unto the people, ‘Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the Lord, to serve Him.’ And they said, ‘We are witnesses.’ ‘Now therefore put away,’ said he, ‘the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the Lord God of Israel.’ And the people said unto Joshua, ‘The Lord our God will we serve, and His voice will we obey.’”**

We do not now stop to contemplate the aspect in which Joshua presents God to the congregation of Israel, inasmuch as our object in referring to the passage is to show the prominent place assigned, in Joshua’s address, to the truth of the unity of the Godhead. This was the truth to which Israel was called to bear witness, in view of all the nations of the earth, and in which they were to find their moral safeguard against the ensnaring influences of idolatry.

But, alas! this very truth was the one as to which they most speedily and signally failed.

The promises, vows, and resolutions made under the powerful influence of Joshua’s appeal soon proved to be like the early dew and the morning cloud, that passeth away.

**“The people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord, that He did for Israel. And Joshua, the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being a hundred and ten years old . . .**

**“And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers; and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which He had done for Israel. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim; and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger. And they forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroth”** (Judges 2:7-13).

### Sustaining Faith

Reader, how admonitory is all this! How full of solemn warning to us all! The grand, all-important, special, and characteristic truth so soon abandoned! The one only true and living God given up for Baal and Ashtaroth!

So long as Joshua and the elders lived, their presence and their influence kept Israel from open apostasy; but no sooner were those moral embankments removed than the dark tide of idolatry rolled in and swept away the very foundations of the national faith.

The Lord of Israel was displaced by Baal and Ashtaroth. Human influence is a poor prop, a feeble barrier. We must be sustained by the power of God, else we shall, sooner or later, give way. The faith that stands merely in the wisdom of men, and not in the power of God, must prove a poor, flimsy, worthless faith. It will not stand the day of trial; it will not bear the furnace; it will most assuredly break down.

It is well to remember this. Second-hand faith will never do. There must be a living link connecting the soul with God. We must have to do with God for ourselves individually, else we shall give way when the testing-time comes. Human example and human influence may be all very good in their place.

It was all very well to look at Joshua and the elders, and see how they followed the Lord. It is quite true that **“as iron sharpeneth iron, so doth the countenance of a man his friend.”**

It is very encouraging to be surrounded by a number of truly devoted hearts – very delightful to be borne along upon the bosom of the tide of collective loyalty to Christ – to His Person and to His cause.

But if this be all, – if there be not the deep spring of personal faith and personal knowledge, – if there be not the divinely formed and the divinely sustained link of individual relationship and communion, then when the human props are removed,- when the tide of human influence ebbs, – when general declension sets in, we shall be, in principle, like Israel following the Lord all the days of Joshua and the elders, and then giving up the confession of His name and returning to the follies and vanities of this present world – things no better, in reality, than Baal and Ashtaroth.

But, on the other hand, when the heart is thoroughly established in the truth and grace of God, when we can say – as it is the privilege of each true believer to say:

**“I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day,”** then, although all should turn aside from the public confession of Christ, – although we should find ourselves left without the help of a human countenance or the support of a human arm, we shall find the foundation of God” as sure as ever, and the path of obedience as plain before us as though thousands were treading it with holy decision and energy.

We must never lose sight of the fact that it is the divine purpose that the professing church of God should learn deep and holy lessons from the history of Israel. **“Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”** Nor is it by any means necessary, in order to our thus learning from the Old Testament scriptures, that we should occupy ourselves in searching out fanciful analogies, curious theories, or far-fetched illustrations. Many, alas! have tried these things, and instead of finding **“comfort”** in the Scriptures, they have been led away into empty and foolish conceits, if not into deadly errors.

But our business is with the living facts recorded on the page of inspired history. These are to be our study; from these we are to draw our great practical lessons.

Take, for example, the weighty and admonitory fact now before us – a fact standing out in characters deep and broad on the page of Israel’s history from Joshua to Isaiah – the fact of Israel’s lamentable departure from that very truth which they were specially called to hold and confess – the truth of the unity of the Godhead.

#### Israel’s Greatest Failure – Idolatry

The very first thing they did was to let go this grand and all-important truth, this key-stone of the arch, the foundation of the whole edifice, the very heart of their national existence, the living center of their national polity. They gave it up, and turned back to the idolatry of their fathers on the other side of the flood, and of the heathen nations around them. They abandoned that most glorious and distinctive truth on the maintenance of which their very existence as a nation depended.

Had they only held fast this truth, they would have been invincible; but in surrendering it, they surrendered all, and became much worse than the nations around them, inasmuch as they sinned against light and knowledge – sinned with their eyes open – sinned in the face of the most solemn warnings and earnest entreaties, and, we may add, in the face of the most vehement and oft-repeated promises and protestations of obedience.

Yes, reader, Israel gave up the worship of the one true and living God, the Lord-Elohim, their covenant-God; not only their Creator, but their Redeemer – the One who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, conducted them through the Red Sea, led them through the wilderness, brought them across the Jordan, and planted them in triumph in the inheritance which He had promised to Abraham their father – **“a land flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands.”**

They turned their backs upon Him, and gave themselves up to the worship of false gods; **“they provoked Him to anger with their high places, and moved Him to jealousy with their graven images.”**

It seems perfectly wonderful that a people who had seen and known so much of the goodness and loving-kindness of God – His mighty acts, His faithfulness, His majesty, His glory, could ever bring themselves to bow down to the stock of a tree; but so it was.

Their whole history, from the days of the calf at the foot of Mount Sinai, to the day in which Nebuchadnezzar reduced Jerusalem to ruins, is marked by an unconquerable spirit of idolatry.

In vain did the Lord, in His long-suffering mercy and abounding goodness, raise up deliverers for them, to lift them from beneath the terrible consequences of their sin and folly. Again and again, in His inexhaustible mercy and patience, He saved them from the hand of their enemies. He raised up an Othniel, an Ehud, a Barak, a Gideon, a Jephthah, a Samson – those instruments of His mercy and power – those witnesses of His deep and tender love and compassion toward His poor infatuated people. No sooner had each judge passed off the scene than back the nation plunged into their besetting sin of idolatry.

So, also, in the days of the kings; it is the same melancholy, heart-rending story. True, there were bright spots here and there – some brilliant stars shining out through the deep gloom of the nation’s history; we have a David, an Asa, a Jehoshaphat, a Hezekiah, a Josiah – refreshing and blessed exceptions to the dark and dismal rule. But even men like these failed to eradicate from the heart of the nation the pernicious root of idolatry. Even amid the unexampled splendors of Solomon’s reign, that root sent forth its bitter shoots, in the monstrous form of high places to Ashtaroath, the goddess of the Zidonians; Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites; and Chemosh, the abomination of Moab.

Reader, only think of this. Pause for a moment, and contemplate the astounding fact of the writer of the Canticles, Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs bowing at the shrine of Molech! Only conceive, the wisest, the wealthiest, and the most glorious of Israel’s monarchs burning incense and offering sacrifices upon the altar of Chemosh!

Truly, there is something here for us to ponder. It was written for our learning.

The reign of Solomon affords one of the most striking and impressive evidences of the fact which is just now engaging our attention, namely, Israel’s complete and hopeless apostasy from the grand truth of the unity of the Godhead – their unconquerable spirit of idolatry. The truth which they were specially called out to hold and confess was the very truth which they first of all and most persistently abandoned.

We shall not pursue the dark line of evidence further, neither shall we dwell upon the appalling picture of the nation’s judgment in consequence of their idolatry. They are now in the condition of which the prophet Hosea speaks – **“The children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim.”**

**“The unclean spirit [of idolatry] has gone out of them,”** during these **“many days,”** to return, by and by, with **“seven other spirits more wicked than himself”** – the very perfection of spiritual wickedness. And then will come days of unparalleled tribulation upon that long misguided and deeply revolted people – **“the time of Jacob’s trouble.”**

But deliverance will come, blessed be God!

Bright days are in store for the restored nation – **“days of heaven upon earth”** – as the same prophet Hosea tells us, **“Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days.”**

All the promises of God to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David shall be blessedly accomplished; all the brilliant predictions of the prophets, from Isaiah to Malachi, shall be gloriously fulfilled. Yes, both promises and prophecies shall be literally and gloriously made good to restored Israel, in the land of Canaan; for **“the Scripture cannot be broken.”**

The long, dark, dreary night shall be followed by the brightest day that has ever shone upon this earth; the daughter of Zion shall bask in the bright and blessed beams of **“the Sun of Righteousness;”** and **“the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”**

It would indeed be a most delightful exercise to reproduce upon the pages of this volume those glowing passages from the prophets which speak of Israel’s future; but this we cannot attempt; it is not needful; and we have a duty to fulfill which, if not so pleasing to us or so refreshing to the reader, will, we earnestly hope, prove not less profitable.

The duty is this: to press upon the attention of the reader (and upon the attention of the whole Church of God) the practical application of that solemn fact in Israel’s history on which we have dwelt at such length – the fact of their having so speedily and so completely given up the great truth set forth in Deuteronomy 6:4, **“Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord.”**

We may perhaps be asked, What bearing can this fact have upon the Church of God? We believe it has a most solemn bearing; and further, we believe we should be guilty of a very culpable shirking of our duty to Christ and to His Church if we failed to point it out. We know that all the great facts of Israel’s history are full of instruction, full of admonition, full of warning, for us. It is our business, our bounden duty, to see that we profit by them – to take heed that we study them aright.

#### The Church Falls Into Israel’s Sin

Now, in contemplating the history of the Church of God as a public witness for Christ on the earth, we find that hardly had it been set up, in all the fullness of blessing and privilege which marked the opening of its career, ere it began to slip away from those very truths which it was specially responsible to maintain and confess.

Like Adam in the garden of Eden; like Noah in the restored earth; like Israel in Canaan; so the Church, as the responsible steward of the mysteries of God, was no Sooner set in its place than it began to totter and fall. It almost immediately began to give up those grand truths which were characteristic of its very existence, and which were to mark off Christianity from all that had gone before. Even under the eyes of the apostles of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, errors and evils had begun to work which sapped the very foundations of the Church's testimony.

Are we asked for proofs?

Alas! we have them in melancholy abundance.

Hear the words of that blessed apostle who shed more tears and heaved more sighs over the ruins of the Church than any man that ever lived. **"I marvel,"** he says, and well he might, **"that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another Gospel: which is not another."** **"O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?"** **"Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service to them which by nature are no gods. But now, 'after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days and months and times and years;"** Christian festivals, so called, very imposing and gratifying to religious nature; but, in the judgment of the apostle, the judgment of the Holy Ghost, it was simply giving up Christianity and going back to the worship of idols, **"I am afraid of you"** – and no wonder, when they could thus so speedily turn away from the grand characteristic truths of a heavenly Christianity, and occupy themselves with superstitious observances. **"I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain."** **"Ye did run well; who did hinder you, that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion cometh not of Him that calleth you. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."**

And all this in the apostle's own day. The departure was even more rapid than in Israel's case; for they served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua; but in the Church's sad and humiliating history, the enemy succeeded almost immediately in introducing leaven into the meal, tares among the wheat. Ere the apostles themselves had left the scene, seed was sown which has been bearing its pernicious fruit ever since, and shall continue to bear till angelic reapers clear the field.

But we must give further proof from Scripture.

Let us hearken to the same inspired witness, near the close of his ministry, pouring out his heart to his beloved son Timothy, in accents at once pathetic and solemn. **"This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me."** Again, **"Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."**

Here is the testimony of the man who, as a wise master-builder, had laid the foundation of the Church. And what was his own personal experience? He was, like his blessed Master, left alone, deserted by those who had once gathered around him in the freshness, bloom, and ardor of early days. His large loving heart was broken by Judaizing teachers, who sought to overturn the very foundations of Christianity, and to overthrow the faith of God's elect. He wept over the ways of many who, while they made a profession, were nevertheless **“the enemies of the Cross of Christ.”**

In a word, the apostle Paul, as he looked forth from his prison at Rome, saw the hopeless wreck and ruin of the professing body. He saw that it would happen to that body as it had happened to the ship in which he had made his last voyage – a voyage strikingly significant and illustrative of the Church's sad history in this world.

### The Indestructible Church of God

But here let us just remind the reader that we are dealing now only with the question of the Church as a responsible witness for Christ on the earth.

This must be distinctly seen, else we shall greatly err in our thoughts on the subject. We must accurately distinguish between the Church as the body of Christ, and as His light-bearer or witness in the world.

In the former character, failure is impossible; in the latter, the ruin is complete and hopeless.

The Church as the body of Christ, united to her living and glorified Head in the heavens, by the presence and indwelling of the Holy Ghost, can never, by any possibility, fail – never be smashed to pieces, like Paul's ship, by the storms and billows of this hostile world. It is as safe as Christ Himself. The Head and the body are one – indissolubly one.

- No power of earth or hell – men or devils can ever touch the feeblest and most obscure member of that blessed body.
- All stand before God, all are under His gracious eye, in the fullness, beauty, and acceptability of Christ Himself.
- As is the Head, so are the members – all the members together – each member in particular.
- All stand in the full eternal results of Christ's finished work on the Cross.

There is, there can be, no question of responsibility here. The Head made Himself responsible for the members. He perfectly met every claim, and discharged every liability. Nothing remains but love – love, deep as the heart of Christ, perfect as His work, unchanging as His throne.

Every question that could possibly be raised against any one or all of the members of the Church of God was raised, gone into, and definitively settled, between God and His Christ, on the Cross. All the sins, all the iniquities, all the transgressions, all the guilt, of each member in particular, and all the members together – yes, all, in the fullest and most absolute way, was laid on Christ and borne by Him.

God, in His inflexible justice, in His infinite holiness, in His eternal righteousness, dealt with everything that could ever, in any possible manner, stand in the way of the full salvation, perfect blessedness, and everlasting glory of everyone of the members of the body of Christ – the assembly of God.

Every member of the body is permeated by the life of the Head; every stone in the building is animated by the life of the Chief Corner-Stone. All are bound together in the power of a bond which can never – no, never be dissolved.

And furthermore, let it be distinctly understood that the unity of the body of Christ is absolutely indissoluble. This is a cardinal point which must be tenaciously held and faithfully confessed. But obviously it cannot be held and confessed unless it is understood and believed; and, judging from the expressions which one sometimes hears in speaking on the subject, it is very questionable indeed if people so expressing themselves have ever grasped in a divine way the glorious truth of the unity of the body of Christ – a unity maintained on earth by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost.

Thus, for example, we sometimes hear people speak of “rending the body of Christ.” It is a complete mistake. Such a thing is utterly impossible.

The Reformers were accused of rending the body of Christ when they turned their backs upon the Romish system. What a gross misconception! It simply amounted to the monstrous assumption that a vast mass of moral evil, doctrinal error, ecclesiastical corruption, and debasing superstition was to be owned as the body of Christ!

How could anyone with the New Testament in his hand regard the so-called church of Rome, with its numberless and nameless abominations, as the body of Christ? How could anyone possessing the very faintest idea of the true Church of God, ever think of bestowing that title upon the darkest mass of wickedness, the greatest masterpiece of Satan the world has ever beheld?

No, reader; we must never confound the ecclesiastical systems of this world – ancient, medieval, or modern; Greek, Latin, Anglican; national or popular, established or dissenting – with the true Church of God, the body of Christ.

There is not, beneath the canopy of Heaven, this day, nor ever was, a religious system, call it what you please, possessing the very smallest claim to be called “**the Church of God,**” or “**the body of Christ.**”

And, as a consequence, it can never be rightly or intelligently called schism, or rending the body of Christ, to separate from such systems; nay, on the contrary, it is the bounden duty of everyone who would faithfully maintain and confess the truth of the unity of the body to separate, with the most unqualified decision, from everything falsely calling itself a church. It can only be viewed as schism to separate from those who are unmistakably and unquestionably gathered on the ground of the assembly of God.

No body of Christians can now lay claim to the title of the body of Christ, or Church of God. The members of that body are scattered every where; they are to be found in all the various religious organizations of the day, save such as deny the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot admit the idea that any true Christian could continue to frequent a place where his Lord is blasphemed. But although no body of Christians can lay claim to the title of the assembly of God, all Christians are responsible to be gathered on the ground of that assembly, and on no other.

And if we be asked, How are we to know – where are we to find this ground? We reply, **“If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.” “If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine.” “There is a path”** (thanks be to God for it!) though **“no fowl knoweth, and the vulture’s eye hath not seen it. The lion’s whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it.”** Nature’s keenest vision cannot see this path, nor its greatest strength tread it. Where is it, then? Here it is: **“Unto man”** – to the reader and to the writer, to each, to all – **“He said, ‘Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding’”** (Job 28).

But there is another expression which we not infrequently hear from persons from whom we might expect more intelligence, namely, “Cutting off the members of the body of Christ.” \*

**\* The expression, “Cutting off the members of Christ’s body” is generally applied in cases of discipline; but it is quite a misapplication. The discipline of the assembly can never touch the unity of the body. A member of the body may so fail in morals or err in doctrine as to call for the action of the assembly in putting him away from the table, but that has nothing to do with his place in the body. The two things are perfectly distinct.**

This, too, blessed be God, is impossible. Not a single member of the body of Christ can ever be severed from the Head, or ever disturbed from the place into which he has been incorporated by the Holy Ghost, in pursuance of the eternal purpose of God, and in virtue of the accomplished atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The divine Three in One are pledged for the eternal security of the very feeblest member of the body, and for the maintenance of the indissoluble unity of the whole.

In a word, then, it is as true to-day as it was when the inspired apostle penned the fourth chapter of his Epistle to the Ephesians, that **“there is one body,”** of which Christ is Head, of which the Holy Ghost is the formative power, and of which all true believers are members. This body has been on earth since the day of Pentecost, is on earth now, and shall continue on earth until that moment, so rapidly approaching, when Christ shall come and take it to His Father’s house. It is the same body, with a continual succession of members, just as we speak of a certain regiment of her majesty’s army having been at Waterloo, and now quartered at Aldershot, though not a man in the regiment of today appeared at the memorable battle of 1815.

Does the reader feel any difficulty as to all this?

It may be that he finds it hard, in the present broken and scattered condition of the members, to believe and confess the unbroken unity of the whole.

He may feel disposed, perhaps, to limit the application of Ephesians 4:4 to the day in which the apostle penned the words, when Christians were manifestly one, and when there was no such thing thought of as being a member of this church or a member of that church, because all believers were members of the one Church. \*

**\* The unity of the Church may be compared to a chain thrown across a river; we see it at each side, but it dips in the middle. But though it dips, it is not broken; though we do not see the union in the middle, we believe it is there all the same. The Church was seen in its unity on the day of Pentecost, and it will be seen in its unity in the glory; and although we do not see it now, we nevertheless believe it most surely.**

**And be it remembered that the unity of the body is a great practical, formative truth; and one very weighty practical deduction from it is that the state and walk of each member affect the whole body. "If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it." A member of what? Some local assembly? Nay; but a member of the body. We must not make the body of Christ a matter of geography.**

**But, we may be asked, are we affected by what we do not see or know? Assuredly. Are we to limit the grand truth of the unity of the body, with all its practical consequences, to the measure of our personal knowledge and experience? Far be the thought. It is the presence of the Holy Ghost that unites the members of the body to the Head and to one another; and hence it is that the walk and ways of each affect all. Even in Israel's case, where it was not a corporate but a national unity, when Achan sinned, it was said, "Israel hath sinned;" and the whole congregation suffered a humiliating defeat on account of a sin of which they were ignorant.**

**It is perfectly marvelous how little the Lord's people seem to understand the glorious truth of the unity of the body, and the practical consequences flowing from it.**

In reply, we must protest against the very idea of limiting the Word of God. What possible right have we to single out one clause from Ephesians 4:4-6, and say it only applied to the days of the apostles? If one clause is to be so limited, why not all? Are there not still "**one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all**"? Will any question this? Surely not. Well, then, it follows that there is as surely one body as there is one Spirit, one Lord, one God.

All are intimately bound up together, and you cannot touch one without touching all. We have no more right to deny the existence of the one body than we have to deny the existence of God, inasmuch as the selfsame passage that declares to us the one declares to us the other also.

But some will doubtless inquire, Where is this one body to be seen? Is it not an absurdity to speak of such a thing, in the face of the almost numberless denominations of Christendom? Our answer is this: We are not going to surrender the truth of God because man has so signally failed to carry it out. Did not Israel utterly fail to maintain, confess, and carry out the truth of the unity of the Godhead? And was that glorious truth, in the smallest degree, touched by their failure?

Was it not as true that there was one God, though there were as many idolatrous altars as streets in Jerusalem, and every housetop sent up a cloud of incense to the queen of Heaven, as when Moses sounded forth, in the ears of the whole congregation, those sublime words, “**Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord**”?

Blessed be God, His truth does not depend upon the faithless, foolish ways of men. It stands in its own divine integrity; it shines in its own heavenly, undimmed lustre, spite of the grossest human failure. Were it not so, what should we do? whither should we turn? or what would become of us? In fact, it comes to this: if we were only to believe the measure of truth which we see practically carried out in the ways of men, we might give up in despair, and be of all men most miserable.

But how is the truth of the one body to be practically carried out? By refusing to own any other principle of Christian fellowship – any other ground of meeting.

All true believers should meet on the simple ground of membership of the body of Christ, and on no other. They should assemble, on the first day of the week, around the Lord’s table, and break bread, as members of the one body, as we read in I Corinthians 10, “**For we, being many, are one loaf, one body; for we are all partakers of that one loaf.**” This is as true and as practical to-day as it was when the apostle addressed the assembly at Corinth. True, there were divisions at Corinth as there are divisions in Christendom; but that did not in any wise touch the truth of God. The apostle rebuked the divisions – pronounced them carnal. He had no sympathy with the poor, low idea which one sometimes hears advocated, that divisions are good things, as superinducing emulation. He believed they were very bad things – the fruit of the flesh, the work of Satan.

Neither, we feel persuaded, would the apostle have accepted the popular illustration that divisions in the Church are like so many regiments, with different facings, all fighting under the same commander-in-chief. It would not hold good for a moment; indeed, it has no application whatever, but rather gives a flat contradiction to that distinct and emphatic statement, “**There is one body.**”

Reader, this is a most glorious truth. Let us ponder it deeply. Let us look at Christendom in the light of it. Let us judge our own position and ways by it. Are we acting on it? Do we give expression to it, at the Lord’s Table, every Lord’s Day? Be assured it is our sacred duty and high privilege so to do. Say not there are difficulties of all sorts, many stumbling-blocks in the way, much to dishearten us in the conduct of those who profess to meet on this very ground of which we speak.

All this is, alas! But too true. We must be quite prepared for it. The devil will leave no stone unturned to cast dust in our eyes, so that we may not see God’s blessed way for His people. But we must not give heed to his suggestions or be snared by his devices. There always have been, and there always will be difficulties in the way of carrying out the precious truth of God; and perhaps one of the greatest difficulties is found in the inconsistent conduct of those who profess to act upon it. But then we must ever distinguish between the truth and those who profess it – between the ground and the conduct of those who occupy it.

Of course, they ought to harmonize, but they do not; and hence we are imperatively called to judge the conduct by the ground, not the ground by the conduct. If we saw a man farming on a principle which we knew to be thoroughly sound, but he was a bad farmer, what should we do? Of course, we should reject his mode of working, but hold the principle all the same.

Not otherwise is it in reference to the truth now before us. There were heresies at Corinth, schisms, errors, evils of all sorts. What then? Was the truth of God to be surrendered as a myth, as something wholly impracticable? was it all to be given up? Were the Corinthians to meet on some other principle? were they to organize themselves on some new ground? were they to gather around some fresh center? No, thank God! His truth was not to be surrendered for a moment, although Corinth was split up into ten thousand sects, and its horizon darkened by ten thousand heresies.

The body of Christ is one; and the apostle simply displays in their view the banner with this blessed inscription: **“Ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.”**

Now, these words were addressed, not merely **“unto the church at Corinth,”** but also **“to all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.”** Hence, the truth of the one body is abiding and universal. Every true Christian is bound to recognize it and to act on it, and every assembly of Christians, wherever convened, should be the local expression of this grand and all-important truth.

Some might perhaps feel disposed to ask how it could be said to anyone assembly, **“Ye are the body of Christ.”** Were there not saints at Ephesus, Colosse, and Philippi? No doubt; and had the apostle been addressing them on the same subject, he could have said to them likewise, **“Ye are the body of Christ,”** inasmuch as they were the local expression of the body; and not only so, but, in addressing them, he had before his mind all saints, to the end of the Church’s earthly career.

But we must bear in mind that the apostle could not possibly address such words to any human organization, ancient or modern. No; nor if all such organizations, call them what you please, were amalgamated into one, could he speak of it as **“the body of Christ.”** That body, let it be distinctly understood, consists of all true believers on the face of the earth. That they are not gathered on that only divine ground, is their serious loss and their Lord’s dishonor. The precious truth holds good all the same – **“There is one body,”** and this is the divine standard by which to measure every ecclesiastical association and every religious system under the sun.

We deem it needful to go somewhat fully into the divine side of the question of the Church, in order to guard the truth of God from the results of misapprehension, and also that the reader may clearly understand that in speaking of the utter failure and ruin of the Church, we are looking at the human side of the subject. To this latter we must return for a moment.

It is impossible to read the New Testament with a calm and unprejudiced mind and not see that the Church as a responsible witness for Christ on the earth has most signally and shamefully failed.

To quote all the passages in proof of this statement would literally fill a small volume; but let us glance at the second and third chapters of the book of Revelation, where the Church is seen under judgment. We have, in these solemn chapters, what we may call a divine Church-history.

Seven assemblies are taken up, as illustrative of the various phases of the Church's history, from the day in which it was set up, in responsibility, on the earth, until it shall be spued out of the Lord's mouth, as something utterly intolerable. If we do not see that these two chapters are prophetic, as well as historic, we shall deprive ourselves of a vast field of most valuable instruction. For ourselves, we can only assure the reader that no human language could adequately set forth what we have gathered from Revelation 2 and 3, in their prophetic aspect.

However, we are only referring to them now as the last of a series of Scripture proofs of our present thesis.

Take the address to Ephesus, the self-same church to which the apostle Paul wrote his marvelous Epistle, opening up so blessedly the heavenly side of things, God's eternal purpose respecting the Church – the position and portion of the Church, as accepted in Christ and blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Him. No failure here; no thought of such a thing; no possibility of it. All is in God's hands here. The counsel is His; the work His. It is His grace, His glory, His mighty power, His good pleasure; and all founded upon the blood of Christ. There is no question of responsibility here. The Church was "**dead in trespasses and sins;**" but Christ died for her; He placed Himself judicially where she was morally; and God, in His sovereign grace, entered the scene and raised up Christ from the dead, and the Church in Him. Glorious fact! Here all is sure and settled. It is the Church in the heavenly places in Christ, not the Church on earth for Christ,- it is the body "**accepted,**" not the candlestick judged. If we do not see both sides of this great question, we have much to learn.

But there is the earthly side as well as the heavenly – the human as well as the divine – the candlestick as well as the body. Hence it is that in the judicial address in Revelation 2, we read such solemn words as these: "**I have somewhat against thee, that thou hast left thy first love.**"

How very distinct! Nothing like this in Ephesians; nothing against the body, nothing against the bride; but there is something against the candlestick. The light had even already become dim. Hardly had it been lighted ere the snuffers were needed.

Thus, at the very outset, symptoms of decline showed themselves, unmistakably, to the penetrating eye of Him who walked amongst the seven golden candlesticks; and when we reach the close, and contemplate the last phase of the Church's condition – the last stage of its earthly history, as illustrated by the assembly at Laodicea – there is not a single redeeming feature.

The case is almost hopeless. The Lord is outside the door – "**Behold, I stand at the door, and knock.**" It is not here as at Ephesus, "**I have somewhat against thee.**" The whole condition is bad. The whole professing body is about to be given up – "**I will spue thee out of My mouth.**" He still lingers, blessed be His name, for He is ever slow to leave the place of mercy, or enter the place of judgment.

It reminds us of the departure of the glory, in the opening of Ezekiel. It moved with a slow and measured pace, both to leave the house, the people, and the land. **“Then the glory of the Lord went up from the cherub, and stood over the threshold of the house; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the Lord’s glory.”** **“Then the glory of the Lord departed from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim.”** And finally, **“the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city”** (Ezekiel 10:4, 18; 11:23).

This is deeply affecting. How striking the contrast between this slow departure of the glory and its speedy entrance, in the day of Solomon’s dedication of the house in II Chronicles 7:1. The Lord was quick to enter His abode in the midst of His people; slow to leave it. He was, to speak after the manner of men, forced away by the sins and hopeless impenitence of His infatuated people.

So also with the Church. We see in the second of Acts His rapid entrance into His spiritual house. He came like a rushing mighty wind to fill the house with His glory. But in the third of Revelation, see His attitude: He is outside. Yes; but He is knocking. He lingers, not indeed with any hope of corporate restoration, but if haply **“any man would hear His voice and open the door.”** The fact of His being outside shows what the church is. The fact of His knocking shows what He is.

Christian reader, see that you thoroughly understand this whole subject: it is of the very last importance that you should. We are surrounded on all sides with false notions as to the present condition and future destiny of the professing church. We must fling these all behind our backs, with holy decision, and listen, with circumcised ear and reverent mind, to the teaching of Holy Scripture. That teaching is as clear as noonday.

The professing church is a hopeless ruin, and judgment is at the door.

Read the Epistle of Jude; read 2 Peter 2 and 3; read II Timothy. Just lay aside this volume and look closely into those solemn scriptures, and we feel persuaded you will rise from the study with the deep and thorough conviction that there is nothing whatever before Christendom but the unmitigated wrath of Almighty God. Its doom is set forth in that brief but solemn sentence in Romans 11, **“Thou also shalt be cut off.”**

Yes; such is the language of Scripture – **“Cut off”** – **“spued out.”**

The professing church has utterly failed as Christ’s witness on the earth. As with Israel, so with the Church, the very truth which she was responsible to maintain and confess, she had faithlessly surrendered. Hardly had the canon of New Testament scripture closed, hardly had the first set of laborers left the field, ere gross darkness set in, and settled down upon the whole professing body. Turn where you will, range through the ponderous tomes of “the fathers,” as they are called, and you will not find a trace of those grand characteristic truths of our glorious Christianity. All, all was shamefully abandoned.

As Israel in Canaan abandoned the Lord for Baal and Ashtaroth, so the Church abandoned the pure and precious truth of God for puerile fables and deadly errors. The rapid departure is perfectly astounding; but it was just as the apostle Paul forewarned the elders of Ephesus – **“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them”** (Acts 20).

How truly deplorable! The holy apostles of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ almost immediately succeeded by **“grievous wolves”** and teachers of perverse things; the whole Church plunged into thick darkness; the lamp of divine revelation almost hidden from view; ecclesiastical corruption in every form; priestly domination with all its terrible accompaniments. In short, the history of the Church – the history of Christendom is the most appalling record ever penned.

True it is, thanks be to God, He left not Himself without a witness. Here and there, from time to time, just as in Israel of old, He raised up one and another to speak for Him. Even amid the deepest gloom of the middle ages, an occasional star appears upon the horizon. The Waldenses and others were enabled, by the grace of God, to hold fast His Word and to confess the name of Jesus in the face of Rome’s dark and terrible tyranny, and diabolical cruelty.

Then came that gracious season, in the sixteenth century, when God raised up Luther and his beloved and honored fellow-laborers to preach the great truth of justification by faith, and to give the precious volume of God to the people, in their own tongue wherein they were born. It is not within the compass of human language to set forth the blessing of that memorable time.

Thousands heard the glad tidings of salvation – heard, believed, and were saved. Thousands, who had long groaned beneath the intolerable weight of Romish superstition, hailed, with profound thankfulness, the heavenly message. Thousands flocked, with intense delight, to draw water from those wells of inspiration which had been stopped for ages by papal ignorance and intolerance. The blessed lamp of divine revelation, so long hidden by the enemy’s hand, was permitted to cast its rays athwart the gloom, and thousands rejoiced in its heavenly light.

But while we heartily bless God for all the glorious results of what is commonly called the reformation, in the sixteenth century, we should make a very grave mistake indeed were we to imagine that it was anything approaching to a restoration of the Church to its original condition.

Far – very far from it. Luther and his companions, if we are to judge from their writings – precious writings, many of them never grasped the divine idea of the Church as the body of Christ. They did not understand the unity of the body; the presence of the Holy Ghost in the assembly, as well as His indwelling in the individual believer; they never reached the grand truth of ministry in the Church, its nature, source, power, and responsibility; they never got beyond the idea of human authority as the basis of ministry; they were silent as to the specific hope of the Church, namely, the coming of Christ for His people – the bright and morning Star; they failed to seize the proper scope of prophecy, and proved themselves incompetent rightly to divide the

word of truth.

Let us not be misunderstood. We love the memory of the reformers. Their names are familiar household words amongst us. They were dear, devoted, earnest, blessed servants of Christ. Would that we had their like amongst us in this day of revived popery and rampant infidelity. We would yield to none in our love and esteem for Luther, Melancthon, Farel, Latimer, and Knox. They were truly bright and shining lights in their day; and thousands – yea, millions will thank God throughout eternity that they ever lived and preached and wrote. And not only so, but, looked at in their private life and public ministry, they put to shame many of those who have been favored with a range of truth for which we look in vain in the voluminous writings of the reformers.

But, admitting all this, as we most freely and gratefully do, we are nevertheless convinced that those beloved and honored servants of Christ failed to seize, and therefore failed to preach and teach, many of the special and characteristic truths of Christianity; at least, we have failed to find these truths in their writings. They preached the precious truth of justification by faith; they gave the Holy Scriptures to the people; they trampled under foot much of the rubbish of Romish superstition.

All this they did, by the grace of God, and for all this we bow our heads in deep thankfulness and praise to the Father of mercies. But Protestantism is not Christianity; nor are the so-called churches of the reformation, whether national or dissenting, the Church of God. Far from it.

We look back over the course of eighteen centuries, and spite of the occasional revivals, spite of the brilliant lights which at various times have shone upon the Church's horizon – lights which appeared all the brighter in contrast with the deep gloom that surrounded them spite of the many gracious visitations of God's Spirit, both in Europe and America, during the past and present century – spite of all these things, for which we most heartily bless God, we return with decision to the statement already advanced, that the professing church is a hopeless wreck; that Christendom is rapidly hastening down the inclined plane, to the blackness of darkness forever; that those highly favored lands, where much evangelical truth has been preached, where Bibles have been circulated in millions, and Gospel tracts in billions, shall yet be covered with thick darkness – given over to strong delusion to believe a lie. And then? Ah, what then? A converted world? Nay, but a judged Church.

The true saints of God, scattered throughout Christendom – all the true members of the body of Christ, will be caught up to meet their coming Lord – the dead saints raised, the living changed, in a moment, and all taken up together to be forever with the Lord. Then the mystery will rise to a head in the person of the man of sin – the lawless one, the Antichrist. The Lord Jesus shall come, and all His saints with Him, to execute judgment on the beast, or revived Roman empire, and the false prophet, or Antichrist – the former in the west, the latter in the east.

This will be a summary act of direct warrior judgment, without any judicial process whatever, inasmuch as both the beast and false prophet shall be found in open rebellion and blasphemous opposition to God and the Lamb. Then comes the sessional judgment of the living nations, as recorded in Matthew 25:31-46.

Thus, all evil having been put down, Christ shall reign, in righteousness and peace, for a thousand years. A bright and blessed time! the true Sabbath for Israel and the whole earth – a period marked by the grand facts, Satan bound and Christ reigning. Glorious facts! The very reference to them causes the heart to overflow in praise and thanksgiving. What will the reality be?

But Satan shall be loosed from his thousand years' captivity, and allowed to make one more effort against God and His Christ – **“And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. \* And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city; and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever”** (Revelation 20:7-10).

**\* The reader must distinguish between the Gog and Magog of Revelation 20, and those of Ezekiel 38 and 39. The former are post-millennial; the latter, pre-millennial.**

This will be Satan's last effort, issuing in his eternal perdition.

Then we have the judgment of the dead, **“small and great”** – the sessional judgment of all those who shall have died in their sins, from the days of Cain down to the last apostate from millennial glory. Tremendous scene! No heart can conceive, no tongue – no pen set forth, its awful solemnity.

Finally, we have unfolded to the vision of our souls the everlasting state – the new Heaven and the new earth wherein righteousness shall dwell, throughout the golden ages of eternity. Such is the order of events as set forth, with all possible clearness, on the page of inspiration. We have given a brief summary of them in connection with the line of truth on which we have been dwelling – a line, as we are fully aware, by no means popular; but we dare not withhold it on that account.

Our business is to declare the whole counsel of God, not to seek popularity. We do not expect the truth of God to be popular in Christendom; so far from this, we have been seeking to prove that just as Israel abandoned the truth which they were responsible to maintain, so the professing church has let slip all those great truths which characterize the Christianity of the New Testament.

And we may assure the reader that our one object in pursuing this line of argument is to arouse the hearts of all true Christians to a sense of the value of those truths, and of their responsibility, not only to receive them, but to seek a fuller realization and a bolder confession of them. We long to see a band of men raised up, in these closing hours of the Church's earthly history, who shall go forth, in true spiritual power, and proclaim, with unction and energy, the long-forgotten truths of the Gospel of God.

May God, in His great mercy to His people, raise up such and send them forth. May the Lord Jesus knock louder and louder at the door, so that many may hear and open to Him, according to the desire of His loving heart, and taste the blessedness of deep personal communion with Himself, while waiting for His coming.

Blessed be God, there is no limit whatever to the blessing of the individual soul who hears Christ's voice and opens the door; and what is true of one is true of hundreds or thousands. Only let us be real and simple and true, feeling and owning our utter feebleness and nothingness, laying aside all assumption and empty pretension, not seeking to be anything or to set up anything, but holding fast Christ's word and not denying His name, finding our happy place at His feet, our satisfying portion in Himself, and our real delight in serving Him in any little way. Thus we shall get on harmoniously, lovingly, and happily together, finding our common center in Christ, and our common object in seeking to further His cause and promote His glory. a that it were thus with all the Lord's beloved people in this our day! we should then have a very different tale to tell, and present a very different aspect to the world around. May the Lord revive His work.

It may perhaps seem to the reader that we have wandered a long way from the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy; but we must remind him, once for all, that it is not merely what each chapter contains that demands our attention, but also what it suggests. And further, we may add that, in sitting down to write, from time to time, it is our one desire to be led by God's Spirit into the very line of truth which may be suited to the need of all our readers.

If only the beloved flock of Christ be fed, instructed, and comforted, we care not whether it be by well-connected notes or broken fragments.

We shall now proceed with our chapter.

### The Importance of the Heart

Moses having laid down the grand foundation truth contained in the fourth verse – **“Hear, a Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord,”** proceeds to press upon the congregation their sacred duty in respect to this blessed One.

It was not merely that there was a God, but He was their God. He had deigned to link Himself with them, in covenant relationship. He had redeemed them, borne them on eagles' wings, and brought them unto Himself, in order that they might be to Him a people, and that He might be their God.

Blessed fact! Blessed relationship! But Israel had to be reminded of the conduct suited to such a relationship – conduct which could only flow from a loving heart. **“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.”**

Here lies the secret of all true practical religion. Without this, all is valueless to God. **“My son, give me thine heart.”**

Where the heart is given, all will be right. The heart may be compared to the regulator of a watch, which acts on the hair-spring, and the hair-spring acts on the main-spring, and the main-spring acts on the hands, as they move around the dial. If your watch goes wrong, it will not do merely to alter the hands, you must touch the regulator. God looks for real heartwork, blessed be His name! His word to us is, **“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.”**

How we ought to bless Him for such touching words! they do so reveal His own loving heart to us. Assuredly, He loved us in deed and in truth, and He cannot be satisfied with any thing else, whether in our ways with Him or our ways one with another: all must flow straight from the heart.

**“And these words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart”** – at the very source of all the issues of life. This is peculiarly precious. Whatever is in the heart comes out through the lips and in the life. How important, then, to have the heart full of the Word of God – so full, that we shall have no room for the vanities and follies of this present evil world. Thus shall our conversation be always with grace, seasoned with salt.

**“Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.”** Hence we can judge of what is in the heart by what cometh out of the mouth. The tongue is the organ of the heart – the organ of the man. **“A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.”** When the heart is really governed by the Word of God, the whole character reveals the blessed result. It must be so, inasmuch as the heart is the main-spring of our entire moral condition; it lies at the center of all those moral influences which govern our personal history and shape our practical career.

In every part of the divine volume, we see how much importance God attaches to the attitude and state of the heart, with respect to Him or to His Word, which is one and the same thing. When the heart is true to Him, all is sure to come right; but on the other hand, we shall find that where the heart grows cold and careless as to God and His truth, there will, sooner or later, be open departure from the path of truth and righteousness.

There is, therefore, much force and value in the exhortation addressed by Barnabas to the converts at Antioch – **“He exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.”**

How needful then, now, always! This “purpose of heart” is most precious to God. It is what we may venture to call the grand moral regulator. It imparts a lovely earnestness to the Christian character which is greatly to be coveted by all of us. It is a divine antidote against coldness, deadness, and formality, all of which are so hateful to God. The outward life may be very correct, and the creed may be very orthodox; but if the earnest purpose of heart be lacking – the affectionate cleaving of the whole moral being to God and His Christ, all is utterly worthless. It is through the heart that the Holy Ghost instructs us. Hence, the apostle prayed for the saints at Ephesus, that **“the eyes of their heart [καρδιας, not διανοιας,] might be enlightened;”** and again, **“That Christ may dwell in your heart by faith.”**

Thus we see how all Scripture is in perfect harmony with the exhortation recorded in our chapter, **“And these words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart.”**

How near this would have kept them to their covenant-God! How safe, too, from all evil, and specially from the abominable evil of idolatry – their national sin, their terrible besetment! If the Lord’s precious words had only found their right place in the heart, there would have been little fear of Baal, Chemosh, or Ashtaroth. In a word, all the idols of the heathen would have found their right place, and been estimated at their true value, if only the word of the Lord had been allowed to dwell in Israel’s heart.

And be it specially noted here how beautifully characteristic all this is of the book of Deuteronomy.

It is not so much a question of keeping up a certain order of religious observances, the offering of sacrifices, or attention to rites and ceremonies. All these things, no doubt, had their place, but they are by no means the prominent or paramount thing in Deuteronomy. No; THE WORD is the all-important matter here. It is the Lord’s word in Israel’s heart.

The reader must seize this fact if he really desires to possess the key to the lovely book of Deuteronomy.

It is not a book of ceremonial; it is a book of moral and affectionate obedience. It teaches, in almost every section, that invaluable lesson, that the heart that loves, prizes, and honors the Word of God is ready for every act of obedience, whether it be the offering of a sacrifice or the observance of a day.

It might so happen that an Israelite would find himself in a place and under circumstances in which a rigid adherence to rites and ceremonies would be impossible; but he never could be in a place or in circumstances in which he could not love, reverence, and obey the Word of God. Let him go where he would – let him be carried, as a captive exile, to the ends of the earth, nothing could rob him of the high privilege of uttering and acting on those blessed words, **“Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee.”**

Precious words! They contain, in their brief compass, the great principle of the book of Deuteronomy, and, we may add, the great principle of the divine life, at all times and in all places. It can never lose its moral force and value: it always holds good. It was true in the days of the patriarchs, true for Israel in the land, true for Israel scattered to the ends of the earth, true for the Church as a whole, true for each individual believer amid the Church’s hopeless ruins.

In a word, obedience is always the creature’s holy duty and exalted privilege – simple, unhesitating, unqualified obedience to the Word of the Lord. This is an unspeakable mercy for which we may well praise our God, day and night. He has given us His Word, blessed be His name, and He exhorts us to let that Word dwell in us richly – dwell in our hearts, and assert its holy sway over our entire course and character.

**“And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.”**

All this is perfectly beautiful. The Word of God hidden in the heart; flowing out in loving instruction to the children, and in holy conversation in the bosom of the family; shining out in all the activities of daily life, so that all who came inside the gates or entered the house might see that the Word of God was the standard for each, for all, and in every thing.

Thus it was to be with Israel of old, and surely thus it ought to be with Christians now. But is it so?

- Are our children thus taught?
- Is it our constant aim to present the Word of God, in all its heavenly attractiveness, to their young hearts?
- Do they see it shining out in our daily life?
- Do they see its influence upon our habits, our temper, our family intercourse, our business transactions?

This is what we understand by binding the Word as a sign upon the hands, having it as a frontlet between the eyes, writing it upon the door-posts and upon the gates.

Reader, is it thus with us? It is of little use attempting to teach our children the Word of God if our lives are not governed by that Word. We do not believe in making the blessed Word of God a mere school-book for our children; to do so is to turn a delightful privilege into a wearisome drudgery. Our children should see that we live in the very atmosphere of Scripture; that it forms the material of our conversation when we sit in the bosom of the family, in our moments of relaxation.

Alas! How little is this the case!

Have we not to be deeply humbled in the presence of God when we reflect upon the general character and tone of our conversation at table, and in the family circle?

- How little there is of Deuteronomy 6:7!
- How much of **“foolish talking and jesting, which are not convenient”**!
- How much evil-speaking of our brethren, our neighbors, our fellow-laborers!
- How much idle gossip!
- How much worthless small talk!

And from what does all this proceed? Simply from the state of the heart. The Word of God, the commandments and sayings of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, are not dwelling in our hearts; and hence they are not welling up and flowing out in living streams of grace and edification.

Will anyone say that Christians do not need to consider these things? If so, let him ponder the following wholesome words: **“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.”** And again, **“Be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (Ephesians 4:29; 5:18-20).

These words were addressed to the saints at Ephesus; and, most assuredly, we should apply our hearts diligently to them. We are little aware, perhaps, of how deeply and constantly we fail in maintaining the habit of spiritual conversation. It is specially in the bosom of the family, and in our ordinary intercourse, that this failure is most manifest. Hence our need of those words of exhortation which we have just penned.

It is evident the Holy Spirit foresaw the need, and graciously anticipated it. Hear what He says **“to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ at Colosse,”** – **“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord”** (Colossians 3).

Lovely picture of ordinary Christian life! It is but a fuller and higher development of what we have in our chapter, where the Israelite is seen in the midst of his family, with the Word of God flowing forth from his heart in loving instruction to his children seen in his daily life, in all his intercourse at home and abroad, under the hallowed influence of the Lord’s words.

Beloved Christian reader, do we not long to see more of all this in our midst?

Is it not, at times, very sorrowful and very humbling to mark the style of conversation that obtains in the midst of our family circles? Should we not sometimes blush if we could see our conversation reproduced in print? What is the remedy? Here it is – a heart filled with the peace of Christ, the word of Christ, Christ Himself: nothing else will do. We must begin with the heart, and where that is thoroughly preoccupied with heavenly things, we shall make very short work with all attempts at evil-speaking, foolish talking, and jesting.

**“And it shall be, when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land which He swear unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities which thou buildedst not, and houses full of all good things which thou filledst not, and wells digged which thou diggedst not, and vineyards and olive-trees which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; then beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage”** (Ver. 10-12).

Amid all the blessings, the mercies, and the privileges of the land of Canaan, they were to remember that gracious and faithful One who had redeemed them out of the land of bondage.

They were to remember, too, that all these things were His free gift. The land, with all that it contained, was bestowed upon them in virtue of His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Cities built and houses furnished, flowing wells, fruitful vineyards and olive yards, all ready to their hand, the free gift of sovereign grace and covenant mercy. All they had to do was to take possession, in simple faith, and to keep ever in the remembrance of the thoughts of their hearts the bounteous Giver of it all.

They were to think of Him, and find in His redeeming love the true motive – spring of a life of loving obedience.

Wherever they turned their eyes, they beheld the tokens of His great goodness – the rich fruit of His marvelous love. Every city, every house, every well, every vine, olive and fig-tree, spoke to their hearts of the Lord's abounding grace, and furnished a substantial proof of His infallible faithfulness to His promise.

**“Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve Him, and shalt swear by His name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you; (for the Lord thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the Lord thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth.”**

There are two great motives set before the congregation, in our chapter, namely, “**love**,” in verse 5, and “**fear**,” in verse 13.

These are found all through Scripture; and their importance in guiding the life and forming the character cannot possibly be too highly estimated. “**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.**” We are exhorted to be “**in the fear of the Lord all the day.**” It is a grand moral safeguard against all evil. “**Unto man He said, ‘Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.’**”

The blessed Book abounds in passages setting forth, in every possible form, the immense importance of the fear of God. “**How**,” says Joseph, “**can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?**”

The man who walks habitually in the fear of God is preserved from every form of moral pravity. The abiding realization of the divine presence must prove an effectual shelter from every temptation. How often do we find the presence of some very holy and spiritual person a wholesome check upon levity and folly; and if such be the moral influence of a fellow-mortal, how much more powerful would be the realized presence of God!

Christian reader, let us give our serious attention to this weighty matter. Let us seek to live in the consciousness that we are in the immediate presence of God. Thus shall we be preserved from a thousand forms of evil, to which we are exposed from day to day, and to which, alas! we are predisposed. The remembrance that the eye of God rests upon us would exert a far more powerful influence upon our life and conversation than the presence of all the saints upon earth and all the angels in Heaven.

- We could not speak falsely,
- We could not utter with our lips what we do not feel in the heart,
- We could not talk folly,
- We could not speak evil of our brother or our neighbor,
- We could not speak unkindly of any one,

If only we felt ourselves in the presence of God.

In a word, the holy fear of the Lord, of which Scripture speaks so much, would act as a most blessed restraint upon evil thoughts, evil words, evil ways, evil in every shape and form.

Moreover, it would tend to make us very real and genuine in all our sayings and doings.

There is a sad amount of sham and nonsense about us. We frequently say a great deal more than we feel. We are not honest; we do not speak, every man, truth with our neighbor; we give expressions to sentiments which are not the genuine utterance of the heart; we act the hypocrite one with another.

All these things afford melancholy proof of how little we live, move, and have our being in the presence of God. If we could only bear in mind that God hears us and sees us – hears our every word and sees our every thought, our every way, how differently we should carry ourselves!

- What holy watchfulness we should maintain over our thoughts, our tempers, and our tongues!
- What purity of heart and mind!
- What truth and uprightness in all our intercourse with our fellows!
- What reality and simplicity in our deportment!
- What happy freedom from all affectation, assumption, and pretension!
- What deliverance from every form of self-occupation!

O, to live ever in the deep sense of the divine presence! to walk in the fear of the Lord all the day long!

And then to prove the “vast constraining influence” of His love!

- To be led out in all the holy activities which that love would ever suggest!
- To find our delight in doing good!
- To taste the spiritual luxury of making hearts glad!
- To be continually meditating plans of usefulness!
- To live close by the fountain of divine love, so that we must be streams of refreshing in the midst of this thirsty scene-rays of light amid the moral gloom around us!

**“The love of Christ,”** says the blessed apostle, **“constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again.”**

How morally lovely is all this!

Would that it were more fully realized and faithfully exhibited amongst us! May the fear and love of God be continually in our hearts, in all their blessed power and formative influence, that thus our daily life may shine to His praise and the real profit, comfort, and blessing of all who come in contact with us, whether in private or in public. God, in His infinite mercy, grant it, for Christ's sake!

The sixteenth verse of our chapter demands our special attention – **“Ye shall not tempt the Lord your God, as ye tempted Him in Massah.”**

These words were quoted by our blessed Lord when tempted by Satan to cast Himself from the pinnacle of the temple – **“Then the devil taketh Him up into the holy city, and setteth Him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto Him, ‘If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down; for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee; and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone.’”**

This is a very remarkable passage. It proves how Satan can quote Scripture when it suits his purpose. But he omits a most important clause – **“To keep Thee in all Thy ways.”**

Now, it formed no part of the ways of Christ to cast Himself from the pinnacle of the temple. It was not the path of duty. He had no command from God to do any such thing, and hence He refused to do it. He had no need to tempt God – to put Him to the test. He had, as a man, the most perfect confidence in God – the fullest assurance of His protection.

Moreover, He was not going to abandon the path of duty in order to prove God's care of Him; and herein He teaches us a most valuable lesson. We can always count on God's protecting hand when we are treading the path of duty; but if we are walking in a self-chosen path – if we are seeking our own pleasure or our own interest, our own ends or objects, then to talk of counting on God would be simply wicked presumption.

No doubt, our God is very merciful, very gracious, and His tender mercy is over us, even when we wander off the path of duty; but this is another thing altogether, and it leaves wholly untouched the statement that we can only count on divine protection when our feet are in the pathway of duty.

If a Christian goes out boating for his amusement, or if he goes clambering over the Alps merely for sight-seeing, has he any right to believe that God will take care of him? Let conscience give the answer.

If God calls us to cross a stormy lake to preach the Gospel, if He summons us to cross the Alps on some special service for Him, then, assuredly, we can commit ourselves to His mighty hand to protect us from all evil. The grand point for all of us is, to be found in the holy path of duty. It may be narrow, rough, and lonely; but it is a path overshadowed by the wings of the Almighty and illumined by the light of His approving countenance.

Ere turning from the subject suggested by verse 16, we would briefly notice the very interesting and instructive fact that our Lord, in His reply to Satan, takes no notice whatever of his misquotation of Psalm 91:11.

Let us carefully note this fact and seek to bear it in mind. In place of saying to the enemy, You have left out a most important clause of the passage which you undertake to quote, He simply quotes another passage, as authority for His own conduct. Thus He vanquished the tempter, and thus He left us a blessed example.

It is worthy of our special notice that the Lord Jesus Christ did not overcome Satan in virtue of His divine power. Had He done so, it could not be an example for us. But when we see Him as a man using the Word as His only weapon, and thus gaining a glorious victory, our hearts are encouraged and comforted; and not only so, but we learn a most precious lesson as to how we, in our sphere and measure, are to stand in the conflict. The Man Christ Jesus overcame by simple dependence upon God and obedience to His Word.

Blessed fact! A fact full of comfort and consolation for us. Satan could do nothing with one who would only act by divine authority, and by the power of the Spirit.

Jesus never did His own will, though, as we know, (blessed be His holy name!) His will was absolutely perfect. He came down from Heaven, as He Himself tells us, in John 6, not to do His own will, but the will of the Father that sent Him. He was a perfect servant, from first to last.

His rule of action was the Word of God; His power of action, the Holy Ghost; His only motive for action, the will of God; hence the prince of this world had nothing in Him. Satan could not, by all his subtle wiles, draw Him out of the path of obedience, or out of the place of dependence.

Christian reader, let us consider these things; let us deeply ponder them; let us remember that our blessed Lord and Master left us an example that we should follow His steps. Oh, may we follow them diligently during the little while that yet remains. May we, by the gracious ministry of the Holy Ghost, enter more fully into the great fact that we are called to walk even as Jesus walked. He is our great Exemplar in all things. Let us study Him more profoundly, so that we may reproduce Him more faithfully.

We shall now close this lengthened section by quoting for the reader the last paragraph of the chapter on which we have been dwelling; it is a passage of singular fullness, depth, and power, and strikingly characteristic of the entire book of Deuteronomy.

**“Ye shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and His testimonies, and His statutes, which He hath commanded thee. And thou shalt do that which is right and good in the sight of the Lord; that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest go in and possess the good land which the Lord sware unto thy fathers; to cast out all thine enemies from before thee, as the Lord hath spoken. And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, ‘What mean the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments which the Lord our God hath commanded you?**

**“Then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh’s bondmen in Egypt; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; and the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes; and He brought us out from thence, that He might bring us in, to give us the land which He sware unto our fathers. And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is at this day. And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He hath commanded us.”**

How prominently is the Word of God kept before the soul, in every page and every paragraph of this book!

It is the one great subject on the heart and in all the discourses of the revered lawgiver. It is his one aim to exalt the Word of God, in all its aspects, whether in the form of testimonies, commandments, statutes, or judgments; and to set forth the moral importance, yea, the urgent necessity of whole-hearted, earnest, diligent obedience, on the part of the people. **“Ye shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God.”** And again, **“Thou shalt do that which is right and good in the sight of the Lord.”**

All this is morally lovely. We have here unfolded before our eyes those eternal principles which no change of dispensation, no change of scene, place, or circumstances can ever touch.

**“That which is right and good”** must ever be of universal and abiding application.

It reminds us of the words of the apostle John to his beloved friend Gaius – **“Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good.”** The assembly might be in a very low condition; there might be very much to try the heart and depress the spirit of Gaius; Diotrephes might be carrying himself most unbecomingly and unwarrantably toward the beloved and venerable apostle and others; all this might be true, and much more – yea, the whole professing body might go wrong.

What then? What remained for Gaius to do? Simply to follow that which was right and good; to open his heart and his hand and his house to everyone who brought the truth; to seek to help on the cause of Christ in every right way.

This was the business of Gaius in his day, and this is the business of every true lover of Christ at all times, in all places, and under all circumstances. We may not have many to join us; we may perhaps find ourselves, at times, almost alone; but we are still to follow what is good, cost what it may.

- We are to depart from iniquity
- Purge ourselves from dishonorable vessels
- Flee youthful lusts
- Turn away from powerless professors.

And what then? **“Follow righteousness, faith, love, peace”**

How? In isolation? Nay. I may find myself alone in any given place for a time, but there can be no such thing as isolation so long as the body of Christ is on earth, and that will be till He comes for us. Hence we never expect to see the day in which we cannot find a few that call on the Lord out of a pure heart; whoever they are and wherever they are, it is our bounden duty to find them, and, having found them, to walk with them in holy fellowship **“until the end”**

May the Lord be graciously pleased to grant His rich blessing upon our meditations thus far. May He clothe these pages with the power of the Holy Ghost, and make them to be a direct message from Himself to the hearts of His people throughout the whole world. May He also grant spiritual power to unfold the truth contained in the remaining sections of this most profound, comprehensive, and suggestive book.

We earnestly beseech the Christian reader to join us in prayer as to all this, remembering those most precious words, **“If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them by My Father which is in heaven.”**

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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