

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF GENESIS

by

Charles H. MacIntosh

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE opening of this chapter presents to us a subject of immense interest to the heart,- namely, the true character of divine restoration. When the child of God has, in any way, declined in his spiritual condition, and lost his communion, he is in great danger, when conscience begins to work, of failing in the apprehension of divine grace, and of stopping short of the proper mark of divine restoration. Now, we know that God does everything in a way entirely worthy of himself - whether he creates, redeems, converts, restores, or provides, he can only act like himself. What is worthy of himself is, ever and only, his standard of action.

This is unspeakably happy for us, inasmuch as we would ever seek to “**limit the Holy One of Israel;**” and in nothing are we so prone to limit him as in his restoring grace.

In the case now before us, we see that Abraham was not only delivered out of Egypt, but brought back “**unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, . . . unto the place of the altar which he had made there at the first: and there Abraham called on the name of the Lord.**”

Nothing can satisfy God, in reference to a wanderer or backslider, but his being entirely restored.

We, in the self-righteousness of our hearts, might imagine that such an one should take a lower place than that which he had formerly occupied; and so he should, were it a question of his merit or his character; but, inasmuch as it is, altogether, a question of grace, it is God’s prerogative to fix the standard of restoration; and His standard is set forth in the following passage:

“If thou wilt return, O Israel, return to me.”

It is thus that God restores, and it would be unworthy of Himself to do anything else. He will either not restore at all, or else restore in such a way as to magnify and glorify the riches of his grace.

Thus, when the leper was brought back, he was actually conducted “**to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.**”

When the prodigal returned, he was set down at the table with the father.

When Peter was restored, he was able to stand before the men of Israel and say, “**ye denied the Holy One, and the Just,**” - the very thing which he had done himself, under the most aggravated circumstances.

In all these cases, and many more which might be adduced, we see the perfectness of God’s restoration. He always brings the soul back to himself, in the full power of grace and the full confidence of faith. “**If thou wilt return, return to me.**” “**Abraham came unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning.**”

Then, as to the moral effect of divine restoration, it is most deeply practical.

If legalism gets its answer in the character of the restoration, antinomianism gets its answer in the effect thereof.

The restored soul will have a very deep and keen sense of the evil from which it has been delivered, and this will be evidenced by a jealous, prayerful, holy and circumspect spirit. We are not restored in order that we may, the more lightly, go and sin again, but rather that we may “**go and sin no more.**” The deeper my sense of the grace of divine restoration, the deeper will be my sense of the holiness of it also.

This principle is taught and established throughout all Scripture; but especially in two well-known passages, namely, Psalm 23:3, and I John 1:9: “**He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.**” And again: “**If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**”

The proper path for a divinely-restored soul is “**the path of righteousness.**”

In other words, having tasted divine grace we walk in righteousness. To talk of grace, while walking in unrighteousness, is, as the apostle says, to turn “**the grace of our God into lasciviousness.**”

If “**grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life,**” it also manifests itself in righteousness, in the outflow of that life. The grace that forgives us our sins, cleanses us from all unrighteousness. Those things must never be separated.

When taken together, they furnish a triumphant answer to the legalism and antinomianism of the human heart. But there was a deeper trial for Abraham’s heart than even the famine, namely, that arising from the company of one who evidently was not walking in the energy of personal faith, nor in the realization of personal responsibility. It seems plain that Lot was, from the very beginning, borne onward rather by Abraham’s influence and example, than by his own faith in God. This is a very common case. If we look down along the history of the people of God, we can easily see how that, in every great movement produced by the Spirit of God, certain individuals have attached themselves thereto who were not personally participators of the power which had produced the movement. Such persons go on for a time, either as a dead weight upon the testimony, or an active hindrance to it.

Thus, in Abraham's case, the Lord called him to leave his kindred; but he brought his kindred with him. Terah retarded him in his movement, until death took him out of the way. Lot followed him somewhat farther, until "**the lusts of other things**" overpowered him, and he entirely broke down.

The same thing is observable in the great movement of Israel out of Egypt.

"**A mixed multitude**" followed them, and caused much defilement, weakness, and sorrow; for we read, in Numbers 11, "**the mixed multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, who shall give us flesh to eat.**"

So also, in the early days of the Church; and not only so, but in every revival which has taken place thereon down to the present day, many have been acted upon by various influences, which, not being divine, proved evanescent; and the persons so acted upon sooner or later gave way, and found their proper level. Nothing will endure but that which is of God. I must realize the link between me and the living God. I must know myself as one called of him into the position which I occupy, else I shall have no stability, and exhibit no consistency therein.

It will not do for us to follow in the track of other people, merely because it is their track. God will graciously give each a path to walk in, a sphere to move in, and a responsibility to fulfil; and we are bound to know our calling and the functions thereof, that, by his grace ministered to our souls daily, we may work therein effectually to his glory. It matters not what our measure may be provided it be what God hath dealt to us. We may have "**five talents,**" or we may have but "**one:**" still, if we use the "**one,**" with our eye fixed on the Master, we shall be just as sure to hear from his glorious lips the words, "**well done,**" as if we had used the "**five.**"

This is encouraging. Paul, Peter, James, and John, had each his peculiar measure, his specific ministry; and so with all: none needs to interfere with another. A carpenter has a saw and a plane, a hammer and a chisel; and he uses each as he needs it. Nothing can be more worthless than imitation.

If, in the natural world, we look at the various orders of creation, we see no imitation. All have their proper sphere, their proper functions. And if it be thus in the natural world, how much more in the spiritual. The field is wide enough for all. In every house there are vessels of various sizes and various shapes. The master wants them all. Let us, therefore, my beloved reader, search and see whether we are walking under a divine or a human influence; whether our faith stands in the wisdom of man, or in the power of God; whether we are doing things because others have done them, or because the Lord has called us to do them; whether we are merely propped up by the example and influence of our fellow, or sustained by personal faith in God. These are serious inquiries.

It is, no doubt, a happy privilege to enjoy the fellowship of our brethren; but if we are propped up by them, we shall soon make shipwreck. So, also, if we go beyond our measure, our action will be strained and unsightly, uneasy and unnatural. It is very easy to see when a man is working in his place, and according to his measure.

All affectation, assumption, and imitation, is contemptible in the extreme.

Hence, though we cannot be great, let us be honest; and though we cannot be brilliant, let us be genuine.

- If a person goes beyond his depth, without knowing how to swim, he will surely flounder.
- If a vessel put out to sea, without being sea-worthy and in trim, it will surely be beaten back into harbor, or lost.

Lot left “**Ur of the Chaldees,**” but he fell in the plains of Sodom.

The call of God had not reached his heart, nor the inheritance of God filled his vision. Solemn thought I may we ponder it deeply!

Blessed be God, there is a path for each of his servants, along which shines the light of his approving countenance, and to walk therein should be our chief joy. His approval is enough for the heart that knows him. True, we may not always be able to command the approval and concurrence of our brethren; we may frequently be misunderstood; but we cannot help these things. “**The day**” will set all this to rights, and the loyal heart can contentedly wait for that day, knowing that then “**every man shall have praise of God.**”

But it may be well to examine, more particularly, what it was that caused Lot to turn aside off the path of public testimony.

There is a crisis in every man’s history at which it will assuredly be made manifest on what ground he is resting, by what motives he is actuated, and by what objects he is animated. Thus it was with Lot.

He did not die at Charran; but he fell at Sodom. The ostensible cause of his fall was the strife between his herdsmen and those of Abraham; But the fact is, when one is not really walking with a single eye and purified affections, he will easily find a stone to stumble over. If he does not find it at one time, he will at another. If he does not find it here, he will find it there.

In one sense, it makes little matter as to what may be the apparent cause of turning aside; the real cause lies underneath, far away, it may be, from common observation, in the hidden chambers of the heart’s affections and desires, where the world, in some shape or form, has been sought after.

The strife between the herdsmen might have been easily settled without spiritual damage to either Abraham or Lot. To the former, indeed, it only afforded an occasion for exhibiting the beautiful power of faith, and the moral elevation, the heavenly vantage-ground, on which faith ever sets the possessor thereof. But to the latter it was an occasion for exhibiting the thorough worldliness of his heart.

The strife no more produced the worldliness in Lot than it produced the faith in Abraham; it only manifested, in the case of each, what was really there.

Thus it is always: controversial and divisions arise in the Church of God, and many are stumbled thereby, and driven back into the world, in one way or another. They then lay the blame on the controversy and division, whereas the truth is, that these things were only the means of developing the real condition of the soul, and the bent of the heart.

The world was in the heart, and would be reached by some route or another; nor is there much of moral excellency exhibited in blaming men and things, when the root of the matter lies within.

It is not that controversy and division are not to be deeply deplored: assuredly they are. To see brethren contending in the very presence of “**the Canaanite and the Perizzite,**” is truly lamentable and humiliating.

Our language should ever be, “**Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee . . . for we are brethren.**”

Still, why did not Abraham make choice of Sodom? Why did not the strife drive him into the world? Why was it not an occasion of stumbling to him? Because he looked at it from God’s point of view.

No doubt, he had a heart that could be attracted by “**well-watered plains,**” just as powerfully as Lot’s heart; but then he did not allow his own heart to choose.

He first let Lot take his choice, and then left God to choose for him. This was heavenly wisdom.

This is what faith ever does: it allows God to fix its inheritance, as it also allows him to make it good. It is always satisfied with the portion which God gives. It can say, “**the lines are fallen to me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.**”

It matters not where “**the lines**” fall; for, in the judgment of faith, they always “**fall in pleasant places,**” just because God casts them there.

The man of faith can easily afford to allow the man of sight to take his choice. He can say, “**If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.**”

What beautiful disinterestedness and moral elevation we have here! and yet what security!

It is certain that, let nature range where it will, let it take its most comprehensive grasp, its boldest and highest flight, there is never the slightest danger of its laying its hand upon faith’s treasure. It will seek its portion in quite an opposite direction.

Faith lays up its treasure in a place which nature would never dream of examining and, as to its approaching thereto, it could not if it would; and it would not if it could. Hence, therefore, faith is perfectly safe, as well as beautifully disinterested, in allowing nature to take its choice.

What, then, did Lot choose when he got his choice. He chose Sodom. The very place that was about, to be judged.

But how was this? Why select such a spot? Because he looked at the outward appearance, and not at the intrinsic character and future destiny.

- Its intrinsic character was “wicked.”
- Its future destiny was “judgment,” to be destroyed by “**fire and brimstone out of heaven.**”

But, it may be said, “Lot knew nothing of all this.” Perhaps not, nor Abraham either; but God did; and had Lot allowed God to “choose his inheritance for him,” he certainly would not have chosen a spot that he himself was about to destroy. He did not, however. He judged for himself. Sodom suited him, though it did not suit God.

His eye rested on the “**well-watered plains,**” and his heart was attracted by them.

“**He pitched his tent toward Sodom.**” Such is nature’s choice!

“**Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.**” Lot forsook Abraham for the same reason. He left the place of testimony, and got into the place of judgment.

“**And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward; for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever.**”

The “**strife**” and “**separation,**” so far from damaging Abraham’s spiritual condition, rather brought out, in full relief, his heavenly principles, and strengthened in his soul the life of faith. Moreover, it cleared the prospect for him, and delivered him from the company of one who could only prove a lead weight. Thus it worked for good, and yielded a harvest of blessing. It is at once most solemn, and yet most encouraging, to bear in mind that, in the long run, men find their proper level.

Men who run unsent, break down, in one way or another, and find their way back to that which they profess to have left.

On the other hand. those who are called of God, and lean on him, are, by his grace, sustained.

“**Their path is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.**”

The thought of this should keep us humble, watchful, and prayerful.

“**Let him, that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall,**” for truly, “**there are first that shall be last, and there are last that shall be first.**” “**He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved,**” is a principle which, whatever be its specific application, has a wide moral bearing.

Many a vessel has sailed out of harbor in gallant style, with all its canvas spread, amid cheering and shouting, and with many fair promises of a first-rate passage; but, alas! storms, waves, shoals, rocks, and quicksands, have changed the aspect of things; and the voyage that commenced with hope has ended in disaster.

I am here only referring to the path of service and testimony, and by no means to the question of a man's eternal acceptance in Christ. This latter, blessed be God, does not in any wise rest with ourselves, but with Him who has said, "**I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.**"

But do we not know that many Christians set out on some special course of service or testimony, under the impression that they are called of God thereto, and after a time they break down? Unquestionably.

And, further, very many set out in the profession of some special principle of action, respecting which they have not been divinely taught, or the consequences of which they have not maturely considered in the presence of God, and, as a necessary result, they themselves have been found after a time in the open violation of those very principles.

All this is deplorable, and should be carefully avoided.

It tends to weaken the faith of God's elect, and causes the enemies of the truth to speak reproachfully.

Each one should receive his call and his commission directly from the Master himself.

All whom Christ calls into any special service, he will, infallibly, maintain therein, for he never sent anyone a warfare at his own charges. But if we run unsent, we shall not only be left to learn our folly, but to exhibit it. Yet it is not that anyone should set himself up as the impersonation of any principle, or as an example of any special character of service or testimony. God forbid. This would be the most egregious folly and empty conceit.

It is a teacher's business to set forth God's Word; and it is a servant's business to set forth the Master's will; but while all this is fully understood and admired, we must ever remember the deep need there is of counting the cost, ere we undertake to build a tower or go forth to war.

Were this more seriously attended to, there would be far less confusion and failure in our midst.

Abraham was called of God from Ur to Canaan and hence, God led him forth on the way.

- When he tarried at Charran, God waited for him;
- When he went down into Egypt, he restored him;
- When he needed guidance, he guided him;
- When there was a strife and a separation, he took care of him.

So that Abraham had only to say, **“Oh, how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee, before the sons of men.”**

He lost nothing by the strife. He had his tent and his altar before; and he had his tent and his altar afterwards.

“Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord.”

Lot might choose Sodom; but as for Abraham, he sought and found his all in God.

There was no altar in Sodom. Alas! all who travel in that direction are in quest of something quite different from that.

It is never the worship of God, but the love of the world that leads them thither. And even though they should attain their object, what is it?

How does it end?

Just thus: **“He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their souls.”**

~ end of chapter 13 ~

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