

LEST YE FAINT

by

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CHAPTER TWELVE

THE DANGER OF DISQUALIFICATION

“. . . lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway [disqualified]” (I Corinthians 9:27).

TRAGEDY IS BUT A WORD until one is enveloped in its grip and tastes of its bitterness. Then adjectives fall short of description. It looms with all the terrifying aspects of an inconceivable monster which vents its brutality without mercy upon helpless, unsuspecting ones.

Of the various kinds of tragedy, however, none can produce more unassuaged remorse than that which might have been avoided.

The Holy Spirit has marched out on the horizon of divine revelation some startling and sobering examples of defeated and dejected personalities, who, by divine judgment and chastening, have suffered a revocation of privilege, a removal of opportunity and a grievous disillusionment of indescribable intensity.

An Incomparable Disappointment in the Experiences of Men

“Then David the king stood up upon his feet, and said, Hear me, my brethren, and my people: As for me, I had in mine heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and for the footstool of our God, and had made ready for the building: But God said unto me, Thou shalt not build an house for my name, because thou hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood” (I Chronicles 28:2, 3).

David’s career had sparkled with color and versatility. It abounded in the excitement of adventure and intrigue, of daring and triumph. It suffered, too, in keeping with the history of all mankind, some scars of defeat and intermittent shadows of sorrow, but this present announcement was as astounding as it was surprising.

That David entertained a strong heart desire to build the temple was by no means a secret to his associates. Had they not, with alacrity and meticulous care, moved at the king’s bidding to **“make ready for the building?”**

The felling of Goliath was not to be reckoned in comparison with the honor of erecting the house of God. It was never so much as dreamed, either by David or by his most intimate associates, that he would be disqualified. Thus, he worked with eagerness toward this coveted end.

It must have been with saddened mien and unsteady bearing that the king of Israel stood before that specially summoned gathering. He called for a careful audience of his words, reminded them of the strongest desire of his life, alluded to the preparations which had been made, then announced his own disqualification. It was not sheer humility which prompted him to state the reason for this sad turn of events; it was quite necessary that he should do so. David was a popular king and the people were with him. They must know the facts. **“It is,”** he said, perhaps stumblingly, **“because I have been a man of war and have shed blood.”**

This sad and solemn reminder needed no explanation. Perhaps most of his hearers were participants in the dances and the hilarious volleys of applause, some forty years previously, when, with concerted voices, they screamed: **“Saul slew his thousands, and David his tens of thousands”** (I Samuel 29:5).

Now, it was a different matter. Heads were drooped and mouths were silent. There was no celebration. The king, in that moment, was not the imposing personality who had ridden the crest of popularity during a renowned regency. No, almost like the Arabs who folded their tents and silently stole away, a great and noble leader was making his exit from the limelight of human admiration and divine privilege. And a disappointing end it was—even bitter to a heart so full of happy desire. It is hard to watch a champion go down, but this is just a further reminder that men ought not provoke the Lord nor grieve His Holy Spirit of promise.

The Severe Cost of a Careless Course

“And Samuel said unto Saul, Thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel” (I Samuel 15:26).

SAUL’S TESTIMONY WAS UNTRUE

The things which befell Saul were grievous to Samuel. When the Lord revealed to him the true condition of the king and the inevitable outcome, Samuel **“cried unto the Lord all night”** (I Samuel 15:11).

What kind of an ignoble person would one be who finds delight in the failure and loss of another. But Saul was vindictive, even arrogantly self-justifying. **“I have performed the commandment of the Lord”** (I Samuel 15:13), he assured the servant of God.

Even while he spoke; the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the cattle put a lie to his statement (I Samuel 15:14).

They were to have been destroyed, but there they were by the contravening and contradictory action of the king. How utterly ill-advised it is to move contrary to the revealed will of God.

SAUL'S LIFE WAS FILLED WITH PRIDE

There was a day when the King of Israel felt more prominently his dependence upon the wisdom and strength and leadership of the Lord. Now, it was different. His attitude had changed. He developed a sense of independence and was operating in his own strength. This never leads to happy ends.

How eminently essential it is for all believers to know that there are countless forces constantly at work to dislodge them from a safe position of humble dependence upon the only One who is able to promote them successfully in the various pursuits of godly enterprise.

“When thou wast little in thine own sight,” Samuel recalled, **“wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed thee king over Israel?”** (I Samuel 15:17).

The tense in this statement magnifies the indictment and indicates a disqualifying turn of personal estimation.

SAUL'S HEART WAS GROSSLY DISOBEDIENT

Saul was afflicted with a prevailing spiritual malady. The blindness of unbelief supported him in his contention that he could move contrary to the divine will; then, through some superficial sacrifice, reinstate himself in the full favour of God.

It is a fleshly complex, but men struggle to bring God to meet their own terms.

- They ignore His commands;
- They deliberately transgress His revealed will;
- They bring reproach upon His cause.

Then, through some meaningless, self-imposed or humanly-suggested disciplinary acts, they themselves pronounce the matter closed.

Saul was content to believe that God would overlook his disobedience if he were to sacrifice some of the animals which he had been commanded to destroy. Samuel, with a perturbed heart, quickly disillusioned the king. **“Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams”** (I Samuel 15:22).

SAUL'S CONFESSION WAS ENTIRELY TOO LATE

The one who towered head and shoulders above most others in Israel is, before God's spiritual representative, a picture of sad and forlorn dejection.

“I have sinned . . . I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord . . . I feared the people . . . I listened to their entreaties” (I Samuel 15:24), he mumbled.

Then he suggested that, if Samuel would accompany him, he would worship the Lord. One is weak indeed when one must have some human assistance to exhibit heart devotion in true worship. Saul presented all the aspects of a spiritually defeated man. His confession was too late.

SAUL'S PENALTY WAS ALMOST UNBEARABLE

Being King of Israel was an honour of no mean proportions. The people, envious of the nations round about, restlessly clamored for a king. **“Make us a king, to judge us like all the nations!”** (I Samuel 8:5), they shouted before the aging Samuel.

This was their demand. Saul had the extreme privilege of being their first monarch, anointed and blessed of the Lord. Now comes the ignominious ordeal of facing impeachment. Nor could it be appealed or deferred. The announcement was both solemn and sad. It read briefly, **“The Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel.”** There it was, authoritative and final. It was a spectacular regime but it terminated in dishonour.

The Sorrowful Forfeiture of Divine Fellowship

“And the Lord rejected all the seed of Israel” (II Kings 17:20).

This was only after prolonged provocation, but it was decisive when it came. Frequent notices inhere in the Pentateuchal record of definite, divine warnings to the people. The offences varied but the penalty was materially the same.

Whether parental failure or Patriarchal carelessness, whether in the congregation or in the priesthood, the Lord viewed with seriousness every infraction of His Holy laws.

One was **“cut off from his people”** who did not observe the law of circumcision (Genesis 17:14), or for violating the law of the sabbath (Exodus 31:14), or for eating blood in observance of the peace-offering (Leviticus 7:27).

One was **“cut off from the congregation”** who was found eating leavened bread. Those who desecrated the hallowed and holy things of the Lord were **“cut off”** from the presence of the Lord (Leviticus 22:3).

Not one of the penalties, severe as they were, cut one off from the Lord Himself. **“Hath God cast away his people? God forbid!”** (Romans 11:1)

For all this, God did not repudiate His people. He did, however, revoke certain coveted privileges and He also removed from them some cherished but abused opportunities.

ISRAEL, WAS GUILTY OF COURTING SECRET SINS

“And the children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right against the Lord their God” (II Kings 17:9).

They seemingly forgot that He who sees in secret rewards openly. They ought to have known that the One who watches over Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. They overlooked the fact that His eyes run to and fro upon the earth beholding.

“Thou compasseth my path,” David declared, **“and art acquainted with all my ways”** (Psalm 139:3)

Yet, in the face of such important knowledge, the flesh will attempt to take advantage of the Lord in a clandestine manner. But Israel’s sinning was discovered and rebuked.

ISRAEL WAS GIVEN TO HEATHEN IDOLATRY

“And they set them up images” (II Kings 17:10).

This seems incredible, but unbelief will follow spurious courses. Any one in any day who becomes dissatisfied with the divinely stated way, will invariably make substitutions which will better appeal to a disobedient heart.

- They procured images;
- They placed them on high hills;
- They proceeded to burn incense;
- They patterned their course after the heathen;
- They provoked the Lord unto anger.

That is the terse report of the Holy Spirit. It was a downward course; it was a degrading procedure; it was grievous to the Lord.

- A people with enlightenment and divine direction,
- A people in covenant relationship with the Most High,
- A people duly warned against heathen practices,
- A people prohibited by sacred commandment from having idols,
- A People now in open defiance of all that is high and holy, giving themselves in reckless abandon to the false and profane.

The context portrays in drab colors how a people, once separated and distinct, now give themselves unashamedly to build images, to burn incense mockingly, and to blaspheme the Infinite.

ISRAEL REFUSED DIVINE INSTRUCTIONS

“They would not hear, but hardened their necks . . . did not believe in the Lord their God” (II Kings 17:14).

Here, plainly to be seen, is the unmitigated folly to which rebellion against God will carry people.

- They became indifferent, insubordinate and incorrigible, for they refused to hear the Lord's instructions;
- They declined submission to His will;
- They pushed on ruthlessly in the devious paths of unbelief.

As they entrenched themselves more and more in the ruts of waywardness and accelerated their speed into the darkening shadows of disobedience, the Lord looked down from His highest heaven and lamented, **“My people are bent to backsliding from me”** (Hosea 11:7).

ISRAEL REJECTED THE STATUTES OF GOD

Esau may barter away his birthright for a mess of pottage, a man may exchange his home and his happiness for the sparkling spirits at the counter of intoxicating destruction, a king may abdicate the throne of a vast empire for the love of woman, but what dreadful, incomparable miscarriage of judgment is characterized in an outright rejection of the precious Word of Life. This was the most unpardonable of all the ghastly indignities which Israel heaped upon the Most High (II Kings 17:15).

It is difficult, at first thought, to determine whether this insidious move was the ultimate of their mounting insults against the Infinite God, or whether it was the diabolic progenitor of their ungodly misdeeds. In their pitiful and unsavory attitude they were, nevertheless, turning from the Water of Life, the Bread of Heaven, the True Light for a dark place, the only One who could successfully chart their journey of life to a blissful consummation. Unbelief takes some disastrous plunges.

ISRAEL ENCOURAGED SPIRITUAL DELINQUENCY

“They caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord” (II Kings 17:17).

A father may assert his willingness to give his right arm for the welfare of his children, but his love and devotion suffer from blatant misunderstanding if he does not use his parental influence to guide them to the threshold of Divine Truth. Failure here may emanate from a passive indifference to the transcendent value of such guidance, but parental integrity collapses utterly when home authority is exercised in matters of questionable, if not degrading avenues of desire for their progeny. Woe to the parent whose encouragement blinds a child toward the blessings of God. Yet this was the sad indictment against Israel.

At long last, after the display of patience most sublime, the Lord God REJECTED all the seed of Israel. The inference is apparent. Let us beware of our attitudes and actions. Even divine toleration ceases, and with its cessation comes irreparable loss to men.

The Disillusionment of a Presumed Assurance

“Yea, thou shalt go forth from him, and thine hands upon thine head; for the Lord hath rejected thy confidences, and thou shalt not prosper in them” (Jeremiah 2:37).

This is the march of melancholy man—an interminable parade of despondent people who have tramped with uneven cadence down the avenues of time.

Their lamentations—the groanings of disillusioned hearts—are mingled murmurings of mistreatment, ill-fate and self-pity. They are those whom even God cannot trust. They are those who have taken refuge in a false security and have settled down to a contented complacency which destroys vision, ignores responsibility and rejects challenge. There is a trite colloquialism which aptly describes the state which leads to such an empty end. It is this: “As snug as a bug in rug.”

Translate this thought into the solemn and sacred realm of spiritual behavior, and it becomes a matter of serious moment. There are those, and the company is large, who are confident that “all is well”, simply because their own estate is gratifying to themselves. They settle down to bask in the sunshine of their own good fortunes and become entirely indifferent to the needs of others. “We are safe and sound;” is what they say in effect, “what happens to others is their sad misfortune.”

The Lord evidenced His strong displeasure in this regard and caused their “confidences” to disappear as Jonah’s withering gourd. Their disillusionment, with its attendant sorrow and emptiness, was graphically dramatized as the people went out from the presence of the Lord with their hands upon their heads. They may appear disgruntled and wax critical of everybody and everything, yet no one is to blame for a state of spiritual destitution but the one who experiences it. **“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it”** (Mark 5:23).

The Price of Exploiting Divine Patience

“Cut off thine hair, O Jerusalem, and cast it away, and take up a lamentation on high places; for the Lord hath rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath” (Jeremiah 17:29).

These stirring, indicting statements were never made without reason; nor were they made hastily. The patience of the Lord is one of the greatest miracles of our age—of any age. The imprecatory pleas of Old Testament days, and the demand of the disciples for fire to fall from heaven in the New, readily prove how man’s patience is exhausted and how quickly he would invoke judgment.

God’s people in Jeremiah’s day were impenitent, unconcerned, bigoted, faithless and hard. **“We are wise;”** they insisted, **“the pen of the scribes is in vain”** (Jeremiah 8:8)

Three conditions led up to the drastic move which the Lord was forced to make.

First, **“They hearkened not, nor inclined their ear”** (Jeremiah 7:24a).

Second, **“They obeyed not the voice of the Lord”** (Jeremiah 7:28).

Third, **“They received not correction”** (Jeremiah 7:28)

Their unspiritual alternate course led them into confusion, for **“they walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward”** (Jeremiah 7:24b).

The Book of Jeremiah is characterized by:

- (1) the attitude of the people,
- (2) the anguish of the prophet,
- (3) the answer of Providence.

When the answer came, it was firm and decisive. They were rejected.

The Incalculable Loss of a Destroyed Prosperity

“As they were increased, so they sinned against me: therefore will I change their glory into shame. I will also reject thee” (Hosea 4:7, 6).

The willful ignorance of Israel was nothing short of an historical catastrophe. The Word states that they were destroyed for lack of knowledge.

- Those who close out the Light, enshroud themselves in darkness.
- Those who turn from His eternal will, turn themselves to inevitable woe.

- They sought but did not submit;
- They got but did not give;
- They received but did not reverence;
- They were bold in their demand but cold in their devotion.

The more they were blessed, the less they believed. That such willfulness will not long be tolerated, and that such waywardness will not satisfy, became the grim realization of these ancient people.

- Their glory was turned into shame.
- Their privileges were revoked;
- Their opportunities were removed;
- Their prosperity was lost.
- They were rejected.

Samson of old with his Herculean strength is an apt illustration. He pursued such a devious course that his spiritual power diminished to drab insignificance. The analogy is strikingly evident. His carrying away the gates of Gaza was an unproductive demonstration— comparable to some of the fleshly efforts which the professing church today flashes through advertising channels, only to exaggerate its lessening influence. Samson’s losses began to multiply. Then the end came ignominiously and with rapidity.

At the knees of Delilah, in a drowsy stupor, his locks were shorn and the glory of his strength eclipsed. A troop of marauding Philistines, poised for such an advantageous moment, rushed with proud delight to the occasion, and in a matter of minutes gouged out the eyes of the dwarfed giant. Samson's vision was gone. Then, with despatch and alacrity, the fetters were affixed, and the divinely-chosen nobleman began grinding in the prison of his foes.

It was on the feast day of a heathen god that the erstwhile judge of Israel was marched in his blindness and bonds into the midst of ancient, ritualistic mockery. The command delivered to the prison guards revealed the intention of these enemies of God: "**Call Samson,**" they said, "**that he may make us sport**" (Judges 16:25).

Three thousand hissing and hilarious people gazed with amused and depraved minds upon the spectacle. There was no mysterious handwriting on the wall, but the hour of bitter calamity was near. Samson found his way to the two central pillars. His arms, in what proved to be an embrace of death, encircled the pillars and wrested them from their places.

The temple of Dagan collapsed, and the scene of gaiety was transformed into a ghastly sight of horror and death for all amid the wreck and ruin in the arena of ungodliness. Samson's loss of His Nazarite separation, his strength, his vision and the presence of the Spirit of God was followed by the loss of his life. Thus, another servant of God came to a sad end through disobedience and departure.

Surely it is high time to awaken from the slumber which has slowly settled, as the gentle falling snow, upon a declining Christian testimony, now to harden into icy unconcern and stolid indifference.

Let us hear the voice of our Lord, saying, "**Repent and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove THY lampstand out of his place**" (Revelation 2:5).

~ end of chapter 12 ~

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