

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

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CHAPTER SEVEN

“WHEN the Lord thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, . . . seven nations greater and mightier than thou, and when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee, thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them.”

In reading the record of God’s dealings with the nations, in connection with His people Israel, we are reminded of the opening words of Psalm 101 – **“I will sing of mercy and of judgment.”**

We see the display of mercy to His people, in pursuance of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and we see also the execution of judgment upon the nations, in consequence of their evil ways. In the former, we see divine sovereignty; in the latter, divine justice; in both, divine glory shines out. All the ways of God, whether in mercy or in judgment, speak His praise, and shall call forth the homage of His people forever.

“Great and marvelous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints. Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? for Thou art holy; for all nations shall come and worship before Thee; for Thy judgments are made manifest” (Revelation 15:3, 4).

This is the true spirit in which to contemplate the ways of God in government.

Some persons, allowing themselves to be influenced by a morbid feeling and false sentimentality, rather than by an enlightened judgment, find difficulty in the directions given to Israel in reference to the Canaanites, in the opening of our chapter. It seems to them inconsistent with a benevolent Being to command His people to smite their fellow-creatures, and to show them no mercy. They cannot understand how a merciful God could commission His people to slay women and children with the edge of the sword.

It is very plain that such persons could not adopt the language of Revelation 15:3, 4. They are not prepared to say, **“Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints.”** They cannot justify God in all His ways; nay, they are actually sitting in judgment upon Him.

They presume to measure the actings of divine government by the standard of their own shallow thoughts – to scan the infinite by the finite; in short, they measure God by themselves. This is a fatal mistake.

We are not competent to form a judgment upon the ways of God, and hence it is the very height of presumption for poor, ignorant, short-sighted mortals to attempt to do so.

We read in the seventh chapter of Luke that **“Wisdom is justified of all her children.”** Let us remember this, and hush all our sinful reasonings. **“Let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, ‘that Thou mightest be justified in Thy sayings, and mightest overcome when Thou art judged.’”**

Is the reader at all troubled with difficulties on this subject? If so, we should much like to quote a very fine passage which may help him. **“O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good; for His mercy endureth forever . . . To Him that smote Egypt in their first-born, for His mercy endureth forever; and brought out Israel from among them; for His mercy endureth forever; with a strong hand, and with a stretched-out arm; for His mercy endureth forever. To Him which divided the Red Sea into parts; for His mercy endureth forever; and made Israel to pass through the midst of it; for His mercy endureth forever; but overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea; for His mercy endureth forever. To Him which smote great kings, for His mercy endureth forever; and slew famous kings)’ for His mercy endureth forever; Sihon, king of the Amorites; for His mercy endureth forever; and Og, the king of Bashan; for His mercy endureth forever; and gave their land for a heritage; for His mercy endureth forever; even a heritage unto Israel His servant; for His mercy endureth forever”** (Psalm 136).

Here we see that the smiting of Egypt’s first-born and the deliverance of Israel, the passage through the Red Sea and the utter destruction of Pharaoh’s host, the slaughter of the Canaanites and giving their lands to Israel – all alike illustrated the everlasting mercy of the Lord. *

*** Very many Christians find considerable difficulty in interpreting and applying the language of a large number of the Psalms which call for judgment upon the wicked. Such language would, of course, be quite unsuitable for Christians now, inasmuch as we are taught to love our enemies, to do good to them that hate us, and to pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us.**

But we must remember that what would be wholly out of place for the Church of God, a heavenly people, under grace, was, and will yet be, perfectly consistent for Israel, an earthly people, under government. No intelligent Christian could think for a moment of calling down vengeance upon his enemies or upon the wicked. It would be grossly inconsistent. We are called to be the living exponents of the grace of God to the world – to walk in the footsteps of the meek and lowly Jesus – to suffer for righteousness – not to resist evil. God is now dealing in long-suffering mercy with the world. “He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” This is to be our model. We are, in this, to be “perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect.” For a Christian to deal with the world on the principle of righteous judgment, would be to misrepresent his heavenly Father and falsify his profession. But by and by, when the Church shall have left the scene, God will deal with the world in righteousness; He will judge the nations for their treatment of His people Israel.

We do not attempt to quote passages, but merely call the reader's attention to the principle, in order to enable him to understand the just application of the prophetic Psalms.

Thus it was, thus it is, and thus it shall be. All must redound to the glory of God. Let us remember this, and fling to the winds all our silly reasonings and ignorant arguments.

It is our privilege to justify God in all His ways, to bow our heads in holy worship, in view of His unsearchable judgments, and rest in the calm assurance that all God's ways are right. We do not understand them all; this would be impossible. The finite cannot grasp the infinite. This is where so many go wrong. They reason upon the actings of God's government, not considering that those actings lie as far beyond the range of human reason as the Creator is beyond the creature.

What human mind can unravel the profound mysteries of divine providence? Can we account for the fact of a city full of human beings – men, women, and children, in one hour, plunged beneath a tide of burning lava? Utterly impossible; and yet this is but one fact of thousands that stand recorded on the page of human history, all lying far beyond the grasp of the most gigantic intellect. Go through the lanes, alleys, wynds, closes, and court-yards of our cities and towns; see the thousands of human beings that throng these places, living in squalid misery, poverty, wretchedness, and moral degradation. Can we account for all this? can we tell why God permits it? Are we called upon to do so?

Is it not perfectly plain to the reader that it is no part of our business to discuss such questions? and if we, in our ignorance and stupid folly, set about reasoning and speculating upon the inscrutable mysteries of the divine government, what can we expect but utter bewilderment, if not positive infidelity?

The foregoing line of thought will enable the reader to understand the opening lines of our chapter.

The Canaanites were to receive no mercy at the hands of Israel. Their iniquities had reached the culminating point, and nothing remained but the stern execution of divine judgment.

“Thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them; neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following Me, that they may serve other gods; so will the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly. But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire.”

Such were the instructions given by the Lord to His people. They were clear and explicit. No mercy for the Canaanites, no covenant with them, no union, no fellowship of any kind, unsparing judgment, intense separation.

We know, alas! How soon and how completely Israel failed to carry out these instructions.

Hardly had they planted their foot upon the land of Canaan ere they made a covenant with the Gibeonites. Even Joshua himself fell into the snare. The tattered garments and mouldy bread of those wily people beguiled the princes of the congregation, and caused them to act in direct opposition to the plain commandment of God. Had they been governed by the authority of the Word, they would have been preserved from the grave error of making a league with people who ought to have been utterly destroyed; but they judged by the sight of their eyes, and had to reap the consequences. *

*** It is at once instructive and admonitory to see that the garments, the mouldy bread, and the plausible words of the Gibeonites did what the walls of Jericho could not do. Satan's wiles are more to be dreaded than his power. "Put on the whole armor of God, that ye maybe able to stand against the wiles of the devil." The more deeply we ponder the various parts of the whole armor of God, the more clearly we shall see that they are ranged under these two heads,- obedience and dependence. The soul that is really governed by the authority of the Word, and wholly dependent upon the power of the Spirit, is fully equipped for the conflict. It was thus the Man Christ Jesus vanquished the enemy. The devil could do nothing with a man who was perfectly obedient and perfectly dependent. May we study, in this, as in all beside, our great Exemplar.**

Implicit obedience is the grand moral safeguard against the wiles of the enemy. No doubt the story of the Gibeonites was very plausible, and their whole appearance gave a show of truth to their statements; but none of these things should have had the slightest moral weight with Joshua and the princes; nor would they, if they had but remembered the word of the Lord. But they failed in this.

They reasoned on what they saw, instead of obeying what they had heard. Reason is no guide for the people of God; we must be, absolutely and completely, guided and governed by the Word of God.

This is a privilege of the very highest order, and it lies within the reach of the simplest and most unlettered child of God.

The Father's word, the Father's voice, the Father's eye, can guide the youngest, feeblest child in His family. All we need is the lowly and obedient heart.

It does not demand great intellectual power or cleverness; if it did, what would become of the vast majority of Christians? If it were only the educated, the deep-thinking, and the far-seeing that were capable of meeting the wiles of the adversary, then verily most of us might give up in despair.

But, thanks be to God, it is not so; indeed, on the contrary, we find, in looking through the history of the people of God in all ages, that human wisdom, human learning, human cleverness, if not kept in their right place, have proved a positive snare, and rendered their possessors only the more efficient tools in the enemy's hand.

By whom have most, if not all, of the heresies been introduced which have disturbed the Church of God from age to age? Not by the simple and the unlearned, but by the educated and the intellectual. And in the passage to which we have just referred, in the book of Joshua, who was it that made a covenant with the Gibeonites? The common people? Nay; but the princes of the congregation. No doubt all were involved in the mischief, but it was the princes that led the way. The heads and leaders of the assembly fell into the snare of the devil through neglect of the plain Word of God.

“Thou shalt make no covenant with them.”

Could aught be plainer than this? Could tattered garments, old shoes, and mouldy bread alter the meaning of the divine command, or do away with the urgent necessity for strict obedience on the part of the congregation? Assuredly not. Nothing can ever afford a warrant for lowering, the breadth of a hair, the standard of obedience to the Word of God.

If there are difficulties in the way, if perplexing circumstances come before us, if things crop up for which we are not prepared, and as to which we are unable to form a judgment, what are we to do? Reason? Jump to conclusions? Act on our own or on any human judgment? Most certainly not.

What then? Wait on God; wait patiently, humbly, believingly, and He will assuredly counsel and guide. **“The meek will He guide in judgment; and the meek will He teach His way.”**

Had Joshua and the princes acted thus, they never would have made a league with the Gibeonites; and if the reader acts thus, he will be delivered from every evil work and preserved unto the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

In verse six of our chapter, Moses sets before the people the moral ground of the line of action which they were to adopt in reference to the Canaanites – the rigid separation and the unsparing judgment. **“For thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God; the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.”**

The principle here laid down is of the very weightiest character. Why were the people to maintain the most marked separation from the Canaanites? Why were they to refuse, with firm decision, to make any covenant, or form any matrimonial alliance with them? Why were they to demolish their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves?

Simply because they were a holy people. And who had constituted them a holy people? the Lord. He had chosen them and set His love upon them; He had redeemed them, and separated them to Himself; and hence it was His province and prerogative to prescribe what they were to be, and how they were to act. **“Be ye holy, for I am holy.”**

It was not by any means on the principle of **“Stand by thyself, come not near to me, for I am holier than thou.”**

This is manifest from what follows. **“The Lord did not set His love upon you, and choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people; but because the Lord loved you, and because He would keep the oath which He had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt”** (Ver. 7,8).

Seasonable words these for Israel! – most healthful and needful! They were to remember that they owed all their dignity, all their privileges, all their blessings, not to aught in themselves – their own goodness or their own greatness, but simply to the fact of the Lord’s having identified Himself with them, in His infinite goodness and sovereign grace, and in virtue of His covenant with their fathers – **“a covenant ordered in all things and sure.”** This, while it furnished a divine antidote against self-complacency and self-confidence, formed the solid basis of their happiness and their moral security. All rested upon the eternal stability of the grace of God, and therefore human boasting was excluded. **“My soul shall make her boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear thereof and be glad.”** It is the settled purpose of God that **“no flesh shall glory in His presence.”**

All human pretension must be set aside. He will hide pride from man. Israel had to be taught to remember their origin and their true condition – **“bondmen in Egypt”** – **“fewest of all people.”** No room for pride or boasting. They were in no wise better than the nations around them; and therefore, if called to account for their high elevation and moral greatness, they had simply to trace it all up to the free love of God and His faithfulness to His oath. **“Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy and for Thy truth’s sake”** (Psalm 115:1).

“Know therefore that the Lord thy God, He is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments, to a thousand generations; and repayeth them that hate Him to their face, to destroy them: He will not be slack to him that hateth Him, He will repay him to his face.” (Ver. 9, 10).

We have two weighty facts set before us here, one, full of rich consolation and comfort to every true lover of God; the other, fraught with deep solemnity to every hater of God. All who really love God and keep His commandments may count on His infallible faithfulness and tender mercy at all times and under all circumstances. **“All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.”** If, through infinite grace, we have the love of God in our hearts, and His fear before our eyes, we may, move on with good courage and joyful confidence, assured that all shall be well – must be well. **“Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.”**

This is a grand, eternal truth – a truth for Israel, a truth for the Church. Dispensations make no difference as to this. Whether we study the seventh of Deuteronomy or the third chapter of I John, we learn the same great practical truth that God delights in those who fear Him and love Him and keep His commandments.

Is there aught of the legal element in this? Not a tinge. Love and legality have nothing in common; they are as far removed as the poles. **“This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous.”** The spirit and genius, the ground and character of our obedience all go to prove it the very reverse of legality.

It is our deep and settled conviction that those persons who are ever ready to cry out, “Legal! Legal!” whenever obedience is pressed upon them, are sadly and grossly mistaken. If indeed it were taught that we must earn by our obedience the high position and relationship of children of God, then verily the solemn charge of legality might justly be urged; but to bestow such an epithet on Christian obedience, is, we repeat, a serious moral mistake.

Obedience could never precede sonship, but sonship should ever be followed by obedience. And while we are on this subject, we must call the attention of the reader to a passage or two of New Testament scripture as to which there is a want of clearness in many minds.

In the fifth chapter of Matthew, we read, **“Ye have heard that it hath been said, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy;’ but I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the sons [υιοι] of your Father which is in heaven; for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust . . . Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect”** (Ver. 43-48).

This passage might, in the judgment of some, seem to teach that the relationship of children can be attained by a certain line of action; but it is not so. It is a question of moral conformity or suitability to the character and ways of our Father. We sometimes hear, in every-day life, the saying, “You would not be your father’s son if you were to act in such a way.” It is as though our Lord had said, If you want to be the sons of your heavenly Father, you must act in grace to all; for that is what He is doing.

Again, in II Corinthians 6, we read, **“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”** Here, it is not a question of the secret relationship of children, formed by a divine operation, but the public acknowledgment of the position of sons [υιους] as the result of our separation from evil. *

*** Speaking in a general way, the word *τεκνον*, child, is a term of endearment; *υιος*, son, of moral dignity. *παις* is either a child or a servant; *νηπιος*, a babe.**

It will be well for the reader to seize this important distinction; it is of great practical value. We do not become children by separation from the world, **“for ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”** **“As many as received Him, to them gave He power [or authority, *εξουσιαν*] to become children [*τεκνα*] of God, to them that believe on His name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God”** (Galatians 3:26; John 1:12, 13). **“Of His own will begat He us by the word of truth”** (James 1:18).

We become children by new birth, which, thanks be to God, is a divine operation from first to last. What had we to do with our natural birth? Nothing. And what have we to do with our spiritual birth? Clearly nothing.

Biblical Separation

But then we must remember that God can only identify Himself with, and publicly acknowledge those who, through grace, seek to walk in a way worthy of Him – a way befitting the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.

If our ways are unlike Him, if we are mixed up with all sorts of wrong things, if we are unequally yoked together with unbelievers, how can we expect God to own us as His sons?

We read, in Hebrews 11, of those who “**confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth,**” and who “**declared plainly that they sought a country;**” and of them we are told that “**God was not ashamed to be called their God.**” He could publicly identify Himself with them, and acknowledge them; He could own them as His.

Reader, let us seriously apply our hearts to the consideration of this great practical question. Let us look, seriously and honestly, to our ways. Let us, in truthfulness and uprightness of heart, inquire whether we are “**unequally yoked together with unbelievers,**” on any ground, or for any object whatsoever. If so, let us give earnest heed to the words, “**Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing.**”

It may be that the carrying out of this holy commandment will expose us to the charge of bigotry, narrowness, and intolerance; it may wear the aspect of pharisaic pride and self-complacency. We may be told, we are not to judge, or set ourselves up to be holier or better than other people.

To all this line of argument we have the one simple, conclusive answer, namely, God’s plain command.

He tells us to be separate, to come out, to touch not the unclean; and all this in order to His receiving us, and acknowledging us as His sons and daughters. This ought to be quite sufficient for us. Let people think or say what they will of us, - let them call us what they please; God will settle the matter with them, sooner or later; our duty is to separate ourselves from unbelievers, if we would be received and owned of God. If believers are mixed up with unbelievers, how are they to be known or distinguished as the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty?

But we may perhaps be asked, How are we to know who are unbelievers? All profess to be Christians – all take the ground of belonging to Christ: we are not surrounded by ignorant heathen, or unbelieving Jews; how then are we to judge?

It was plain enough in the early days of Christianity, when the apostle wrote his Epistle to the assembly at Corinth – then the line of demarcation was as clear as a sunbeam; there were the three distinct classes “**the Jew, the Gentile, and the Church of God;**” but now all is changed.

We live in a Christian land, under a Christian government, we are surrounded on all hands by Christians, and therefore II Corinthians 6 cannot apply to us; it was all very well when the Church was in its infancy, having just emerged from Judaism on the one hand and heathenism on the other, but to think of applying such a principle at this advanced stage of the Church's history, is wholly out of the question.

To all who take this ground, we would put a very plain question, – is it true that the Church has reached a stage of her history in which the New Testament is no longer her guide and authority? Have we got beyond the range of Holy Scripture? If so, what are we to do? whither are we to turn for guidance? If we admit for a moment that II Corinthians 6 does not apply to Christians now, what warrant have we for appropriating to ourselves any portion of the New Testament?

The fact is, Scripture is designed for the Church of God as a whole, and for each member of that Church in particular; and hence, as long as the Church is on earth, so long will the Scripture apply. To question this is to offer a fiat contradiction to the words of the inspired apostle when he tells us that the Holy Scriptures are able to make us “**wise unto salvation**” – that is, “**wise**” right onward to the day of glory, for such is the blessed force of the word “**salvation**” in II Timothy 3:15.

We want no new light – no fresh revelation; we have “**all truth**” within the covers of our precious Bible. Thank God for it! We do not want science or philosophy to make us wise. All true science and all sound philosophy will leave untouched the testimony of Holy Scripture; they cannot add to it, but they will not contradict it.

When infidels talk to us about “progress,” “development,” “the light of science,” we fall back, in holy confidence and tranquility, upon those precious words, “**all truth**,” “**wise unto salvation**.” It is blessedly impossible to get beyond these. What can be added to “**all truth**”? What more do we or can we want than to be made wise right onward to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ?

And further, let us remember that there is no change whatever in the relative position of the Church and the world.

It is as true to-day as it was eighteen hundred and fifty years ago, when our Lord uttered the words, that His people are not of the world, even as He Himself is not of the world. (John 17). The world is the world still. It may, in some places, have changed its dress, but not its true character, spirit, and principles. Hence, therefore, it is as wrong to-day for Christians to be “**unequally yoked together with unbelievers**” as it was when Paul penned his Epistle to the Church at Corinth. We cannot get over this; we cannot set aside our responsibility in this matter.

It will not, by any means, meet the case to say, “**We must not judge**.” We are bound to judge. If we refuse to judge, we refuse to obey, and what is this but positive rebellion? God says, “**Come out from among them and be ye separate**,” if we reply, We cannot judge, where are we? The fact is, we are absolutely commanded to judge. “**Do not ye judge them that are within? but them that are without God judgeth**” (I Corinthians 5:12, 13).

But we shall not pursue this line of argument any further. We trust the reader is one who fully owns the direct application to himself of the passage which we have just quoted, It is as plain as it is pointed; it calls upon all God's people to come out and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing, This is what God requires of His people, in order to His owning them as His; and surely it ought to be the deep and earnest desire of our hearts to respond to His gracious will in this matter, utterly regardless of the world's thoughts respecting us.

Some of us are very much afraid of being thought narrow and bigoted; but, oh, how little it imports to a truly devoted heart what men think of us! Human thoughts perish in an hour. When we are manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ, when we stand in the full blaze of the glory, what will it matter to us whether men considered us narrow or broad, bigoted or liberal? and what should it matter to us now? Not the weight of a feather.

Our one grand object should be, so to act – so to carry ourselves as to be “**acceptable**” to Him who has made us “**accepted**.”

May it be so with the writer and the reader, and with every member of the body of Christ?

Warning to ‘haters’ of God

Let us now turn, for a moment, to the weighty and very solemn truth presented to us in verse 10 of our chapter. “**He will not be slack to him that hateth Him, He will repay him to his face.**”

If the lovers of God are comforted in verse 9; and most blessedly encouraged to keep His commandments, the haters of God are called to hearken to a warning note in verse 10.

There is a time coming when God will deal personally, face to face, with His enemies. How awful the thought that anyone should be a hater of God – a hater of that One who is said to be and who is “**Light**” and “**Love**;” the very fountain of goodness, the Author and Giver of every good and perfect gift, the Father of lights; the One whose liberal hand supplies the need of every living thing, who hears the cry of the young ravens, and quenches the thirst of the wild ass; the infinitely good, the only wise, the perfectly Holy God, the Lord of all power and might, the creator of the ends of the earth, and the One who has power to destroy both soul and body in hell!

Only think, reader, of anyone being a hater of such a One as God; and we know that all who are not lovers must be haters.

People may not see this; very few would be disposed to own themselves to be absolute haters of God, but there is no neutral ground in this great question; we must either be for or against; and in point of fact, people are not slow in showing their colors.

It often happens that the heart's deep-seated enmity to God comes out in hatred to His people, to His Word, His worship, His service. How frequently do we hear such expressions as, “I hate religious people,” “I hate all cant,” “I hate preachers”!

The truth is, it is God Himself that is hated. **“The carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be;”** and this enmity Comes out in reference to everyone and everything connected with God. There lies deep down in every unconverted heart the most positive enmity to God. Every man in his natural state hates God.

Now, God declares, in Deuteronomy 7:10, that **“He will not be slack to him that hateth Him; He will repay him to his face.”**

This is a most solemn truth, and one which ought to be more pressed upon the attention of all whom it may concern. Men do not like to hear it; many affect and profess not to believe it. They would fain persuade themselves and persuade others also that God is too good, too kind, too merciful, too benevolent, to deal in stern judgment with His creatures. They forget that God’s ways in government are as perfect as His ways in grace. They imagine that the government of God will pass over or deal lightly with evil and evil-doers.

This is a most miserable and fatal mistake, and men will find it to be so to their heavy and eternal cost.

True it is, blessed be God, He can, in His rich sovereign grace and mercy, forgive us our sins, blot out our transgressions, cancel our guilt, justify us perfectly, and fill our hearts with the spirit of adoption; but this is another thing altogether. This is grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. It is God, in His wondrous love, providing righteousness for the poor, guilty, hell-deserving sinner who knows and feels and owns that he has no righteousness of his own, and never could have it.

God, in the marvelous love of His heart, has provided a means whereby He can be just and the justifier of every poor brokenhearted, bankrupt sinner that simply believes in Jesus.

But how, we may ask, was all this done? Was it by passing over sin, as though it were nothing? was it by relaxing the claims of the divine government, lowering the standard of divine holiness, or touching, in the most remote way, the dignity, stringency, and majesty of the law? No; thanks and praise to redeeming love, it was the very reverse.

Never was there or could there be a more terrible expression of God’s eternal hatred of sin, or of His unflinching purpose to condemn it utterly and punish it eternally; never was there or could there be a more glorious vindication of the divine government, a more perfect maintenance of the standard of divine holiness, truth, and righteousness; never was the law more gloriously vindicated or more thoroughly established than by that most glorious scheme of redemption, planned, executed, and revealed by the .Eternal Three in One,- planned by the Father, executed by the Son, and revealed by the Holy Ghost.

If we would have a just sense of the awful reality of the government of God, His wrath against sin, and the true character of His holiness, we must gaze at the Cross; we must hearken to that bitter cry that issued from the heart of the Son of God and broke through the dark shadows of Calvary, **“My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”**

Never had such a question been asked before, never has such a question been asked since, and never shall – never can such a question be asked again. Whether we consider the One who asked it, the One of whom it was asked, or the answer, we must see that the question stands absolutely alone in the annals of eternity.

The cross is the measure of God's hatred of sin, as it is the measure of His love to the sinner. It is the imperishable foundation of the throne of grace, the divinely righteous ground on which God can pardon our sins and constitute us perfectly righteous in a risen and glorified Christ.

But then if men despise all this, and persist in their hatred of God, and yet talk of His being too good and too kind to punish evil-doers, how will it be with them?

“He that believeth [obeyeth] not [>>> – 23] the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth upon him” (John 3:36). *

*** John 3:36 is a passage of immense weight and importance. It not only sets forth the great truth that all who believe in the Son of God are the privileged possessors of eternal life, but it also cuts up by the roots two leading heresies of the day, namely, Universalism and Annihilationism. The Universalist professes to believe that, ultimately, all shall be restored and blessed. Not so, says our passage; for those who “believe [obey] not the Son shall not see life.”**

The annihilationist professes to believe that all who are out of Christ shall perish like the beasts. Not so, for “the wrath of God abideth” upon the disobedient. Abiding wrath and annihilation are wholly incompatible. It is utterly impossible to reconcile them.

It is interesting and instructive to notice the difference between the words [>>>] – “he that believeth” – and [>>>] he that obeyeth not.” They give us the two sides of the subject of faith.

Can it be possible – can we believe for a moment that a just God should exercise judgment upon His only begotten Son, His well-beloved, His eternal delight, because He was bearing our sins in His own body on the tree, and yet allow impenitent sinners to escape? Had Jesus, the spotless, holy, perfect Man – the only perfect Man that ever trod this earth – had He to suffer for sins, the just for the unjust, and shall evildoers, unbelievers, and haters of God be saved and blessed and taken to Heaven? and all this, forsooth, because God is too kind and too good to punish sinners in hell forever!

Did it cost God the giving up, the forsaking, and the bruising of His beloved Son in order to save His people from their sins, and shall ungodly sinners, despisers, and rebels be saved in their sins?

Did the Lord Jesus Christ die for nothing? did the Lord put Him to grief and hide His face from Him when there was no necessity? Why the awful horrors of Calvary? why the three hours' darkness? why that bitter cry, **“My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”** – why all this if sinners can get to Heaven without it? Why all this inconceivable sorrow and suffering for our blessed Lord if God is too kind and too gracious and too tender to send sinners to hell?

What egregious folly! What will not men believe, provided it be not the truth of God?

The poor dark human mind will affect to believe the most monstrous absurdity in order to get a plea for rejecting the plain teaching of Holy Scripture. The very thing which men would never think of attributing to a good human government they do not hesitate to attribute to the government of the only wise, the only true, the only just God.

What should we think of a government that could not or would not punish evil-doers? Would we like to live under it? What should we think of the government of England if, because her majesty is so kind, so gracious, so tender-hearted, she could not allow criminals to be punished as the law directs? Who would care to live in England?

Reader, do you not see how that one verse which is now before us demolishes completely all the theories and arguments which men, in their folly and ignorance, have advanced on the subject of the divine government? **“The Lord thy God, He is God, the faithful God, which . . . repayeth them that hate Him to their face, to destroy them; He will not be slack to him that hateth Him, He will repay him to his face.”**

Oh that men would hearken to the Word of God!

- That they would be warned by its clear, emphatic, and solemn statements as to coming wrath, judgment, and eternal punishment!
- That, instead of seeking to persuade themselves and others that there is no hell, no deathless worm and unquenchable fire, no eternal torment, they would listen to the warning voice, and, ere it be too late, flee for refuge to the hope set before them in the Gospel!

Truly this would be their wisdom. God declares that He will repay those that hate Him. How awful the thought of this repayment! Who can meet it?

The government of God is perfect, and because it is so, it is utterly impossible that it can allow evil to pass unjudged, nothing can be plainer than this.

All Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, sets it forth in terms so clear and forcible as to render it the very height of folly for men to argue against it. How much better and wiser and safer to flee from the wrath to come than to deny that it is coming, and that when it does come, it will be eternal in its duration.

It is utterly vain for anyone to attempt to reason in opposition to the truth of God. Every Word of God shall stand forever.

We see the actings of His government in reference to His people Israel, and in reference to Christians now. Did He pass over evil in His people of old? Nay; on the contrary, He visited them continually with His chastening rod, and this, too, just because they were His people, as He said to them by His prophet Amos:

“Hear this word which the Lord hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, ‘You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities’ “ (Amos 3:1, 2).

We have the same weighty principle set forth in the first Epistle of Peter, in its application to Christians now – **“For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God; and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”** (Chap. 4:17, 18).

God chastens His own just because they are His own, and that they may not be condemned with the world. (I Corinthians 11).

The children of this world are allowed to go on their way; but their day is coming – a dark and heavy day – a day of judgment and unmitigated wrath. Men may question and argue and reason, but Scripture is distinct and emphatic. **“God hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom He hath ordained.”**

The great day of reckoning is at hand, when God will repay every man to his face.

It is truly edifying to mark the way in which Moses, that beloved and honored servant of God, led assuredly by the Spirit of God, pressed the grand and solemn realities of the divine government upon the conscience of the congregation.

Hear how he pleads and exhorts:

“Thou shalt therefore keep the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which I command thee this day, to do them. Wherefore it shall come to pass, if ye hearken to these judgments, and keep and do them, that the Lord thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which He sware unto thy fathers. And He will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee; He will also bless the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy land, thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep, in the land which He sware unto thy fathers to give thee. Thou shalt be blessed above all People; there shall not be male nor female barren among you or among your cattle. And the Lord will take away from thee all sickness, and will put none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which thou knowest, upon thee; but will lay them upon all them that hate thee. And thou shalt consume all the people which the Lord thy God shall deliver thee; thine eye shall have no pity upon them; neither shalt thou serve their gods; for that will be a snare unto thee” (Ver. 11-16).

What a powerful appeal! how affecting! Mark the two groups of words. Israel was to **“hearken,” “keep,”** and **“do.”** The Lord was to **“love,” “bless,”** and **“multiply.”** Alas! alas! Israel failed – sadly, shamefully failed, under law and under government; and hence, instead of the love and the blessing and the multiplying, there has been judgment, curse, barrenness, dispersion, desolation.

But, blessed be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, if Israel has failed under law and government, He has not failed in His rich and precious sovereign grace and mercy. He will keep the covenant and the mercy which He swore unto their fathers. Not one jot or tittle of His covenant-promise shall ever fail. He will make all good by and by. He will fulfill, to the very letter, all His, gracious promises. Though He cannot do this on the ground of Israel's obedience, He can and will do it through the blood of the everlasting covenant, the precious blood of Jesus, His eternal Son – all homage to His peerless name!

Yes, reader, the God of Israel cannot suffer one of His precious promises to fall to the ground. What would become of us if He could? What security, what rest, what peace could we have, if the Lord's covenant with Abraham were to fail in any single point? True it is that Israel has forfeited all claim. If it be a question of fleshly descent, Ishmael and Esau have a prior claim: if it be a question of legal obedience, the golden calf and the broken tables tell their melancholy tale: if it be a question of government on the ground of the Moab covenant, they have not a single plea to urge.

But God will be God, spite of Israel's lamentable unfaithfulness. **“The gifts and calling of God are without repentance,”** and hence **“all Israel shall be saved.”**

God will most assuredly make good His oath to Abraham, spite of all the wreck and ruin of Abraham's seed.

We must steadfastly hold to this, in the face of every opposing thought, feeling, or opinion. Israel shall be restored and blessed and multiplied in their own beloved and holy land. They shall take down their harps from the willows and, beneath the peaceful shade of their own vines and fig-trees, chant the high praises of their loving Saviour and God, throughout that bright millennial Sabbath which lies before them. Such is the unvarying testimony of Scripture, from beginning to end, which must be maintained in its integrity, and made good in every particular, to the glory of God, and on the ground of His everlasting covenant.

But we must return to our chapter, the closing verses of which demand our special attention.

The Grand Remedy for Unbelieving Fear

It is very touching and beautiful to mark the way in which Moses seeks to encourage the heart of the people in reference to the dreaded nations of Canaan. He enters into and anticipates their very inmost thoughts and feelings.

“If thou shalt say in thine heart, These nations are more than I; how can I dispossess them? Thou shalt not be afraid of them; but shalt well remember what the Lord thy God did unto Pharaoh, and unto all Egypt; the great temptations which thine eyes saw, and the signs, and the wonders, and the mighty hand, and the stretched out arm, whereby the Lord thy God brought thee out: so shall the Lord thy God do unto all the people of whom thou art afraid. Moreover, the Lord thy God will send the hornet among them, until they that are left, and hide themselves from thee, be destroyed.

“Thou shalt not be affrighted at them; for the Lord thy God is among you, a mighty God and terrible. And the Lord thy God will put out those nations before thee by little and little; thou mayest not consume them at once, lest the beasts of the field increase upon thee. But the Lord thy God shall deliver them unto thee, and shall destroy them with a mighty destruction, until they be destroyed. And He shall deliver their kings into thine hand, and thou shalt destroy their name from under heaven; there shall no man be able to stand before thee, until thou have destroyed them. The graven images of their gods shall ye burn with fire; thou shalt not desire the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it unto thee, lest thou be snared therein; for it is an abomination to the Lord thy God. Neither shalt thou bring an abomination into thine house, lest thou be a cursed thing like it; but thou shalt utterly detest it, and thou shalt utterly abhor it, for it is a cursed thing” (Ver. 17-26).

The grand remedy for all unbelieving fears is, simply to fix the eye upon the living God; thus the heart is raised above the difficulties, whatever they may be.

It is of no possible use to deny that there are difficulties and opposing influences of all sorts. This will not minister comfort and encouragement to the sinking heart. Some people affect a certain style of speaking of trials and difficulties which just goes to prove, not their practical knowledge of God, but their profound ignorance of the stern realities of life. They would fain persuade us that we ought not to feel the trials, sorrows, and difficulties of the way. They might as well tell us that we ought not to have a head on our shoulders or a heart in our bosom. Such persons know not how to comfort those that are cast down. They are mere visionary theorists, wholly unfit to deal with souls passing through conflict or grappling with the actual facts of our daily history.

How did Moses seek to encourage the hearts of his brethren?

“Be not affrighted,” he says; but why? Was it that there were no enemies, no difficulties, no dangers? No; but **“the Lord thy God is among you, a mighty God and terrible.”**

Here is the true comfort and encouragement.

The enemies were there, but God is the sure resource. Thus it was that Jehoshaphat, in his time of trial and pressure, sought to encourage himself and his brethren. **“O our God, wilt Thou not judge them? For we have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon Thee.”**

Here lies the precious secret. The eyes are upon God. His power is brought in, and this settles everything. **“If God be for us, who can be against us?”**

Moses meets, by his precious ministry, the rising fears in the heart of Israel – **“These nations are more than I.”** Yes, but they are not more than the **“mighty and terrible God.”**

What nations could stand before Him? He had a solemn controversy with those nations because of their terrible sins; their iniquity was full; the reckoning-time had come, and the God of Israel was going to drive them out before His people.

Hence, therefore, Israel had no need to fear the power of the enemy. The Lord would see to that. But there was something far more to be dreaded than the enemy's power, and that was, the ensnaring influence of their idolatry. **“The graven images of their gods shall ye burn with fire.”**

What! the heart might say, are we to destroy the gold and silver that adorn these images? Might not that be turned to some good account? Is it not a pity to destroy what is so very valuable in itself? It is all right to burn the images, but why not spare the gold and silver?

Ah, it is just thus the poor heart is prone to reason; thus oftentimes we deceive ourselves when called to judge and abandon what is evil. We persuade ourselves of the rightness of making some reserve; we imagine we can pick and choose and make some distinction. We are prepared to give up some of the evil, but not all. We are ready to burn the wood of the idol, but spare the gold and silver.

Fatal delusion! **“Thou shalt not desire the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it unto thee. lest thou be snared therein; for it is an abomination to the Lord thy God.”**

All must be given up, all destroyed. To retain an atom of the accursed thing is to fall into the snare of the devil, and link ourselves with that which, however highly esteemed among men, is an abomination in the sight of God.

And let us mark and ponder the closing verses of our chapter. To bring an abomination into the house is to become like it! How very solemn! Do we fully understand it? The man who brought an abomination into his house became a cursed thing like it!

Reader, may the Lord keep our hearts separated from all evil, and true and loyal to Himself.

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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