

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

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CHAPTER THIRTY

THIS chapter is one of very deep interest and importance. It is prophetic, and presents to us some of **“the secret things”** referred to at the close of the preceding chapter. It unfolds some of those most precious resources of grace treasured up in the heart of God, to be unfolded when Israel, having utterly failed to keep the law, should be scattered to the ends of the earth.

“And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee, and shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey His voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart and with all thy soul; that then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee.”

How touching, how perfectly beautiful, is all this! It is no question of law-keeping, but something far deeper, far more precious; it is the turning of the heart – the whole heart – the whole soul to the Lord, at a time when a literal obedience to the law is utterly impossible. It is a broken and contrite heart turning to God, and God, in deep and tender compassion, meeting that heart. This is true blessedness, at all times and in all places. It is something above and beyond all dispensational dealings and arrangements. It is God Himself, in all the fullness and ineffable blessedness of what He is, meeting a repentant soul; and we may truly say that when these two meet, all is divinely and eternally settled. It must be perfectly clear to the reader that what we have now before us is something as far removed from law-keeping and human righteousness as Heaven is above earth.

The first verse of our chapter proves in the clearest possible manner that the people are viewed as in a condition in which the carrying out of the ordinances of the law is a simple impossibility. But blessed be God, there is not a spot on the face of the earth, be it ever so remote, from which the heart cannot turn to God. The hands might not be able to present a victim for the altar, the feet might not be able to travel to the appointed place of worship, but the heart could travel to God. Yes; the poor crushed, broken, contrite heart could go directly to God, and God, in the depth of His compassion and tender mercy, could meet that heart, bind it up, and fill it to overflowing with the rich comfort and consolation of His love, and the full joy of His salvation.

But let us hearken yet further to those **“secret things”** which **“belong to God”** – things precious beyond all human thought.

“If any of thine be driven out unto the utmost parts of heaven” – as far as they could go – “from thence will the Lord thy God gather thee, and from thence will He fetch thee; and the Lord thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and He will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers.”

How precious is all this! But there is something far better still. Not only will He gather them, fetch them, and multiply them – not only will He act in power for them, but He will do a mighty work of grace in them of far more value than any outward prosperity however desirable. **“And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart”** – the very center of the whole moral being, the source of all those influences which go to form the character – **“and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart”** – the grand moral regulator of the entire life – **“and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live. And the Lord thy God will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and on them that hate thee, which persecuted thee”** – a solemn word for all those nations who have ever sought to oppress the Jews! – **“And thou shalt return, and obey the voice of the Lord, and do all His commandments, which I command thee this day.”**

Nothing can be more morally lovely than all this.

The people gathered, fetched, multiplied, blessed, circumcised in heart, thoroughly devoted to the Lord, and yielding a whole-hearted, loving obedience to all His precious commandments! What can exceed this in blessedness for a people on the earth?

“And the Lord thy God will make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy land, for good; for the Lord will again rejoice over thee for good, as He rejoiced over thy fathers: if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law, and if thou turn unto the Lord thy God, with all thine heart and with all thy soul. For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it? But the Word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it” (Ver. 10-14).

This is a singularly interesting passage. It furnishes a key to **“the secret things”** already referred to, and sets forth the great principles of divine righteousness, in vivid and beautiful contrast to legal righteousness in every possible aspect.

According to the truth here unfolded, it matters not in the least where a soul may be – here, there, or any where; **“the Word is nigh thee.”** It could not possibly be nigher. What could be nigher than **“in thy mouth, and in thy heart”**? We need not, as we say, move a muscle to get it. If it were above us or beyond us, reason would that we might complain of our utter inability to reach it; but no, there is no need of either hands or feet in this most blessed and all-important matter. The heart and the mouth are here called into exercise.

There is a very beautiful allusion to the above passage in the tenth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, to which the reader may refer with much interest and profit. Indeed, it is so full of evangelic sweetness, that we must quote it.

“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record, that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they, being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth” – not to everyone who says he believes, as in James 2:14 – **“For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, that the man which doeth those things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise: Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down;)”** – Striking parenthesis! Marvelous instance of the Spirit’s use of Old Testament Scripture! It bears the distinct stamp of His master-hand – **“or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead). But what saith it? The Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith, which we preach;”** – How perfectly beautiful the addition! Who but the Spirit could have supplied it? – **“that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture saith, ‘Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed.’ “**

Mark this beautiful word – **“whosoever.”**

It most assuredly takes in the Jew. It meets him wherever he may be, a poor exile at the very ends of the earth, under circumstances where obedience to the law as such was simply impossible, but where the rich and precious grace of God and His most glorious salvation could meet him in the depth of his need. There, though he could not keep the law, he could confess with his mouth the Lord JESUS, and believe in his heart that God had raised Him from the dead; and this is salvation. But then, if it be **“whosoever,”** it cannot possibly be confined to the Jew; nay, it cannot be confined at all; and hence the apostle goes on to say, **“There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek.”**

There was the greatest possible difference under the law. There could not be a broader or more distinct line of demarcation than that which the lawgiver had drawn between the Jew and the Greek; but that line is obliterated, for a double reason: first, because **“all have sinned and come short of the glory of God”** (chap. 3:23).; and secondly, because **“the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him; for whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”**

How blessedly simple! **“Calling”** – **“believing”** – **“confessing”**! Nothing can exceed the transcendent grace that shines in these words. No doubt it is assumed that the soul is really in earnest – that the heart is engaged. God deals in moral realities. It is not a nominal, notional head-belief; but divine faith wrought in the heart by the HOLY GHOST – a living faith, which connects the soul, in a divine way and by an everlasting link, to Christ. And then there is the confessing with the mouth the Lord JESUS. This is of cardinal importance.

A man may say, I believe in my heart, but I am not one for parading my religious belief. I am not a talker. I keep my religion to myself. It is entirely a matter between my soul and God; I do not believe in that perpetual intruding our religious impressions upon other people. Many who talk loudly and largely about their religion in public, make but a sorry figure in private, and I certainly do not want to be identified with such. I utterly abhor all cant. Deeds, not words, for me.

All this sounds very plausible, but it cannot stand for a moment in the light of Romans 10:9. There must be the confession with the mouth.

Many would like to be saved by Christ, but they shrink from the reproach of confessing His precious Name. They would like to get to Heaven when they die, but they do not want to be identified with a rejected Christ. Now God does not own such. He looks for the full, bold, clear confession of Christ, in the face of a hostile world.

Our Lord Christ, too, looks for this confession. He declares that whoso confesses Him before men, He will confess before the angels of God; but whoso denies Him before men, He will deny before the angels of God.

The thief on the Cross exhibited the two great branches of true saving faith. He believed with his heart, and confessed with his mouth. Yes, he gave a flat contradiction to the whole world on the most vital question that ever was or ever could be raised, and that question was Christ. He was a thoroughly pronounced disciple of Christ. Oh, that there were more such! There is a terrible amount of indefiniteness and cold half-heartedness in the professing church, grievous to the Holy Ghost, offensive to Christ, hateful to God. We long for bold decision, out-and-out, unmistakable testimony to the Lord Jesus. May God the Holy Spirit stir up all our hearts, and lead us forth, in more thorough consecration of heart, to that blessed One who freely gave His life to save us from everlasting burnings!

We shall close this section by quoting for the reader the last few verses of our chapter, in which Moses makes a peculiarly solemn appeal to the hearts and consciences of the people. It is a most powerful word of exhortation.

“See, I have set before thee this day life and good and death and evil.”

Thus it is ever in the government of God. The two things are inseparably linked together. Let no man dare to snap the link.

God **“will render to every man according to his deeds; to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; but glory, honor, and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: for there is no respect of persons with God”** (Romans 2:6-11).

The apostle does not, in this great practical passage, go into the question of power; he simply states the broad fact – a fact applicable at all times and under all dispensations – government, law, and Christianity; it ever holds good that **“God will render to every man according to his deeds.”** This is of the very last possible importance. May we ever bear it in mind. It may perhaps be said, Are not Christians under grace? Yes, thank God; but does this weaken, in the smallest degree, the grand governmental principle stated above? Nay, it strengthens and confirms it immensely. But again, some may feel disposed to say, Can any unconverted person do good? We reply, This question is not raised in the Scripture just quoted. Everyone taught of God knows and feels and owns that not one atom of “good” has ever been done in this world but by the grace of God; that man left to himself will do evil only – evil continually. **“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.”**

All this is most blessedly true, and thankfully owned by every pious soul, but it leaves wholly untouched the fact set forth in Deuteronomy 30 and confirmed by Romans 2, that life and good, death and evil, are bound together by an inseparable link. May we never forget it. May it ever abide in the remembrance of the thoughts of our hearts.

“See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; in that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply; and the Lord thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live; that thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey His voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto Him” – the all-important, essential thing for each, for all, the very spring and power of all true religion, in every age, in every place; – **“for He is thy life, and the length of thy days;”** -How close! how vital! how real! how very precious! – **“that thou mayest dwell in the land which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them”** (Ver. 15-20).

Nothing can be more solemn than this closing appeal to the congregation; it is in full keeping with the tone and character of the entire book of Deuteronomy – a book marked throughout by the most powerful exhortations that ever fell on mortal ears. We have no such soul-stirring appeals in any of the preceding sections of the Pentateuch. Each book, we need not say, has its own specific niche to fill, its own distinct object and character; but the great burden of Deuteronomy, from beginning to end, is exhortation; its thesis, the Word of God; its object, obedience – whole-hearted, earnest, loving obedience, grounded on a known relationship and enjoyed privileges.

~ end of chapter 30 ~

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