

Deuteronomy - Commentaries by Charles Henry Mackintosh

Christian Truth: Volume 26, Self-Occupation (8:1-2)

"All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore unto your fathers. And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments or no." Deut. 8:1, 2.

It is at once refreshing, edifying and encouraging to look back over the whole course along which the faithful hand of our God has conducted us; to trace His wise and gracious dealings with us; to call to mind His many marvelous interpositions on our behalf, how He delivered us out of this strait and that difficulty; how, oftentimes, when we were at our wits' end, He appeared for our help, and opened the way before us, rebuking our fears and filling our hearts with songs of praise and thanksgiving.

We must not, by any means, confound this delightful exercise with the miserable habit of looking back at our ways, our attainments, our progress, our service, what we have been able to do, even though we are ready to admit, in a general way, that it was only by the grace of God that we were enabled to do any little work for Him. All this only ministers to self-complacency, which is destructive of all true spirituality of mind. Self-retrospection, if we may be allowed to use such a term, is quite as injurious in its moral effect as self-introspection. In short, self-occupation in any of its multiplied phases, is most pernicious; it is, in so far as it is allowed to operate, the deathblow to fellowship. Anything that tends to bring self before the mind must be judged and refused with stern decision; it brings in barrenness, darkness, and feebleness. For a person to sit down to look back at his attainments or his doings, is about as wretched an occupation as any one could engage in. We may be sure that it was not to any such thing as this that Moses exhorted the people when he charged them to "remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee."

We may here recur for a moment to the memorable words of the Apostle in Philippians 3. "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Now, the question is, What were the "things" of which the blessed Apostle spoke? Did he forget the precious dealings of God with his soul, throughout the whole of his wilderness journey? Impossible; indeed we have the very fullest and clearest evidence to the contrary. Hear his touching words before Agrippa: "Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great" (Acts 26:22). So also, in writing to his beloved son and fellow laborer, Timothy, he reviews the past, and speaks of the persecutions and afflictions which he had endured; "But," he adds, "Out of them all the Lord delivered me" (2 Tim. 3:11). And again, "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion." Chap. 4:16, 17.

To what then does the Apostle refer when he speaks of "forgetting those things which are behind"? We believe he refers to all those things which had no connection with Christ-things in which the heart might rest, and nature might glory-things which might act as weights and hindrances. All these were to be forgotten in the ardent pursuit of those grand and glorious realities which lay before him. We do not believe that Paul, or any other child of God or servant of Christ, could ever desire to forget a single scene or circumstance, in his whole earthly career, in any way illustrative of the goodness, the loving-kindness, the tender mercy, the faithfulness of God. On the contrary, we believe it will ever be one of our very sweetest exercises to dwell upon the blessed memory of all our Father's ways with us while passing across the desert, home to our everlasting rest.

"There with what joy reviewing
Past conflicts, dangers, fears,
Thy hand our foes subduing,
And drying all our tears;
Our hearts with rapture
burning,
The path we shall retrace,
Where now our souls are learning
The riches of Thy grace."

But let us not be misunderstood. We do not by any means wish to give countenance to the habit of dwelling merely upon our own experience. This is often very poor work, and resolves itself into self-occupation. We have to guard against this as one of the many things which tend to lower our spiritual tone and draw our hearts away from Christ. But we need never be afraid of the result of dwelling upon the record of the Lord's dealings and ways with us. This is a blessed habit, tending ever to lift us out of ourselves, and fill us with praise and thanksgiving.

Why, we may ask, were Israel charged to "remember all the way" by which the Lord their God had led them? Assuredly, to draw out their hearts in praise for the past, and to strengthen their confidence in God for the future. Thus it must ever be.

"We'll praise Him for all that is past,
And trust Him for all that's to come."

May we do so more and more! May we just move on, day by day, praising and trusting, trusting and praising. These are the two things which redound to the glory of God, and to our peace and joy in Him. When the eye rests on the "Ebenezers" which lie all along the way, the heart must give forth its sweet "Hallelujahs" to Him who has helped us hitherto, and will help us right on to the end. He hath delivered, and He doth deliver, and He will deliver. Blessed chain! Its every link is divine deliverance.

Nor is it merely upon the signal mercies and gracious deliverances of our Father's hand that we are to dwell with devout thankfulness, but also upon the humblings and provings of His wise, faithful, and holy love.

All these are full of richest blessing to our souls. They are not, as people sometimes call them, mercies in disguise, but plain, palpable, unmistakable mercies for which we shall have to praise our God throughout the golden ages of that bright eternity which lies before us.

"Thou shalt remember all the way"—every stage of the journey, every scene of wilderness life, all the dealings of God, from first to last, with the special object thereof, "to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart."

How wonderful to think of God's patient grace and painstaking love with His people in the wilderness! What precious instruction for us! With what intense interest and spiritual delight we can hang over the record of the divine dealings with Israel in all their desert wanderings! How much we can learn from the marvelous history! We too have to be humbled and proved, and made to know what is in our hearts. It is very profitable and morally wholesome.

On our first setting out to follow the Lord, we know but little of the depths of evil and folly in our hearts. Indeed, we are superficial in everything. It is as we get on in our practical career that we begin to prove the reality of things; we find out the depths of evil in ourselves, the utter hollowness and worthlessness of all that is in the world, and the urgent need of the most complete dependence upon the grace of God every moment. All this is very good; it makes us humble and self-distrusting; it delivers us from pride and self-sufficiency, and leads us to cling in childlike simplicity to the One who alone is able to keep us from falling. Thus, as we grow in self-knowledge, we get a deeper sense of grace, a more profound acquaintance with the wondrous love of the heart of God, His tenderness toward us, His marvelous patience in bearing with all our infirmities and failings, His rich mercy in having taken us up at all, His loving ministry to all our varied need, His numberless interpositions on our behalf, the exercises through which He has seen fit to lead us for our souls' deep and permanent profit.

The practical effect of all this is invaluable; it imparts depth, solidity, and mellowness to the character; it cures us of all our crude notions and vain theories; it delivers us from one-sidedness and wild extremes; it makes us tender, thoughtful, patient, and considerate toward others; it corrects our harsh judgments, and gives a gracious desire to put the best possible construction upon the acts of others, and a readiness to attribute the best motives in cases which may seem to us equivocal. These are precious fruits of wilderness experience which we may all earnestly covet.

Short Papers, Four Points of Knowledge (8:1-9)

(Read Deut. 8:1-9.) In these verses we have four valuable points of knowledge connected with our walk through the wilderness: namely, 1. the knowledge of ourselves; 2. the knowledge of God; 3. the knowledge of our relationship; and, 4. the knowledge of our hope.

I. And, first, as to the knowledge of self, we read, "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart." Here is a wondrous point of knowledge. Who can utter it?

Who can penetrate the depths of a human heart? Who can tell its windings and labyrinths? The details of a wilderness life tend to bring out a vast deal of the evil that is in us. At our first starting upon our Christian career, we are apt to be so occupied with the present joy of deliverance that we know but very little of the real character of nature. It is as we get on, from stage to stage of our desert course, that we become acquainted with self.

II. But, then, we are not to suppose that, as we grow in self-knowledge, our joy must decline. Quite the opposite. This would be to make our joy depend upon ignorance of self whereas it really depends upon the knowledge of God. In point of fact, as the believer advances in the knowledge of himself, his joy becomes deeper and more solid, inasmuch as he is led more thoroughly out of, and away from, himself, to find his sole object in Christ. He learns that nature's total ruin is not merely a true doctrine of the Christian faith, but a deep reality in his own experience. He also learns that divine grace is a reality, that salvation is a reality—a deep, personal reality; that sin is a reality; the cross, a reality; the advocacy of Christ, a reality. In a word, he learns the depth, the fullness, the power, the application of God's gracious resources. "He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger," not that you might be driven to despair, but that He might "feed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know, that He might make thee to know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live. Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years."

Touching and beautiful appeal! "Forty years" of uninterrupted evidence of what was in the heart of God toward His redeemed people. "Six hundred thousand footmen" clothed, fed, kept and cared for, during "forty years," in "a vast howling wilderness!" What a noble and soul-satisfying display of the fullness of divine resources! How is it possible that, with the history of Israel's desert wanderings lying open before us, we could ever harbor a single doubt or fear? Oh! that our hearts may be more completely emptied of self, for this is true humility; and more completely filled with Christ, for this is true happiness and true holiness. "For the Lord thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of thy hand; he knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness: these forty years the Lord thy God hath been with thee, thou hast lacked nothing." (Deut. 2:7.)

III. All that we have been dwelling upon flows out of another thing, and that is, the relationship in which we stand. "Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee" This accounts for all. The hunger and the food; the thirst and the water; the trackless desert and the guiding pillar; the toil and the refreshment; the sickness and the healing—all tell of the same thing, a Father's hand, a Father's heart. It is well to remember this, "lest we be weary and faint in our minds." (Heb. 12) An earthly father will have to take down the rod of discipline, as well as to imprint the kiss of affection—to administer the rebuke as well as express his approval; to chasten as well as minister supplies. Thus it is with our heavenly Father. All His dealings flow out of that marvelous relationship in which He stands towards us. He is a "Holy Father." All is summed up in this. Our Father is the "Holy One;" and "the Holy One" is our Father. To walk with, lean on, and imitate Him "as dear children," must secure everything in the way of genuine happiness, real strength, and true holiness. When we walk with Him, we are happy; when we lean on Him, we are strong; and when we imitate Him, we are practically holy and gracious.

IV. Finally, in the midst of all the exercises, the trials, the conflicts, and even the mercies and privileges of the wilderness, we must keep the eye steadily fixed on that four points of knowledge. 233

which lies before us. The joys of the kingdom are to fill our hearts, and to give vigor and buoyancy to our steps, as we pass across the desert. The green fields and vine-clad hills of the heavenly Canaan, the pearly gates and golden streets of the New Jerusalem are to fill the vision of our souls. We are called to cherish the hope of glory—a hope which will never make ashamed. When the sand of the desert tries us, let the thought of Canaan cheer us. Let us dwell upon the “inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us” (1 Pet. 1:4.) “For the Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths, that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig-trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack anything in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass.” Bright and blessed prospect! May we dwell upon it, and upon Him who will be the eternal source of all its brightness and blessedness!

“To Canaan’s sacred bound

We haste with songs of joy,

Where peace and liberty are found,

And sweets that never cloy;

Hallelujah!

We are on our way to God!

“How sweet the prospect is!

It cheers the pilgrim’s breast;

We’re journeying through the wilderness,

But soon we’ll gain our rest.

Hallelujah!

We are on our way to God.’

Christian Truth: Volume 26, Word of God in the Home, The (6:6-9)

Deut. 6:6-9

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

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

Thus it was to be with Israel of old; and surely thus it ought to be with Christians now. But is it so? Are our children thus taught? Is it our constant aim to present the Word of God, in all its heavenly attractiveness, to their young hearts? Do they see it shining out in our daily life? Do they see its influence upon our habits, our temper, our family intercourse, our business transactions? This is what we understand by binding the Word as a sign upon the hands, having it as a frontlet between the eyes, writing it upon the doorposts, and upon the gates.

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

Alas! how little is this the case! Have we not to be deeply humbled in the presence of God when we reflect upon the general character and tone of our conversation at table and in the family circle? How little there is of Deut. 6:7! How much of "foolish talking" and "jesting, which are not convenient"! How much idle gossip! How much worthless small talk!

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

Will any one say that Christians do not need to consider these things? If so, let him ponder the following wholesome words: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." Eph. 4:29. And again, "Be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody

in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Chap. 5:18-20.

These words were addressed to the saints at Ephesus; and, most assuredly, we should apply our hearts diligently to them. We are little aware, perhaps, of how deeply and constantly we fail in maintaining the habit of spiritual conversation. It is specially in the bosom of the family, and in our ordinary intercourse, that this failure is most manifest. Hence our need of those words of exhortation which we have just penned. It is evident the Holy Spirit foresaw the need, and graciously anticipated it. Hear what He says "To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse": "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Col. 3:15, 16.

Lovely picture of ordinary Christian life! It is but a fuller and higher development of what we have brought before us in these three verses in Deuteronomy 6, where the Israelite is seen in the midst of his family, with the Word of God flowing forth from his heart in loving instruction to his children—seen in his daily life in all his intercourse at home and abroad, under the hallowed influence of Jehovah's words.

Beloved Christian reader, do we not long to see more of all this in our midst? Is it not, at times, very sorrowful and very humbling to mark the style of conversation that obtains in the midst of our family circles? Should we not sometimes blush if we could see our conversation reproduced in print? What is

the remedy? Here it is—a heart filled with the peace of Christ, the word of Christ, Christ Himself. Nothing else will do. We must begin with the heart, and where that is thoroughly preoccupied with

heavenly things, we shall make very short work with all attempts at evil speaking, foolish talking, and jesting.

Answers to Correspondents: From Things New and Old 1858-1863, 58. The Ministry of Angels (5:22)

"F. D." We consider the ministry of angels to be intimately connected with the government of God. They also, as we know, minister in various ways to the people of God.

As to the expression in Deuteronomy 5:22, it teaches us that the ten words formed the subject of communication from the fiery mount.

Christian Truth: Volume 34, Israel's Idolatry: Written for Our Learning (4:20)

Israel's Idolatry

"But the Lord hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto Him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day." Deut. 4:20.

Can anything be more affecting than this? Jehovah, in His rich and sovereign grace and by His mighty hand, brought them forth from the land of death and darkness, a redeemed and delivered people. He had brought them to Himself that they might be to Him a peculiar treasure above all the people upon the earth. How then could they turn away from Him, from His holy covenant, and from His precious commandments?

"Sadly, they could and did. "They made a calf" (Acts 7:41) "and... said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (Exod. 32:4). Think of this! A calf made by their own hands, an image graven by art and man's device had brought them up out of Egypt! A thing made out of the women's earrings had redeemed and delivered them! And this has been written for our admonition. But why should it be written for us if we are not capable of and liable to the very same sin? We must either claim that God the Holy Spirit has penned an unnecessary sentence, or admit our need of an admonition against the sin of idolatry; and assuredly our needing the admonition proves our tendency to the sin.

Are we better than Israel? In no wise. We have brighter light and higher privileges; but, so far as we are concerned, we are made of the same material, and have the same capabilities and the same tendencies as they. Our idolatry may take different shape from theirs; but idolatry is idolatry, whatever the shape may be; and the higher our privileges, the greater our sin. We may, perhaps, be disposed to wonder how a rational people could be guilty of such overwhelming folly as to make a calf and bow down to it, and this too after having had such a display of the majesty, power, and glory of God. Let us remember that their folly is recorded for our admonition, and that we, with all our light, all our knowledge, all our privileges, are warned to "flee from idolatry."

Let us deeply ponder all this, and seek to profit by it. May every chamber of our hearts be filled with Christ, and then we shall have no room for idols. This is our only safeguard. If we slip away the breadth of a hair from our precious Savior and Shepherd, we are capable of plunging into the darkest forms of error and moral evil. Light, knowledge, spiritual privileges, church position are no security for the soul. They are very good in their right places, and if rightly used; but in themselves, they only increase our moral danger.

Nothing can keep us safe, right, and happy, but having Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith. Abiding in Him, and He in us, that wicked one touches us not. But if personal communion be not diligently maintained, the higher our position, the greater our danger, and the more disastrous our fall. There was not a nation beneath the canopy of heaven more favored and exalted than Israel when they gathered round Mount Horeb to hear the word of God. There was not a nation on the face of the earth more degraded or more guilty than they when they bowed before the golden calf, an image of their own formation.

From the days of Moses, sacred writings were recognized by the faithful in Old Testament times as the Word of God, therefore demanding implicit subjection and continual obedience. They were not to "add unto the word" or "diminish aught" from that which God commanded. It was so indispensable that the Lord instructed Israel that he might "know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live." (Deut. 4:2; 8:3.) But while God's people were called to hearken to, and hold fast what He had revealed, and to obey it at all cost, yet it is well to observe how remarkably in these times God's blessing was with those who honored Him in obeying His truth. His displeasure followed those who turned away from it. This runs all through Scripture. It will be interesting to notice a few examples.

The disobedience of our first parents in doing what was contrary to the word of God, has been followed with unutterable misery to them and to their posterity. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Rom. 5:12. Cain became "a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth," for he refused to hearken to the voice of God and do His will. Abel Noah believed God's testimony as to coming judgment, because men had corrupted the earth and filled it with violence. He therefore, according to the word of God, prepared an ark to the saving of himself and his house. The world, so overrun with infidelity as to reject the testimony of this preacher of righteousness, was therefore swept away by divine judgment.

Abraham was singularly blest and honored in obeying the word of God, while just Lot vexed his righteous soul from day to day and had to escape for his life. His posterity came under God's curse. All this could be traced to walking after the sight of his eyes and doing his own will instead of being subject to the will and word of God.

When God gave the children of Israel manna in the wilderness, He commanded that no man should leave of it till the morning. But some of the people did not listen to Moses and left some manna till the morning. It bred worms and stank and Moses was wroth with them. On the sixth day the Lord sent them a double portion so as to feed them also on the Sabbath day. They had to lay it up to be kept until the morning according to the word of the Lord by Moses and it did not stink, neither was there any worm in it. Again we find there were some who would not believe God, that there would be none sent down on the seventh day; therefore, some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. "And the Lord said unto Moses, How long refuse ye to keep My commandments and My laws?" Ex. 16:28. Scarcely anything could show more strikingly the divine authority of the Word, the peace and blessing connected with subjection to it, and the evil of departing from it.

The children of Israel, after the solemn covenant of the law when they promised obedience to all the words which the Lord had said, almost immediately rebelled in making a golden calf, and worshiping and sacrificing to it saying, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." Ex. 32:4. Thus they brought upon themselves the just judgment of God in acting so contrary to His holy word. We are told, "There fell of the people that day about three thousand men." v.28.

When Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, entered upon the solemn office of priesthood, they were cut off by instant death because they offered strange fire which the Lord commanded them not to do. The Lord said, "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh Me, and before all the people I will be glorified." Lev. 10:3.

When the son of an Israelite woman blasphemed the name of the Lord and cursed, God commanded that he should be put to death, and that all the congregation should certainly stone him. (Lev. 24:10-16.)

Those, too, who were under the Law of Moses, were commanded to keep the Sabbath day holy and to do no manner of work in it. When a man therefore, despised the word of the Lord and was found gathering sticks on the Sabbath day, he was stoned to death. The word of the Lord was, "The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp." Num. 15:35. These are some of the instances of the sad results of despising the Law of Moses they died without mercy.

Saul lost the kingdom by rejecting the word of the Lord. He was commanded by the Lord of hosts to utterly destroy and not spare Amalek, man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass. Instead of this he spared the king of the Amalekites, Agag, the best of the sheep, oxen, lambs, and all that was good and would not utterly destroy them. Saul might have thought he was doing a good thing in reserving some of the sheep and oxen for sacrifices, but it was contrary to the word of the Lord. Therefore Samuel said, "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king." 1 Sam. 15:22, 23. C. H. Mackintosh

Short Papers, Privilege and Responsibility (20:1-9)

(Read Deut. 20:1-9.)

Privilege and responsibility! Yes, this is the divine order; and how important it is, in dealing with the things of God, to place them in the order in which he places them, and leave them there! The human mind is ever prone to displace things; and hence it is that we so frequently find the responsibilities, which attach to the people of God, pressed upon those who are yet in their sins. This is a great mistake. I must be in a position before I can fulfill the responsibilities attaching thereto. I must be in a relationship before I can know the affections which belong to it. If I am not a father, how can I know or exhibit the affections of a father's heart? Impossible. I may descant upon them, and attempt to describe them; but, in order to feel them, I must be a father.

Thus it is in the things of God. I must be in a position before I can enter into the responsibilities which belong to it. I must be in a relationship before I can understand the affections which flow out of it. Man has been tested in every possible way. He has been tried in creation. He has been tried under divine government. He has been tried under law. He has been tried with ordinances. He has been tried by the ministry of the prophets. He has been tried by the ministry of righteousness, in the person of John the Baptist. He has been tried by the ministry of grace, in the Person of Christ. He has been tried by the ministry of the Holy Ghost. What has been the result? Total failure! An unbroken chain of testimony from Paradise to Pentecost has only tended to make manifest man's utter failure in every possible way. In every position of responsibility, in which man has been set, he has broken down. Not so much as a single exception can be adduced.

So much for man's responsibility. He has proved himself unfaithful in everything. He has not a single inch of ground to stand upon. He has destroyed himself, but in God is his help. Grace has come in, in the Person of Christ, and perfectly met man's desperate case. The cross is the divine remedy for all the ruin, and by that cross the believer is introduced into a place of divine and everlasting privilege. Christ has met all the need, answered all the demands, discharged all the responsibilities, and, having done so by his death upon the cross, He has become, in resurrection, the basis of all the believer's privileges. We have all in Christ, and we get Him, not because we have fulfilled our responsibilities, but because God loved us even when we had failed in everything. We find ourselves, unconditionally, in a place of unspeakable privilege. "We did not work ourselves into it; we did not weep ourselves into it; we did not pray ourselves into it; we did not fast ourselves into it. We were taken up from the depth of our ruin, from that deep, deep pit into which we had fallen, in consequence of having failed in all our responsibilities; we have been set down, by God's free grace, in a position of unspeakable blessedness and privilege, of which nothing can ever deprive us. Not all the powers of hell and earth combined; not all the malice of Satan and his emissaries; not all the power of sin, death, and the grave, arrayed in their most terrific form, can ever rob the believer in Je

My reader cannot be too simple in his apprehension of this. We do not reach our place of privilege as the result of faithfulness in the place of responsibility. Quite the reverse. We have failed in everything. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." We deserved death; but we have received life. We deserved hell; but we have received heaven. We deserved eternal wrath; but we have received eternal favor. Grace has entered the scene, and it "reigns through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord."

Hence, then, in the economy of grace, privilege becomes the basis of responsibility, and this is beautifully illustrated in the passage of scripture which stands at the head of this paper. I shall quote it for my reader, lest he should not have his Bible at hand. "When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the Lord thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And it shall be, when ye are come nigh unto the battle that the priest shall approach, and speak unto the people, and shall say unto them, Hear, O Israel; ye approach this day unto battle against your enemies; let not your hearts faint; fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them; for the Lord your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you."

Here we have Israel's privileges distinctly set forth. "The Lord thy God is with thee," and that, moreover, in the very character in which He had brought them up out of the land of Egypt. He was with them in the power of that sovereign grace which had delivered them from the iron grasp of Pharaoh, and the iron bondage of Egypt, which had conducted them through the sea, and led them across "the great and terrible wilderness." This made victory sure. No enemy could possibly stand before Jehovah acting in unqualified grace on behalf of His people.

And let my reader note carefully, that there is not a single condition proposed by the priest in the above quotation. He states, in the most absolute way, the relationship and consequent privilege of the Israel of God. He does not say, "The Lord thy God will be with you, if you do so and so." This would not be the proper language of one who stood before the people of God as the exponent of those privileges which grace had conferred upon them. Grace proposes no conditions, raises no barriers, makes no stipulations. Its language is, "The Lord thy God is with thee....he goeth with you.... to fight for you.... to save you." When Jehovah fights for His people they are sure of victory. "If God be for us, who can be against us? Grant me but this, that God is with me, and I argue full victory over every spiritual foe.

Thus much as to the question of privilege: let us now turn, for a moment, to the question of responsibility.

"And the officers shall speak unto the people, saying, What man is there that hath built a new house, and hath not dedicated it? let him go and return to his house lest he die in the battle, and another man dedicate it. And what man is he that hath planted a vineyard, and hath not yet eaten of it? let him also go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man eat of it. And what man is there that hath betrothed a wife, and hath not taken her? let him go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man take her. And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart."

There is uncommon moral beauty in the order in which the priest and the officer are introduced in this passage. The former is the exponent of Israel's privileges; the latter, of Israel's responsibilities. But how interesting it is to see that, before the officers were permitted to address the assembly on the grand question of responsibility, the priest had established them in the knowledge of their precious privilege. Imagine the case reversed. Suppose the officer's voice had first been heard, and what would have been the result? Fear, depression, and discouragement. To press responsibility before I know my position—to call for affections ere I am in the relationship, is to place an intolerable yoke upon the neck—an insufferable burden upon the shoulder. This is not God's way. If you search from Genesis to Revelation, you will find, without so much as a single exception, that the divine order is privilege and responsibility. Set me upon the rock of privilege, and I am in a position to understand and fulfill my responsibility; but talk to me of responsibility while yet in the pit of ruin, the mire of legality, or the slough of despond, and you rob me of all hope of ever rising into that hallowed sphere, upon which the sunlight of divine favor pours itself in living luster, and where alone responsibilities can be discharged to the glory of the name of Jesus.

Some there are who talk to us of "gospel conditions" Who ever heard of a gospel fenced with conditions? We can understand law-conditions; but a gospel with conditions is "a different gospel, which is not another." (Gal. 1:6, 7.) Conditions to be fulfilled by the creature pertain not to the gospel, but to the law. Man has been tried under all possible conditions. And what has been the issue? Failure! Yes, failure only—failure continually. Man is a ruin—a wreck—a bankrupt. Of what use can it ever be to place such an one under conditions, even though you should call them by the anomalous title of "gospel conditions?" None whatever. Man, under any kind of conditions, can only prove unfaithful. He has been weighed in the balance and found wanting. He has been condemned, root and branch. "They that are in the flesh cannot please God."

It does not say, "they that are in the body." No: but "they that are in the flesh" But the believer is not in the flesh, though in the body. He is not looked at in his old-creation standing—in his old Adamic condition, in which he has been tried and condemned. Christ has come down and died under the full weight of his guilt He has taken the sinner's place, with all its liabilities, and by His death settled everything. He lay in the grave after having answered every claim and silenced every enemy. Justice, law, sin, death, wrath, judgment, Satan, everything, and every one. There lay the divine Surety in the silent tomb; and God entered the scene, raised Him from the dead, set Him at His own right hand in the heavens, sent down the Holy Ghost to testify to a risen and exalted Savior, and to unite to Him, as thus risen and exalted, all who believe in His name.

Here, then, we get on to new ground altogether. We can now listen to the officer as he tells out in our hearing the claims of Christ upon all those who are united to Him. The priest has spoken to us, and told us of the imperishable ground which we occupy, the indestructible relationship in which we stand, and now we are in a position to listen to the one who stands before us as the exponent of our high and holy responsibilities. Had "the officer" come first, we should have fled from his presence, discouraged and dismayed by the weight and solemnity of his words, and giving utterance to the despairing inquiry, "Who then can be saved?" But, inasmuch as "the priest"—the minister of grace—the exponent of privilege, has set us upon our feet in the new creation, and strengthened our hearts by unfolding the unconditional grace in which we stand, we can listen to the "commandments" of the officer, and find them "not grievous," because they come to us from off the mercy-seat.

And what does the officer say to us? Just this: "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life." This is the sum and substance of the officer's message. He demands, on the part of God's warriors, a disentangled heart. It is not a question of salvation, of being a child of God, of being a true Israelite; it is simply a question of ability to wage an effectual warfare; and, clearly, a man cannot fight well if his heart is entangled with "a house," "a vineyard," or "a wife!"

Nor was it a question of having such things. By no means. Thousands of those, who went forth to tread the battle-field, and gather the spoils of victory, had houses, and lands, and domestic tics. The officers had no quarrel with the possessors of these things; the only point was, not to be entangled with them. The apostle does not say, "No man that warreth engages in the affairs of this life." Had he said this, we should all have to live in idleness and isolation, whereas he distinctly teaches us, elsewhere, that, "If any man will not work, neither shall he eat." The grand point is to keep the heart disentangled. God's warriors must have free hearts, and the only way to be free is to cast all our care upon Him who careth for us. I can stand in the battle-field with a free heart when I have placed my house, my vineyard, and my wife, in the divine keeping.

But, further, God's warriors must have courageous hearts as well as free hearts. "The fearful and the faint-hearted" can never stand in the battle, or wear the laurel of victory. Our hearts must be disentangled from the world, and bold by reason of our artless confidence in God; and, be it well remembered, that these things are not "gospel conditions;" but gospel results—a deeply-important distinction. What a mistake to speak of gospel conditions! It is simply the old leaven of legality presented in a new and strange form, and dubbed with a name which, in itself, involves a contradiction. If those precious clusters which are the result of union with the living Vine, be set forth as the necessary conditions of that union, what must become of the sinner? Where shall we get them if not in Christ? And how do we become united to Christ? Is it by conditions? Nay; but by faith.

May the Holy Ghost instruct my reader as to the divine order of "privilege and responsibility!"

Christian Truth: Volume 4, God's Loving Care: Unbelief and its Fruit (1:27)

"And ye murmured in your tents." Deut. 1:27.

Unbelief is not only a blind and senseless reasoner, but a dark and gloomy murmurer. It neither gets to the right side of things nor to the bright side of things. It is always in the dark, always in the wrong, simply because it shuts out God, and looks only at circumstances. They said, "Whither shall we go up? our brethren have discouraged our heart, saying, The people is greater and taller than we." But they were not greater than Jehovah. "The cities are great and walled up to heaven"—the gross exaggeration of unbelief!—"and moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakim there."

Now, faith would say, "Well, what though the cities be walled up to heaven? our God is above them, for He is in heaven. What are great cities or lofty walls to Him who formed the universe, and sustains it by the word of His power? What are Anakim in the presence of the Almighty God? If the land were covered with walled cities from Dan to Beersheba, and if the giants were as numerous as the leaves of the forest, they would be as the chaff of the threshing floor before the One who has promised to give the land of Canaan to the seed of Abraham, His friend, for an everlasting possession."

But as Israel had not faith, as the inspired Apostle tells us in the third chapter of Hebrews, "They could not enter in because of unbelief." Here lay the great difficulty. The walled cities and the terrible Anakim would soon have been disposed of had Israel only trusted God. He would have made very short work of all these. But ah! that deplorable unbelief! It ever stands in the way of our blessing. It hinders the outshining of the glory of God; it casts a dark shadow over our souls, and robs us of the privilege of proving the all-sufficiency of our God to meet our every need and remove our every difficulty.

Blessed be His name, He never fails a trusting heart. It is His delight to honor the very largest drafts that faith hands in at His exhaustless treasury. His assuring word to us ever is, "Be not afraid, only believe." And again, "According to your faith be it unto you." Precious, soul-stirring words! May we all realize more fully their living power and sweetness. We may rest assured of this, we can never go too far in counting on God; it would be a simple impossibility. Our grand mistake is that We do not draw more largely upon His infinite resources. "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?"

Thus we can see why it was that Israel failed to see the glory of God on the occasion before us. They did not believe. The mission of the spies proved a complete failure. As it began, so it ended, in most deplorable unbelief. God was shut out. Difficulties filled their vision.

"They could not enter in." They could not see the glory of God. Hearken to the deeply affecting words of Moses. It does the heart good to read them. They touch the very deepest springs of our renewed being. "Then I said unto you, Dread not, neither be afraid of them. The LORD your God which goeth before you, He shall fight for you"—only think of God fighting for people! Think of Jehovah as a Man of war!—"He shall fight for you, according to all that He did for you in Egypt before your eyes; and in the wilderness, where thou hast seen how that the LORD thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place. Yet in this thing ye did not believe the LORD your God, who went in the way before you, to search you out a place to pitch your tents in, in fire by night, to show you by what way ye should go, and in a cloud by day."

What moral force, what touching sweetness in this appeal! How clearly we can see here, as indeed on every page of the book, that Deuteronomy is not a barren repetition of facts, but a most powerful commentary on those facts. It is well that the reader should be thoroughly clear as to this. If, in the book of Exodus or Numbers, the inspired lawgiver records the actual facts of Israel's wilderness life, in the book of Deuteronomy he comments on those facts with a pathos that quite melts the heart. And here it is that the exquisite style of Jehovah's acts is pointed out and dwelt upon with such inimitable skill and delicacy. Who could con-

sent to give up the lovely figure set forth in the words, "as a man doth bear his son"? Here we have the style of the action. Could we do without this? Assuredly not. It is the style of an action that touches the heart because it is the style that so peculiarly expresses the heart. If the power of the hand, or the wisdom of the mind is seen in the substance of an action, the love of the heart comes out in the style. Even a little child can understand this, though he might not be able to explain it.

Handfuls of Pasture: Volume 2, Landmarks and Stumblingblocks: Part 2 (19:14)

We should, just like to add a line or two to our leading article for August, in order to remove one or two more of those stumblingblocks which so sadly block up the path of anxious enquirers.

We find, in many cases, that appropriation is used as a great stumblingblock to souls; and although we have devoted a paper to this very subject, in one of our earlier volumes, we deem, it right to touch upon it briefly in this article for the purpose of showing the reader that instead of being a stumblingblock in his way, it is, in reality, a landmark in his spiritual inheritance.

To judge from the way in which many put the subject of appropriation, it would seem as though they looked upon it as something which they have to do ere the benefits of Christ's death can be made available for them. This is a great mistake. The death of Christ, in all its atoning efficacy, applies itself to the sinner the moment he takes his place as a sinner. So far from there being any difficulty in making the application, the difficulty, nay the impossibility, is to refuse it. The blood of Jesus is for the guilty sinner as such. Every one, therefore, who knows and feels himself to be a guilty sinner, is privileged to rest simply in that precious blood. The atoning work is done. Sin is put away. All is finished—yes, finished by God's own hand. Have I to wait for anything further? Have I got something else to do—something to add to the finished work of Christ? Assuredly not. I am simply called to rest, by faith, in what Christ has done for me, and know that all my sins are divinely put away, and that my conscience is as clean as the blood of Jesus can make it.

This is appropriation. It is taking God at His word—setting to my seal that God is true. It is not a certain indescribable work of mine, but a resting in the work of Christ. It is not waiting for something that is to be done by me, but a confiding in what has been done by Christ. This makes all the difference. Appropriation is really a landmark, not a stumblingblock. It is only because people mistake what it is that they stumble over it. It not un-frequently happens that while they are vaguely looking for it, they actually possess it. If I heartily believe that Jesus died and rose again, I am privileged to take up those precious accents of the apostle, and say, "He loved me and gave himself for me." This, truly, is the language of appropriation. But it is appropriation in its right place—as a landmark, not as a stumblingblock. Appropriation, as a stumblingblock, speaketh on this wise, "I know that Christ died for me, but I cannot appropriate the benefits of His death." This is a very serious error indeed. It is, in reality, to imply that the death of Christ is of no avail without a certain work on the sinner's part; whereas scripture teacheth us that the moment a sinner takes his true place, as utterly lost, the death of Christ applies to him as fully and as truly as though he were the only sinner in the universe, and, moreover, that he is justified by faith and not by works of any kind.

It is truly wonderful to mark, the various methods in which the enemy tries to harass and stumble souls. If he cannot succeed in causing them to look to, and lean upon, legal efforts and ceremonial observances, he will perplex them with questions respecting election, appropriation, realization, feelings, frames, and experiences. Anything, in short, but simply resting in a full Christ. It is not that we undervalue these things; far from it; we value them as landmarks, but we dread them as stumblingblocks. The true ground of a believer's peace is not election, appropriation, or realization, but Christ. He rests on the eternal truth that God dealt with Christ on the cross about all his sins—that the entire question was gone into and settled there, once and forever. To believe this is appropriation. To abide in the faith of it is realization.

May the Spirit of God lead the anxious reader to understand these things! It is our heart's desire and prayer to God continually that burdened souls may be set at liberty, by the knowledge of a full and free salvation—a salvation unencumbered by any of those perplexing questions which are so frequently raised to the damage of God's truth and the darkening of the souls of men. Election is a truth; appropriation is a fact; realization is a reality but let us, once for all, declare, and let the reader fully understand and constantly remember, that these things are not to be laid as stumblingblocks along the pathway of the sinner, but set up as precious landmarks in the inheritance of the saints.

clickbible.org