Judges - Commentaries by Voice to the Faithful

Why Then is All This Befallen Us?, Why Then is All This Befallen Us? (6:13)

Judg. 6:13

If we study the history of Corinth and of Ephesus as given to us in Scripture, we shall learn where and how we have failed, and that the state of things which we deplore is the result of our departure from the grace made known to us.

The church at Corinth came behind in no gift. God's favor to them was very manifest; all that the Head could confer by the Holy Ghost to them in the way of gift was theirs, and yet we know that they were a reproach; no testimony for Christ in the assembly, in the world, or in private life. Now Ephesus was greatly in advance of Corinth. The fullest light had been communicated to them, and we may assume that the saints there were "perfect," able to receive the wisdom of God in its entirety. They were also most zealous in their care of the assembly. The Lord says to them, "I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience, and for My name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted. ' Rev. 2:2, 3. And yet after all this they were disqualified and unfitted to be a candlestick to hold the 'light of God in testimony here, because they had left their first love.

Now in Corinth, they were not in practical deliverance; that is, they were not free of the old man, and were walking after the flesh. If I am living in the pleasures of the flesh or of the mind, it is very clear that I am not delivered from it. As I am delivered I am morally apart from that wherein I was held. It is very humbling to note that at Corinth, though so largely blessed by the Holy Spirit, yet they were carnal and walked as men. They had not accepted the cross as the termination of man morally in the sight of God. They gloried in men, and they reigned as kings on the earth. It is important to bear in mind that if we seek exaltation for man, we have not accepted the cross of Christ. No flesh can glory in His presence; the natural man does not understand the things of the Spirit of God. If a saint is carnal, he is not able to receive the wisdom of God, and the same one who cannot receive the things which God has prepared for them that love Him, which are beyond all human conception, will, as a necessary consequence, seek to enjoy the earth and its things as much as he can; that is reigning as kings; he has not learned the untold blessings on God's side which are his own; but he seeks what is not his own—even earthly things. Because he has not the greater, he seeks the lesser.

Thus we see that these two are concurrent; when the joys on God's side are unknown, all that ministers to man is coveted.

It is easy to see the difference between the Corinthian and the Ephesian declension; the Corinthians had not accepted the cross (when the snare is to exalt the man, there will be concurrently an attempt to advance or enjoy one's position on the earth, so forcibly expressed in the words "reigned as kings"), while the Ephesians had lost what they had held in faith, and thus were unable to be in testimony for Christ. It is a great help to learn from Scripture the cause of our low estate. The first thing for an invalid to ascertain is, from what does his ill health spring; and the next is to obtain the remedy which will effect a cure. After the Apostle had exposed to the Corinthians all that had befallen them, the reproach they had incurred in every circle they were found in, he addresses them in chapter 10, "I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say." v. 15. He directs their attention first to the obligation they were under at the Lord's table, that they were in communion with Christ's blood, and with His body; that is His death; thus establishing that they were identified with Christ's death here on the earth; consequently they could not minister to the flesh for which Christ died, in any form; that is, if He, the perfect Man, was dead as to the man here, and that they had avowed themselves to be identified with Him in His death, how could they acknowledge the man in the flesh, or accept distinction for the man here? They all as partakers of the one loaf were in this common bond. This is the responsible side. There is beside what I may call the heart side, where they were to answer to the Lord's desire, "This do in remembrance of Me." Where were they to remember in this world the One who loved them best? They were to remember Him in death. How could they reconcile this with their self-consideration and reigning as kings? What a moral denial were they in their own ways of the One they assumed to remember! And more; they betrayed themselves. One is hungry, another is drunk. The rich lived in excess, even at the Lord's supper, and the poor were neglected. Sad indeed all that had befallen them; they did not discern the Lord's body. "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." 1 Cor. 11:30.

Next, the Apostle dwells on their corporate responsibility baptized by one Spirit into one body—the Holy Spirit the power—He is to lead and to guide; all must be determined by Him; man's mind has no place there in any form; every one is in relation to the rest by the Spirit of God, not by any human means. So, if one member suffer, all suffer with it; or if one be honored, all rejoice with it. At the Lord's table they avowed their identification with the death of Christ, and thus morally abrogated all the glory of man in the flesh; while as the assembly of God, they have no power nor ability but by and through the Spirit of God. Now the Apostle in the second epistle, not only reminds them of his ministry (in chap. 3), finishing up with their beholding the Lord's glory, where no flesh could be, but also he tells of the effect on himself, "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus." Thus the surpassingness of the treasure on the one hand, and the dying of Jesus on the other hand, completely distanced them from the flesh. Also it was of great importance that they should walk agreeably to the Lord, even with regard to the future (which they had overlooked), because "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." 2 Cor. 5:10.

One word more as to the Corinthians. The Apostle has been led in a very full way to establish them on true Christian ground; and now he presses on them that the first distinct mark that they had not received the grace of God in vain, would be that they would come out and be separate and touch not the unclean thing (2 Cor. 6:17). It is evident that it was here their failure began. They were caught in the Balaam snare. The point of departure must be the point of restoration. A warning word to us all, intimating the failure which is imminent when we touch the unclean, when our divine sensibility is so weakened that we can admit of and enter on social intercourse with the world—the dead

bone.

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In the above brief review we have, seen the sad consequences which result when saints, however favored of God, give the natural man a place as to his mind and tastes, even when there was no breach of the law. Now let us turn and learn how Ephesus, to whom so much light and truth had been committed, became unfitted to be a candlestick.

Ephesus, as we learn from the Acts, had a bright beginning, and evidently had advanced far beyond the Corinthians, to whom the Apostle could not make known the wisdom of God, and to whom he could not speak as unto spiritual, but as unto babes in Christ. The Ephesians were established in grace, and the Apostle had declared to them "all the counsel of God," had "kept back nothing that was profitable" unto them, as we read in Acts 20; and he adds to this in his epistle to them, where he writes, "Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ." Eph. 3:4. In Revelation 2 They are commended for their works and labor, and endurance, and because they could not bear them that are evil. They were morally far beyond the Corinthians; "hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not." They carefully attended to the Apostle's warning in Acts 20, and in everything they surpassed the Corinthians, who evidently had been so damaged by false teachers that the Apostle in the end of the second epistle insists on the great moral difference between them and himself.

The Ephesians had borne and had endured, and for Christ's name's sake, had labored and had not fainted; and yet after all, they had failed to such an extent, that unless they repented and did the first works, their candlestick or lamp would be taken away. It is deeply affecting and important to apprehend the nature of their declension which is conveyed in the words, "Thou hast left thy first love." What is first love? When does one leave it and thus lose so much? As far as I have gathered from Scripture, I should say that first love was that absolute personal devotion of the Church to Christ, that it could say in the language of another, "Whither thou goest, I will go." A peculiar energy of the Spirit is manifested in Stephen when "he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus." Peter had first love when he would leave the ship and enter on a path unknown and fatal to a mere man, in order to join the Lord. Nothing can satisfy first love but association, which in the Church involves union. As has been said, "The first estate must be maintained or God's glory and the truth are falsified." The consummation of first love is union. It is there only that the first love of the Church rests. The Church is in first love when union with Christ in heaven by the Holy Spirit is known; and the first love is left by the Church, or the individual saint, when faith as to union with Christ wanes. Winds and waves distract a Peter; anything which diverts us from Christ where He is as the one absorbing object, not only deprives us of the joys that love imparts, but spoils our testimony, as with Peter and Barnabas in another day.

Love is the heart absorbed with its object; and the Church enjoys its love in Christ's love which generated it. We love Him because He first loved us; our love wanes as this knowledge of His love wanes. It is in heavenly association that we reach His love that passes knowledge. When His attractiveness wanes, the love wanes. When He fully commands the heart, we are in His banqueting house, and His banner over us is love. The nearer love is to its object, the more it is satisfied and renewed. It is there it is nourished and cherished. It is there that "He that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me." Christ dwells in our hearts by faith when our union with Him is realized.

When the Church or the individual is in first love, there is an assured sense of right "to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." When I feed on Christ, when He dwells in my heart by faith, I am enabled to be a true witness of Him here. I must imbibe Christ in order to reflect Him. If I do not imbibe Him, I have lost my first love, and I cannot reflect Him. It could not be possible. The lamp is taken away. But if I am living in the faith of being united to Him in heaven, I am feeding on Him there, and then I am enabled to be a witness for Him here, so that every one who wanes in the assurance of faith of being united to Christ where He is, wanes in power to express Him here; and on the other hand, the one who does the first works, cleaves to Him where He is, feeds on Him there, is a witness for Him here.

I need not add more; may the Lord grant that the above may be a word of warning and of help to each of us. May we lay it to heart, that if, like Corinthians, the natural man is allowed a place, his influence will crop up in the Church, in the world, and in social life; self-consideration and a love of earthly things will characterize us. And again, though we may be Ephesians as to growth and intelligence, yet' we may have waned from out first love, and thus after -all that we have received, be nothing of a lamp to our fellow Christians on every side seeking and needing help; and as to ourselves, not eating of the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God. The Lord help us. From "Voice to the Faithful"

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