Jeremiah - Commentaries by Charles Henry Mackintosh

The Scriptures, Scriptures, The: Part 7

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The books of Ezra and Nehemiah set before us very strikingly, in many ways, the blessedness of returning to God and acting obediently to His Word in an evil time. Ezra, like others we have seen, not only sought the law of the Lord for himself to act on, but he spread the truth among others; "he taught Israel statutes and judgments."

The priests and Levites had their places, "as it is written in the law of Moses." They also kept the Passover on the day it was ordered in the Holy Scriptures, and also the feast of unleavened bread seven days, as it was written, "with joy; for the Lord had made them joyful." They also found written in the law which the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month. The people acted on this at once. They made themselves booths and sat under the booths, for since the days of Joshua, the son of Nun, the children of Israel had not done so, and there was very great gladness. How encouraging to us are all these examples of the blessing which is always connected with obedience to His Word!

We shall call attention to another instance before closing our remarks on the blessing connected with obeying God's Word, and the terrible consequences of despising it. Jeremiah lived in a day when truth was trodden down in the streets, when the people had forsaken the Fountain of living waters and had hewed unto themselves cisterns, broken cisterns which could hold no water. A sense of this gave the faithful prophet much suffering, yet he speaks of having much gladness and rejoicing. How was this? He says, "Thy words were found." It would seem they were so seldom heard that he had to search for them. "I did eat them" not merely look at them and admire them, but receive them into his heart by faith, "and Thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart." Observe, they were not his own thoughts or circumstances, but God's thoughts as revealed in His holy Word.

There was another man who lived at the same time, not a man in poverty and seclusion, but in wealth and prominence; it was Jehoiakim, the king.

The king sent Jehudi to fetch the roll; and he took it out of Elishama the scribe's chamber. And Jehudi read it in the ears of the king, and in the ears of all the princes which stood beside the king. Now the king sat in the winter house in the ninth month: and there was a fire on the hearth burning before him. And it came to pass, that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth. Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words. Nevertheless Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah had made intercession to the king that he would not burn the roll; but he would not hear them. But the king commanded Jerahmeel the son of Hammelech, and Seraiah the son of Azriel, and Shelemiah the son of Abdeel, to take Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet: but the Lord hid them.

Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, after that the king had burned the roll, and the words which Baruch wrote at the mouth of Jeremiah, saying, Take thee again another roll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah hath burned. And thou shalt say to Jehoiakim king of Judah, Thus saith the Lord; Thou hast burned this roll, saying, Why hast thou written therein, saying, The king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cause to cease from thence man and beast? Therefore thus saith the Lord of Jehoiakim king of Judah; He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost. And I will punish him and his seed and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring upon them, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and upon the men of Judah, all the evil that I have pronounced against them; but they hearkened not.

Then took Jeremiah another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah; who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire: and there were added besides unto them many like words.
Jer. 36:21-32.

What a very solemn thing to reject the Word of God! How fully all these instances exemplify the words of Jehovah, "Them that honor Me I will honor, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed." 1 Sam. 2:30.

How important it is to have in constant remembrance the fact that we have a revelation from God and that "forever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven." This alone is the authority for faith; we receive the divine testimony and set to our seal that God is true. The infallibility of the Word of God stands, in widest contrast with the traditions and commandments of men. In the days of the prophets, the great point of controversy was whether God's Word was to be believed and acted on or not. And even to this day as we may consider the New Testament, the point still is whether man, either a rationalist, a ritualist, or an infidel is to be believed to the rejection of the divine authority of Scripture.

C.H. Mackintosh

Short Papers, Separation: Not Fusion

" Therefore, thus saith the Lord, If thou return, then will I bring thee again, and thou shalt stand before me; and if thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth; let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them.' Jer. 15:19.

The principle laid down in the foregoing passage is of the deepest possible importance to all who desire to walk with God. It is by no means a popular principle; very far from it. But this does not detract from its value in the judgment of those who are taught of God. In an evil world the popular thing is almost sure to be the wrong thing; and whatever has most of God—most of Christ—most of pure truth—is sure to be most unpopular. This is an axiom in the judgment of faith, inasmuch as Christ and the world are at opposite points of the moral compass.

Now, one of the most popular ideas of the day is fusion, or amalgamation; and all who desire to be accounted men of broad sympathies and liberal sentiments go thoroughly in for this grand object. But we hesitate not to avow that nothing can be more opposed to the revealed mind of God. We make this statement in the full consciousness of its opposition to the universal judgment of Christendom. For this we are quite prepared. Not that we court opposition; but we have long since learned to distrust the judgment of what is called the religious world, because we have so constantly found that judgment to be diametrically opposed to the plainest teaching of holy scripture; and it is, we can truly say, our deep and earnest desire to stand with the word of God against everything and everyone; for we are well assured that nothing can abide forever, save that which is based upon the imperishable foundation of holy scripture.

What, then, does scripture teach on the subject of this paper? Is it separation, or fusion? What was the instruction to Jeremiah in the passage quoted above? Was he told to try and amalgamate with those around him? Was he to seek to mingle the precious with the vile? The very reverse. Jeremiah was taught of God first of all to return himself—to stand apart even from those who were the professed people of God, but whose ways were contrary to His mind. And what then? “I will bring thee again, and thou shalt stand before me.”

Here, then, we have Jeremiah’s personal path and position most clearly laid down. He was to return, and take his stand with God in thorough separation from evil. This was his bounden duty, regardless of the thoughts of men, or of his brethren. They might deem and pronounce him narrow, bigoted, exclusive, intolerant, and the like; but with that he had nothing whatever to do. His one grand business was to obey. Separation from evil was the divine rule, not amalgamation with it. The latter might seem to offer a wider field of usefulness, but mere usefulness is not the object of a true servant of Christ, but simple obedience. The business of a servant is to do what he is told, not what he considers right or good. If this were better understood, it would simplify matters amazingly. If God calls us to separation from evil, and we imagine we can do more good by amalgamation with it, how shall we stand before Him? How shall we meet Him? Will He call that good which resulted from positive disobedience to His word? Is it not plain that our first, our last, our only duty, is to obey? Assuredly. This is the foundation, yea, it is the sum and substance of all that can really be called good.

But was there not something for Jeremiah to do in his narrow path and circumscribed position? There was. His practice was defined with all possible clearness. And what was it? “If thou separate the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth.” He was not only to stand and walk in separation himself, but he was to try and separate others also. This might give him the appearance of a proselytizer, or of one whose object was to draw people over to his way of thinking. But here again he had to rise above all the thoughts of men. It was far better, far higher, far more blessed, for Jeremiah to be as God’s mouth, than to stand well with his fellows. What are man’s thoughts worth? Just nothing. When his breath goeth out of him, in that very hour his thoughts perish. But God’s thoughts shall endure forever. If Jeremiah had set about mingling the precious with the vile, he would not have been as God’s mouth; nay, he would have been as the devil’s mouth. Separation is God’s principle; fusion is Satan’s.

It is counted liberal, large-hearted, and charitable, to be ready to associate with all sorts of people. Confederacy, association, limited liabilities, are the order of the day. The Christian must stand apart from all such things; not because he is better than other people, but because God says, “ Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” It was not because Jeremiah was better than his brethren that he had to separate himself, but simply because he was commanded to do so by Him whose word must ever define the course, govern the conduct, and form the character of His people. And, further, we may rest assured it was not in sourness of temper, or severity of spirit, but in profound sorrow of heart and humility of mind that Jeremiah separated himself from those around him. He could weep day and night over the condition of his people; but the necessity of separation was as plain as the word of God could make it. He might tread the path of separation with broken heart and weeping eyes, but tread it he must if he would be as God’s mouth, Had he refused to tread it, he would have been making himself to be wiser than God. What, though those around him, his brethren and friends, might not be able, to understand or appreciate his conduct; with this he had nothing whatever to do. He might refer them to Jehovah for an explanation, but his business was to obey, not to explain or apologize.

Thus it is always. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. “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.” 2 Cor. 6:14-18.

It may seem very plausible and very popular to say, “ We ought not to judge other people. How can we tell whether people are believers or not? It is not for us to set ourselves up as holier than others. It is charitable to hope the best. If people are sincere, what difference does it make as to creeds? Each one is entitled to hold his own opinions. It is only a matter of views after all.”

To all this we reply, God’s word commands Christians to judge, to discern, to discriminate, to come out, to be separate. This being so, all the plausible arguments and reasonings that can possibly be adduced are, in the judgment of a true-hearted, single-eyed, servant of Christ, lighter by far than the small dust of the balance.

Hearken to the following weighty words from the blessed apostle Paul to his son Timothy—words bearing down with unmistakable clearness upon all the Lord’s people at this very moment: “Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his. And let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from, iniquity. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honor, and some to dishonor. If a man purge himself from these (the dishonorable vessels), he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work.” 2 Tim. 2:19-21.

Here we see that if any man desires to be a sanctified vessel, meet for the Master’s use, and prepared, unto every good work, he must separate himself from the iniquity and the dishonorable vessels around him. There is no getting over this without flinging God’s word overboard; and surely to reject God’s word is to reject Himself. His word commands me to purge myself, to depart from iniquity, to turn away

from those who have only a form of godliness, but deny its power.

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