

## A Lesson on Separation

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Leviticus 18: 2, 3: "*I am the Lord your God. After the doings of the land of Egypt wherein ye dwelt shall ye not do; and after the doings of the land of Canaan shall ye not do; neither shall ye walk in their ordinances.*"

Leviticus 20: 24-26: "*I have separated you from other people.*"

*Things "which I have separated from you as unclean."*

*"I have severed you from other people that ye should be mine."*

There are one or two general remarks to be made to start with. In Lev. 18: 1-5 we have brought together certain instruction with regard to the lands of Egypt and Canaan.

The land of Egypt is characterized in Ex. 20: 2, and Deut. 4: 6, as a house of bondage. The Egyptians may not have experienced it to be such, but the people in whom God was working for blessing found it to be such. The mercy of God brought them out of it. The Exodus was for them an entire change of condition. Instead of Egypt and bondage they were brought to God as God's redeemed people.

Canaan, the land of milk and honey, was pre-eminently the land of blessing, the territory promised to Abraham and his seed.

There was a negative side and a positive side. (1) Negative, in their deliverance from bondage. (2) Positive, in their being brought into the enjoyment of the land which He had purposed for them.

In Lev. 20: 22-26, which speaks of the inheritance of the land, we see that —

- a. Separation was with a view to *the blessing* that God had determined for them (v. 24).
- b. Separation was with a view to *the purity* and holiness of the people of God, already enriched (v. 25).
- c. Separation was with a view to intense and utter *devotedness* to the Lord.

I purpose to take up these three things, and urge them upon our spirits this afternoon. We have been brought out of bondage with a view to our blessing, to be holy as He is holy, and to have our hearts so brought under the sway of His grace and love that it is real liberty to be for Him and His delight alone.

On the score of obligation alone the redeemed people of God ought to be wholly set for God's pleasure, apart from every other influence. Over and over again — some twenty-five times, I think — in Lev. 18, 19, and 20, is emphasis laid upon the fact that the One who spoke to them was Jehovah their God. A right sense of who He was and of the sovereign favour He bestowed upon them would lead to great exercise that they should be pleasing to Him, and be absolutely clear of anything diverse from His will for them. They were not brought out of Egypt to be a disorderly rabble, nor even to devise for themselves the best way to order their conduct or movements; they were to be a consolidated nation under His rule and direction. He who delivered them promised to give them the land of blessing, and

would bring the nation in.

As to ourselves, once sinners of the Gentiles, we were under Satan's bondage, but we have been delivered through the death and blood-shedding of Christ, and brought to God. Some of us, if we look back, are amazed at the amount of wickedness and sin which we crowded in, in the time we were unconverted. God only knows what would have become of us had He not arrested us and intervened. But He brought us out of bondage. We became miserable in our sin, and because of our sins; the sight of our wretchedness was hateful, we wanted to flee from ourselves, as well as to escape the deserved judgment of God. Thank God we were set free. In Christ we have found the Antitype of the Passover and the Red Sea; the judgment of God is past for us in the death of the Passover Lamb, and the power of Satan and our links with the world as the sphere of Satan's power are broken in the Red Sea deliverance of Christ's death and resurrection. We find ourselves to be God's people, redeemed in His own way and by His own work; brought to God, the subjects of His eternal favour and love in Christ Jesus our Lord.

But not only so. He has a plan for us. While heaven and the Father's house and glory with Christ are our ultimate destiny, I think we must take the land of Canaan as set before Israel to be the type or picture for us of what God wants us to enjoy now. As there was a land from which we have been delivered, so is there a land set before us for our present possession and enjoyment. The Lord Jesus who has died here has gone back to heaven, and having strangely won our hearts by His love expressed in death, has sent down the Holy Ghost to draw us after Himself in spirit, and to bring us into the realization of all the heavenly blessedness He has won for us even while we are still physically on the earth.

Now the present application of this is as follows. Had the church taken full possession in a practical way of its heavenly calling, had there been no failure and no departure, the heavenly life of our risen Head and Lord would have flowed unhindered through those associated with Him on earth; and holiness, unity, and love would have marked all. The power of Satan would have been overcome in spite of his determined opposition; the heavenly blessings and the heavenly calling would have been realized on earth. As Israel would have been a nation for God's pleasure and God's true witnesses on the earth, had they carried out God's will, so would the church have been an amazing expression of Christ in His beauty, love, and purity here on earth, and a mighty and blessed witness to the grace of God to the world, during the period of Christ's absence and rejection.

But Israel failed. There were two main snares, idolatry and lawlessness. In Samuel's days there came in a third, a desire to be like others and to have some visible head or leader other than the Lord. Jehovah had certainly said they were not to do after the doings of the land of Egypt. But He also added, "after the doings of the land of Canaan whither I bring you shall ye not do" (Lev. 18: 3).

"The doings of the land of Canaan" actually became a variable factor as time went on. The first phase was encountered when the nation entered in Joshua's day, dispossessing the wicked inhabitants the baseness of whose lives needs only to be known to see how justly God acted in ordering their extinction as men on the earth. But as succeeding generations of Israelites were born, so did they come into different phases in the "Canaan" of their day. I may name, for instance, the days of the Judges, to which further reference will be made in a moment. Or again, the days of Rehoboam, when frightful division followed the brighter days of David and Solomon, and the people had to choose between the divine centre (and the weakened testimony associated with it) and centres that were not divine (1 Kings 12). Later still, in the days of Hoshea (2 Kings 17), when the ten revolting and idolatrous tribes were removed, and the "Samaritans" took their place, what a mixture followed; and what different "doings of

the land of Canaan" had the faithful Israelite now to face! Later still, when Judah also had failed and had been carried captive, but through God's faithful goodness a remnant were brought back, "the doings of the land of Canaan" were still their danger and their snare. Finally, in those days when the Son of God appeared, how peculiar the path of His followers, when those "doings" culminated in His rejection and crucifixion.

Now all of these phases have their lessons for us, and indicate phases of difficulty which we meet after we have got our spiritual footing on divine ground. We first are to learn what God's purpose for us is, and the heavenly calling that puts us into association with the risen and heavenly Christ. Against this Satan will fight with might and main. The moment he finds a Christian who wants to enter into and enjoy all God's purpose for him (being not content with his individual salvation, but earnestly set to be here for the will and pleasure of God in the full light of Christ's heavenly position and glory), he will use every endeavour to divert him, or to discourage and to oppose him.

Alas! many a Christian meets the second phase as we have it set out in the book of Judges. Briefly, after the death of Joshua and the elders who outlived him, the first sign of losing touch with God was *relaxation* in the forward movement (see Judges 1: 19, 21, 27, 29, 30, 31, 33). The Lord was with those who went on (verses 2, 4, 19, 22), but it is solemn to notice how many flagged, and the growing persistence of the enemy may be seen in his determination to keep a footing among them. In verse 19, "they could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because they had chariots of iron." In verse 27 "the Canaanites would dwell in that land." In verse 28, "they could not utterly drive them out." In verse 29 "the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them." So in verse 30. And sadly it goes on — "the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, for they did not drive them out," and "Naphthali dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land" (verses 32-33). Finally you have the "Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain, for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley" — a humbling position for Israel, tantamount to defeat for them, and leaving an undisturbed and unbroken frontier for the enemy.

Dear friends, it is very sad indeed if there come a time in our Christian experience when things begin to slacken, if we lose zest and cease to thirst for the Lord's things. When that is so, and if it be so, I beg any brother or sister to get before the Lord to search out the cause. Should any here have ceased to press on to the apprehension of the heavenly calling, may God arrest you today.

First, then, we have relaxation. In Judges 2: 2 we discover *negligence* and *disobedience*. One thing leads to another. If there is not energy to go on steadily to learn more of the Lord, and there be negligence of His word and will, you may soon get direct disobedience. Then in verse 10 is a further step — *forgetfulness* of what the Lord had done for Israel. The popular idea today is that we are the summing up of all the wisdom of the past ages, to belittle what has gone before in the applauding of what *we* think and do. (What a mercy it is that we are constantly reminded in the Lord's Supper of what Christ has done, and of what God has done for us in Christ!) But is there not a danger as one generation gives place to another to "pooh-pooh" that which God has taught saints in ages past?

By-and-by, as the Israelites became more self-satisfied and complacent, the Lord became displaced altogether. The next step was *idolatry* (verses 11-13). Forsaking Jehovah, losing the sense of *grace* that had delivered and blessed them, they followed what one might call the craze of the day. Baalim and Ashtaroth, with all the orgies of sensuous indulgence attending, took the place that the living God had at one time possessed, and God's discipline in government became heavier and heavier upon them. From time to time the Lord raised up judges (verse 16) as in mercy the Lord now raises up faithful men from time to time, to stem the tide and help His people; and there were local movements

when He caused exercise. But verse 19 of our second chapter of Judges shows the continued drift. The judges passed, and then they resumed the down-grade. "They ceased not from their own doings nor from their own stubborn way." That is a terrible stage. No remonstrance touched them. It is a serious thing when a man, though going in an entirely wrong course, sinning against God and misleading his fellows, stubbornly goes on in it. *Stubbornness* is the last stage in that chapter. It seems to fittingly lead to that solemn verse, the last in the book (Judges 21: 25) when the principle of independence was openly adopted: "In those days there was no king in Israel, every man did that which was right in his own eyes." It was the crowning sin in that dreadful book, the climax among God's people, when every man made his own individual judgment the test of right and wrong, and — be it noted — did that which was *right* in his own eyes. It would be a mistake to render it, "he did what he knew to be *wrong*."

We are all liable to these sins of departure. Through all Israel's history the one unchanging guide, the Word of God, was always sufficient to show them the good and right way. Spoken or written, it was the one sure guide for the faithful soul. Neglect of it was always weakness, and surely led to disaster; attention to it, subjection to it, giving the Lord His right place, meant light and help and recovery. Some conditions could be altered, some could not be altered. The faithful ones, if delivered at all, were invariably exercised and recovered by prophetic ministry, by the word of God, to that which was the mind of God for the moment. And even when the time was passed for recovery, the presentation of the Person and glory of the coming Christ sustained their faith and fed their souls — and at last He came; and so will come again.

Now to come back to Lev. 20: 22-26. In verse 24 we read of "a land flowing with milk and honey." On the authority of God's word and promise it was set before Israel, "I have said unto you." They were the people of God's choice, "Ye shall inherit their land." The Lord of heaven and earth it was who bestowed it upon them, "I have given it unto you." And though enemies had to be dispossessed and there would be conflict, the mighty God guaranteed His intervention in their favour, "Ye shall possess it." Moreover, it was an inheritance well worth obtaining, whatever exercises were necessary to get the good of it, "a land flowing with milk and honey." A definite locality was set before them, the land of Canaan; and blessing full and overflowing in that locality. For the blessings in the Old Testament were of an earthly order and connected with an earthly centre. In the Gospels of the New Testament we read of Christ, their promised Messiah, presented to them to see if they were ready for Him to fulfil all God's promises on their behalf. But they were not ready. They disbelieved Him and would not credit His mission. They dubbed Him "that deceiver," took up stones to stone Him, mocked Him, condemned Him as a common malefactor, crucified Him, pierced His side, and His life-blood poured on the earth was the witness to His rejection here. But God raised Him from the dead; and alive now to die no more — He has been exalted to the highest glory and transferred from earth to heaven. God is detaining Him there for a certain period, this present dispensation, during which He is working out a secret plan that was in His mind from all eternity. He said nothing about it to the Old Testament prophets, so that it was a mystery until now. It is a very elementary lesson, but a most important lesson for us to learn, that we who believe in Christ as our Saviour, though enjoying His love here and now, are blessed with heavenly blessings, not earthly as the Jew. We are called with a calling that is centred in a heavenly Christ in the heavenly place.

No one can over-estimate the importance of this, or the need for young Christians to understand the character of the blessings brought to us. In our case the very nature of our blessing detaches us from man's present world in which he boasts so much. It has become to us an Egypt from which the grace of God has delivered us. But the place where Christ has entered in risen and triumphant life has become

the Canaan of which we are to take possession by the leading of that Spirit who is Christ's Spirit, delegated to lead us into the enjoyment of the place where Christ is our life and portion, and the delight of the heart of God. The mass of Christians seem to know very little of this. The great slogan of man, and of Christians whose ideas lean towards the betterment of the present world, is "Leave the world better than you found it." But the truth of God is as stated in Acts 15: 14, "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His Name." Ours are spiritual blessings not seen or handled, nor centred on the earth, though enjoyed here; they are spiritually discerned. And because that is the case God has sent down His Spirit in order to create us anew, to indwell us, and to lead us into all the truth. The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he discern them. If that elementary truth were learned it would be a great start.

But further, even during this dispensation, as succeeding generations of Christians take their places in the present testimony, the phases of their experience vary just as we have seen to have been the case with Israel. The Canaan of Joshua's day was one thing, the Canaan of Rehoboam's day, or of Nehemiah's day, or of the day of the Lord's life on earth, were all different. Yet, as it remained true throughout, "after the doings of the land of Canaan wherein ye dwell shall ye not do," so is it incumbent upon loyal Christians to-day to test all that goes on religiously around them in Christendom by the infallible word of God, and by the truth of the calling wherewith they are called. Satan will not leave us alone any more than he would leave Israel alone. The most favoured Christians, if they become self-centred and self-complacent, are liable to deceive themselves in the most disastrous ways, such as we find exemplified in the different forms of Israel's failure.

The first reference to separation is then in view of the blessing that God has in view for us.

The second reference is in Lev. 20: 25. This is separation in view of purity or holiness. In this case, as will be noticed, it was not a matter of one nation being separated from other outside nations. It was rather a moral education for those who were already in that path of outward separation from the world. In the land of Canaan, where God was so wonderfully known, it was still necessary that God's people should be a people of exercised consciences and minds, and especially in relation to the character of God and the associations which were compatible with that character. Hence the remarkable chapters in Leviticus which form the centre portion of the book, i.e., from Lev. 11 to Lev. 17. Our verse tells us, "Ye shall therefore put difference between clean beasts and unclean, and between unclean fowls and clean; and ye shall not make your souls abominable by beast or by fowl or by any manner of living thing that creepeth on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean." This is a serious part of our spiritual education. No one could think of a camel, a coney, a hare, or a pig, as being creatures *morally* wrong. The same could be said of fishes, fowl, or creeping things, prohibited by divine law as food for the Israelite (chap. 11). But for certain wise reasons, one of which was their typical application for our learning (Rom. 15: 4), Jehovah separated from His Israel certain creatures as unclean, and also added certain natural functions as bringing about conditions in which communion with Himself was interrupted. There is no gainsaying this. The animals referred to were His creation, each perfect in its own way and form, yet for Israel they were set aside as unclean. We may or may not see why: the fact is there. The Apostle Paul in the light of Christianity says, "I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself " (Rom. 14: 14), i.e., that even the animals spoken of and prohibited under the law were not inherently unclean, not essentially so; but for wise and, as we see, typical reasons, were forbidden. God had His people's moral education in view in forbidding either contact or assimilation.

As confirmation of this, it is known that in the garden of Eden the Lord God planted a garden, and made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also, and the

tree of knowledge of good and evil. All were His work. Yet for moral reasons He forbade the eating of the last-named tree. And He was wiser than His creature, and knew what He did this for.

So with the unclean beasts, or fowls, or creeping things: they were His own creation, His own work. Yet for causes already considered, and to test His people as to their submission and loyalty to His will for them, He separated these things from them as unclean. They were unclean for those to whom God had forbidden them.

I consider it as evident that while there is much in Christendom which is the work of God, and that we have to thankfully recognize it and pray for it and bless God for it, there is often found with it something of worldly admixture from which we are led and taught (led by the Spirit and taught by the Word) to keep apart. It would be utterly wrong to say that the work of God is unclean, but it would be equally wrong to justify or to associate with the worldly conditions condemned of God, under which this work is sometimes done. A certain relation to God makes certain things unclean to His people; not intrinsically unclean, for they are His creation, yet separated from them as unclean, to develop and strengthen their sense of the holiness of His presence and the delicacy and sensitiveness of the communion to which He has called us. People who are not separate will not understand this, but those who are truly separated to Christ in the full light of the Christian calling will see it, and recognize the propriety of it.

The third reference to separation is in Lev. 20: 26. After all, the greatest object of our separation is not our blessings (verse 24), nor our purity (verse 25), but for that we might be wholly for Him. He wants our affection, He wants us entirely for His own heart's pleasure. "*Holy unto Me*" is His language here. "I have severed you from other people that you should be *Mine*." Could anything so operate in our hearts as this? In Titus 2: 13, 14, we read of "the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify *unto Himself* a people for a possession" — that He might have us for Himself.

*The death of Christ* separates us from all that which God has separated from us.

*The love of God and the love of Christ* separate us in affection, so that the separation becomes hearty and not legal.

Separation is no difficulty if our hearts are satisfied in the joy of knowing God, and in the love and glory of Christ. It is when we hanker after popularity, or ease, or gain, that separation becomes distasteful.

If you are saved and yet have no affection for Christ, there must be something wrong. A few days ago I heard of a woman who will have it that she is saved. She says she has heard people talk of affection for Christ, and though she cannot explain it, says *she* never had *affection* for Christ. I wonder if there is anyone here like that.

Oh, may God bring it home to your soul: "The Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me." May God give you to search and see any defect in this utter separation to Christ, and bring you near to Him. And may the affection of all of us for Him be deepened.