

Counsels and Rebukings of The Gospel

Our getting on the way of life was the grace work of God. The children of God peached repentance. But the Lord awakened our consciences under the preaching of repentance. The Christians proclaimed the sermon of reconciliation, but the Lord kindled faith in our hearts under it. Also, our survival on the way is the sheer grace work of God. He stakes out the narrow path with his counsels and rebukings so we would not stray. On the left side of the road are road signs on which grave warnings are marked against carnal freedom. Let us remember a few. "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." (Romans 6:12-13) "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry." (Col. 3:5) "But now ye also put off all these: anger, wrath,, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds: (Col. 3:8-9) "And he not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (Rom. 12:2) "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, ,that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal. 5:19-21) These parts are but a few scattered examples from a great number of similar passages. But these show as it were, a flash of what is in question. On the right side of the narrow way are severe warnings against spiritual defilement, self-righteousness, legalistic spirituality and hypocrisy. It is equally as dangerous as freed of the flesh. Does not Paul write to the Corinthians: "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit." (II Cor. 7:1) The Galatians who had strayed into legalistic spirituality the Apostle rebukes thus severely: "Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now make perfect by the flesh? (Gal. 3:3) And again: "Ye did run well; who did hinder you, that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgement, whosoever he be." (Gal. 5:7-10) These also are but examples from many similar ones, but already from these the purpose of the Holy Spirit should become clear.

These apostolic words of counsel and rebuking are all written to the saintly brothers and sisters in Christ, as to the newborn grace children of God. If these are applied to people who are not partakers of the Holy Spirit, or to the sorrowless and hypocritical, or yet these souls still under the Law are commanded to journey according to them, it would be as if an unborn fetus were being taught how to walk.

These admonitions and rebukings are not the law, which already in its first commandment condemns its violators to the third and fourth generation. They do not belong to the ministration of death written and engraved in stones, or to the ministration of condemnation. (II Cor. 3:7-10) On the contrary, they are the gospel, belonging to the complete work of the gospel as Paul writes to Timothy: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry." (II Tim. 4:2-5) The Apostles do distribute their admonitions, and rebukings entirely in the spirit of the gospel. They

are words attached to the power of grace, which build upon the foundation of righteousness which is of faith. For example, when Paul starts to give his teachings touching the everyday endeavor to the Roman Christians he writes: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God." (Rom. 12:1) Not in this tone: "Read these lines. If you have not traveled thus, you are not at all children of God and you cannot own the grace of God in that condition!" We also must interpret these parts of the Bible in a gospel spirit! They are precious teachings of a dear Father to his beloved children, not to cut them away from faith, but to protect them in faith! We do not, brothers and sisters, follow these gracious admonitions to deserve something, to become more blessed, to admire our achievements, and on their basis begin to despise others; but saved by grace we want to be obedient to these unpretentious teachings of grace and truth. Since the Father has forgiven our past sins, we desire to avoid new sins. This is that new obedience, the obedience of faith, where in we journey led by the indwelling Holy Spirit along the narrow way marked by the gospel, until we arrive in glory.

Sometimes we notice that these admonishments, against the temptations of sins that are before us, are rather severe. Let us think for example of Paul's statement: "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." (Rom. 8:13) The heavenly Father in his love thus wishes to make sin shocking and fearful. But if the child has in weakness stumbled and fallen, the tone is different. It appears best in the tender words of the apostle of love: "My little children, these things write I, unto you that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:1-2) So Paul preached the most beautiful grace to the Corinthian Christians in the beginning of his epistle, although they had there fallen into many faults and falls. Then later the Apostle continues his serious rebukings and recommendations unto repentance. The Son of God bore the faulty shepherds of the congregations of Asia Minor as stars in his right hand, but preached repentance severely at the same time: "Remember therefore how thou has received and heard; and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch; I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." (Rev 3:3) The Hebrew Christians were urged to put away the sin that always besets one and to look upon Christ the author and finisher of faith. (Heb. 12:2) Unto sin then, not the slightest relief is granted, but the traveler who has succumbed to faults is addressed tenderly in a spirit of grace and mercy. He is not urged to leave Christ or deny faith, but is corrected unto steps of repentance as a believing child of grace. Only then, if a Christian is disobedient to those counsels and rebukings of the gospel, does he himself tear himself loose from grace, loses the Holy Spirit and succumbs again under the power of spiritual death.

Disobedience against the counsels and rebukings of the gospel is precisely what has led into great misunderstandings in these matters.

When some believers have through continuing disobedience lost the childlike confidence of faith and assurance of salvation, having come into that state of soul which is under the law, the counsels and rebukings of the gospel according to them, have not sufficed as guidelines for pardoned souls. According to their darkened state of soul, they have begun to demand the law, the ministrations of death and condemnation, engraved in stone, as the teacher of Christians. Then these unfortunates, themselves having not believed unto peace and freedom, would not allow others to do so either.

Again other disobedient ones have begun to quarrel against the counsels and rebukings of the Gospel. Because of the darkened condition of their souls, they cannot tolerate wholesome doctrine, but because of their itching ears, seek all kinds of coddlers. The counsels and rebukings of the gospel according to their opinions are law, unsuitable for the Christian. These two dangers: legalistic spirituality and carnal freedom,

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have always been preying upon the child of God. May the Lord give us, brothers and sisters, true light and understanding!

Journey friends, when we preserve in our bosoms faith and good conscience, we cannot chop up the gospel, but we need it in its entirety, with its promises of grace, counsels, and rebukings. It is in its entirety a precious grace gift of God unto salvation to those who believe. We love it. We thank God for it. We need nothing but the gospel in order to achieve glory, but we need it entirely as the Apostles have left it in their epistles to the Christians.

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