

Careless Choices

by John Gifford Bellett

The sermon warns of the dangers of gradual declension from God's principles, using the example of the patriarchs to illustrate the importance of standing firm in our faith.

Scripture: Joshua 23:12

Topics: "Marital Obedience", "Spiritual Decline"

Description

John Gifford Bellett preaches on the importance of obedience in marriage as a test of the state of the nation, tracing the decline from Abraham's faithful example to Judah's complete apostasy in the matter. The command to keep the way of the Lord in marriage was a crucial principle, evident from the earliest days of Genesis to the later generations of the elect family, showing a pattern of gradual but solemn declension leading to apostasy.

Transcript

The command to the nation of Israel at the very beginning was to keep the way of the Lord very particularly as to marriage. They were by no means either to give their daughters to the sons of the Canaanites, or take the Canaanites' daughters of their sons. "Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto they son" (Deut. 7:3). If they did so, it would be on the pain of being no longer owned of the Lord. "...If ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations....and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you; know for a certainty that the Lord your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the Lord your God hath given you" (Josh. 23:12,13). According to this, the apostate days of Solomon are marked by disobedience to this very thing (1 Ki. 11); and afterwards, no real recovery to God could be admitted, without a return to the observance of this principle in their marriages (Ezra 10; Neh. 10:28-30).

Obedience, therefore, in this thing was a peculiar test of the state of the nation. And it is thus in the earliest book of Genesis. For though divine law was not then published, divine principles were then understood. It may be regarded as the witness of the state of family religion then, as it was of the state of national religion afterwards.

Abraham, in this matter, eminently keeps "the way of the Lord"; and so Eliezer, one of his "household"; and so Isaac, one of his "children". For Abraham sends a special embassy into a distant land, in order to

get a wife "in the Lord" for his son - Eliezer goes on that embassy with a ready mind - and Isaac in patience waits for the fruit of it, not seeking any alliance with the nearer people; and, though sad and solitary, keeps himself for the Lord's appointed helpmeet. Like Adam, he waited for a helpmeet from the Lord's own hand, though it cost him patience and sore solitude. This his meditation in the field at eventide shows. He might have got a daughter of Canaan; but he endured. He will rather suffer the sickening of his heart from the deferring of his hope, than not marry "in the Lord", or take him a wife of any that he may choose. And all this was very beautiful in this first generation of this elect family. The father, the servant, and the child, each in his way, witnesses how Abraham had ordered his house according to God, teaching his children and his household the way of the Lord. "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Gen. 18:19).

But we notice a course of sad decline and departure from all this. Isaac, in his turn and generation, becomes the head of the family. But he is grievously careless in this matter, compared with his father. "And Esau....took to wife Judith the daughter of Beerli the Hittite, and Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite, which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah" (Gen. 26:34,35). He does not watch over his children's ways, to anticipate mischief, as Abraham had done. Esau his son marries daughters of the Hittites. Isaac and Rebekah are grieved at this, it is true; for they had righteous souls which knew how to be "vexed" with this; but then, it was their carelessness which had brought this vexation upon them.

Jacob, however, declines still further. He neither anticipates the mischief, like Abraham, nor does he, like Isaac, grieve over it when it occurs. But with an unconcerned heart, as far as the history tells us, he allows his children to form what alliances they please, and to take them wives of all whom they choose. There is no joy for the heart here, as in the obedience of Abraham; there is no relief for the heart here, as in the sorrow of Isaac and Rebekah.

But Judah afterwards goes beyond even all this in a very fearful way. He represents the fourth generation of this elect family. But he not only does not anticipate mischief, like Abraham, in the ordering of his family, nor grieve over mischief when brought into it, like Isaac, nor is he simply indifferent about it, whether it be brought in or not, like Jacob, but he actually brings it in himself! For he does nothing less than take a daughter of the Canaanites to be the wife of his son Er (Gen. 38)!

This exceeded. This was sinning with a high hand. And thus, in all this, in this history of the four generations of Genesis-patriarchs, we notice declension, gradual but solemn declension, till it reached complete apostasy from the way of the Lord.

But if this be serious and sad, as it really is, is it not profitable and seasonable? Can we not readily own, that it is "written for our learning"? How does it warn us of a tendency to decline from God's principles! What took place in the same elect family, generation after generation, may take place in the same elect person, year after year. The principles of God may be deserted by easy gradations. They may first be relaxed, then forgotten, then despised. They may pass from a firm hand into an easy one, from thence to an indifferent one, and find themselves at last flung away by a rebellious one. Many have at first stood for God's principles in the face of difficulties and fascinations, like Abraham - then, merely grieved over the loss of them, like Isaac - then, been careless about their loss or maintenance, like Jacob - and at last with a high hand, broken them, like Judah.

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