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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;
he shall set me up upon a rock.
—Psalm 27:5*

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MEDITATION

Then the LORD said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh, and tell him, Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, Let my people go, that they may serve me. For if thou refuse to let them go, and wilt hold them still, Behold, the hand of the LORD is upon thy cattle which is in the field, upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the oxen, and upon the sheep: there shall be a very grievous murrain. And the LORD shall sever between the cattle of Israel and the cattle of Egypt: and there shall nothing die of all that is the children's of Israel. And the LORD appointed a set time, saying, To morrow the LORD shall do this thing in the land. And the LORD did that thing on the morrow, and all the cattle of Egypt died: but of the cattle of the children of Israel died not one. And Pharaoh sent, and, behold, there was not one of the cattle of the Israelites dead. And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go.

—Exodus 9:1–7

Thus far the plagues had been excruciating for the Egyptians: the waters turned to blood, then frogs filling the land, then lice, then flies. What misery, what pain, what madness must have descended upon the Egyptians as they sought relief. But thus far each plague had been temporary. God had turned the Nile to blood for seven days and then had returned the Nile to water. So also God had sent the frogs, the lice, and the flies for a number of days, but then each plague had ceased. The plagues were death to Egypt, but thus far the plagues had not permanently damaged Egypt's economy or wealth. Yes, the fish had all died when the Nile was turned to blood, but there were still fields full of crops and pastures full of cattle and homes full of people. But with the fifth plague, God began to strip away the wealth and security of Egypt. The plagues from here on in would target the fruit of the pasture, the field, and the home. Layer by layer, God would peel away the physical bounties by which he had made Egypt so powerful and prosperous. Stroke after stroke, God would scour the land of its cattle, its crops, and its people.

Fifth plague: the murrain of beasts.

As with the other plagues, God made it unmistakably clear that it was his word that came to Pharaoh and his arm that destroyed Pharaoh.

First, God sent Moses to go in unto Pharaoh and tell him, "Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, Let my people go, that they may serve me." Second, God announced the plague before he sent it: "There shall be a very grievous murrain." Third, God set an appointed time when the plague would strike: "To morrow the LORD shall do this thing in the land." Fourth, God put a division between Egypt and Israel, so that the beasts of Israel would live while the beasts of Egypt died. No one could say that the plague was a thing of chance or that it came of natural causes. All must acknowledge that the plague was the hand of Jehovah.

On the appointed day God sent a very grievous murrain upon all the beasts of Egypt. The murrain was a terrible pestilence that made the cattle grievously sick and that caused them to die very rapidly. The word that God used for the murrain means *destruction* and *death*. The murrain struck the cows, the horses, the asses, the camels, the oxen, the sheep. Man knows many dread diseases among cattle, but man had never seen anything like this. The murrain was worse than mad cow disease, worse than sheep-pox, worse than horse colic, worse than equine infections anemia, worse than camel trypanosomiasis. The murrain that God sent struck all the beasts the same day, causing them to sicken,

weaken, and die that very day. The murrain was not a bacteria, a virus, or a tsetse fly. The murrain was the hand of God. “Behold, the hand of the LORD is upon thy cattle which is in the field.”

When all the cattle of Egypt died, Pharaoh sent his servants into the camps of the Israelites to see whether their cattle had also died. “And, behold, there was not one of the cattle of the Israelites dead.” And what was Pharaoh’s response? According to God’s appointment and by God’s sovereign direction, “the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go.”

God was stripping the Egyptians of all that they had, but he was filling his people with all his wealth. And such wealth! Not the wealth of cattle and earthly bounties, which were just the earthly pictures of the spiritual reality. But God filled his people with the wealth of his covenant love. He is “the LORD God of the Hebrews.” And they are “my people.” What riches and treasures for the people of God in Christ!

—AL

HERMAN HOEKSEMA’S *BANNER* ARTICLES

The Banner

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(Pp. 312–13)

Our Doctrine by Rev. H. Hoeksema

Article XXXIII. The Fallen King and His Kingdom (continued)

The passage from the epistle to the Hebrews (6:4–8) to which we have referred once or twice contains a truth of tremendous significance. As is the case with regard to many of the most important passages of Scripture so also this passage would, at first sight, almost cause us to despair of a correct interpretation, or to say the least, make us hesitant to accept what it seems to imply. To many it seemed that here at least we have a plain statement of the possibility to fall away from grace. And (who would not admit it?) if we read all that is predicated of the persons described, and then come to the conclusion that, namely, they fall so deeply that their conversion even is an impossibility, we also would be inclined to say that there is indeed, a falling away from grace possible, and that in this passage it is plainly taught.

Yet, we know that all Scripture militates against such a conception. The very doctrine of election would be sufficient to refute the error that those that have been given to Christ from all eternity as his own people, for whom He

suffered and died, for whom He arose, whose life He is, could ever fall away from Him to such an extent that their conversion is an impossibility and that they crucify the Son of God afresh. Falling away from grace can be conceived of only on the Arminian standpoint that also the acceptance of the Christ is dependent on the sinner’s own free will. If the case is thus, that man without the grace of God’s Spirit, that the natural sinner of his own accord is able to accept the grace there is in Christ Jesus, then it were conceivable, that the same sinner would also of his own account deny the Christ again and put Him to an open shame. But not so if we place ourselves upon the standpoint of the Reformed view of the truth. According to this God knows His own from eternity. He gave them to Christ. It is for them that Christ came into the world. For them He suffered and died. For them He lives. Them He regenerates by the power of His Spirit and by that Spirit He seals them. If on this so thoroughly scriptural basis a falling away from grace is taught, it amounts to the

theory that either God made a mistake in eternity or that Christ sometimes regenerates one of the subjects of Satan by mistake so that the grace He first instills into their hearts is removed as soon as the error is known. But this is, of course, inconceivable. It is impossible that God would have made an error in eternity, and it is just as impossible that Christ would ever regenerate one that is not His. And since, on the one hand Christ never imparts His grace except to those that are given Him by the Father; and on the other hand it is just as certain that all those given Him by the Father shall surely be saved, it is plain that the theory of a falling away from grace is simply an absurdity, unless the entire reformed conception is discarded. "For whom he did foreknow them he also did predestinate to be conformed according to the image of His Son that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He did predestinate, them He also called, and whom he called them he also justified, and whom He justified them He also glorified."

Hence, we may be assured that this is not the implication of the passage we are discussing.

But let us look at the text. It reads as follows: "For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify unto themselves the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame. For the land which hath drunk the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them for whose sake it is also tilled, receiveth blessing from God; but if it beareth thorns and thistles, it is rejected and nigh unto a curse; whose end it is to be burned."

Let us notice in the first place that the passage is naturally divided into two parts. The first part, verses 4–6, contains a simple statement of fact, of the fact, namely, that some persons may fall so deeply that their conversion

and repentance is a hopeless case. The second part, verses 7–8, offers the explanation of this fact by means of an illustration. Let us briefly consider each of these parts.

It is plain that in the first part of the text the author gives us a picture of persons that once lived in very close proximity to the realm of God's grace. If Scripture were not so emphatic in its denial of a falling away from grace, and in its insistence upon the perseverance of the saints, we would receive the impression that the author gave us a picture here of saints that fell away. Now, however, it is evident that the persons referred to are living in close contact with the realm of God's grace, while they are no true participants of that grace. They are members of the church, of course, for them the author is addressing. Perhaps they even occupied a very important position in that church. Judging, at least, from the predications we find about them in the text, they were not of the least in the church of Christ. The author says that they were once enlightened. They had an understanding of the truth, perhaps, they obtained a deep insight into that truth, so that they could be guides to others and were a blessing to many a child of God. Neither was it a mere, cold, objective enlightenment which they possessed, a knowledge that did not at all stir the heart and quicken the spirit, for the text tells us that they even tasted the good Word of God. They had a taste for the truth of God. They had a good appetite and the Word tasted good to them. Still more. They tasted of the heavenly gift. Undoubtedly, this expression refers in general to the gift of grace in Christ Jesus, to all the blessings of grace there are in Him for His people. Of this they tasted. It does not say that they were satisfied with them, but they tasted of them. They had some conception of their inherent joy, and they could even feel the joy they caused to those that believe and appropriate these blessings. They tasted, too, of the powers of the world to come. They had an idea of the glorious kingdom Christ would establish in the future. They could picture to themselves the beauty and the power of that kingdom. And as they drew the picture of that kingdom before

their imagination they could rejoice in such a manifestation of glory and bliss. And last but not least, they were made partakers of the Holy Spirit. And that by Holy Spirit the Spirit as He dwells in the church is meant becomes plain from chapter 10:29 of this same epistle, where the writer evidently refers to the same persons, and tells us that they were sanctified in the blood of the covenant, and that they do despite unto the **Spirit of grace**. Of this Spirit of grace they were made partakers. Of course, not in the saving sense, for then they could not fall away. But we must remember that the Spirit is poured out into the church, and that it is thru that Spirit that the blessings of grace become the inheritance of the saints. And the meaning, no doubt, of the clause, that these persons were made partakers of the Spirit, is that they lived in the outward realm where the Spirit of grace distributed His blessings. And living in that realm they could not escape the overflow of that Spirit, and the drops of grace fell also upon them. They enjoyed the privileges of that church, they received the instruction of that church, they were baptized with the baptism of that church, they partook of the Lord's supper with that church, perhaps they even were overseers in that church, ministers, elders and deacons. They continually moved about in the realm in which the Spirit operated, and with that Spirit they came into contact even to such an extent that there was a working of the Holy Spirit in their heart. In a word, these people received all the blessings of the church, it seemed.

Yet they fall away. True, the writer does not say in the text that they fall away, but he grants the possibility nevertheless that men may receive all these blessings and yet fall away even from the outward sphere of grace. And he says that if they once fall away it is an impossibility that they ever be brought to repentance again. They become the worst of sinners, the most hardened of rebels against God and against His Christ, they are classified with the bitterest enemies of the Son of God, they crucify the Christ afresh, and they put Him to an open shame. Men that were once enlightened; that tasted of

the good word of God, of the heavenly gift, of the powers of the age to come; that were made partakers of the Spirit of Grace! Men that perhaps were leaders in the church, to whom the smaller children of God looked for counsel; men that were esteemed in the church and that occupied positions of honor and importance, — such men fall away and become open enemies of the cross!

The author explains this phenomenon. He explains why it is impossible for these persons ever to be brought to repentance again. And the explanation amounts, in brief, to this, that the blessings of grace have been a curse to them. He gives us the illustration of a field. Upon that field falls the rain from heaven. Now, rain is in itself a blessing from God; no one would deny this. But what does the author say? That this rain is a blessing for that land if it brings forth herbs meet for them for whose sake it is also tilled. If the seed of good grain is hidden in the soil of that field, and the rain falls upon the soil it will result in causing that good seed to sprout and to produce a splendid harvest. In that case the rain is a blessing. But it may also be that in that field is hidden the seed of the thorn and the thistle, the results of sin and the curse of God over creation. If the rain also in that case fall upon the field it will develop the thorns and the thistles. If it did not rain at all these weeds, of course, would not develop. But now they develop, and that under the influence of the same rain that also caused the good seed to sprout. The very same rain, therefore, may become a blessing and a curse, according to the receptivity of the field.

Now, then, the author means to say, thus it is also in regard to the blessings of grace. If these blessings are showered upon those that have received the good seed in their heart thru the regenerating grace of the Spirit, it will have the result that this good seed sprouts and develops into conscious faith and love and manifests itself in good works to the glory of God. And in that case they are blessings of grace. But if that good seed is not in the heart, if there is nothing

in the heart but the seed that was sown by the serpent in paradise, it will also cause that seed to sprout. The blessings of God's grace, the very same blessings, will emphasize and bring to development the power of sin as well as the principle of new life.

In the one case they are a blessing.
In the other they become a curse!

—Holland, Mich.



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