Defects in the Priesthood, Nature in the Path, and the Mind of Christ

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The Disciples and the Samaritans — Ye Know Not What Spirit Ye Are

Luke 9:51–56 records a moment near the end of the Lord's ministry when the Samaritans refused to receive Him because His face was set toward Jerusalem. James and John, seeing this, asked: Lord, wilt thou that we speak that fire come down from heaven and consume them, as Elijah did? And He turned and rebuked them: ye know not of what spirit ye are.

Was their love for the Lord in question? Almost certainly not. They felt keenly the slight to His dignity. They understood He deserved honour. What they did not understand was where He was going and why — that the days of His receiving up were being fulfilled, that He was going to Jerusalem to die, and that this was not a day of judgment on the world but of grace. They had right feelings at the wrong time, in the wrong direction. Something of nature had intruded into what was otherwise a genuine love and devotion. The flesh had inserted itself and turned right material in the wrong direction.

Defects in the Priests — Leviticus 21

Leviticus 21 gives a detailed list of physical defects that would disqualify a son of Aaron from priestly service: blindness, lameness, a flat nose, one limb longer than the other, broken-footed or broken-handed, humpbacked, withered, having a spot in the eye, the itch, scabs. It is an oddly specific list, and the deeper meaning of each item likely repays careful study. The principle, however, is plain: there

can be a defect in one of Aaron's sons that allows him to eat the holy things but prevents him from ministering those holy things.

Leviticus 22:26–27 gives a clue to the underlying thought: an offering animal must be seven days with its mother before it is accepted for sacrifice on the eighth day. Seven days under nature; then the eighth day — the new beginning, the day of resurrection, the day of the Lord — when it is accepted. The implication is that there is a period in which nature is exerted, during which the offering is not yet suitable. And is that not true of the Christian walk? Is there any of us who carries no defect of nature? Is any act we perform for the Lord entirely free of some admixture of the flesh — some self-consciousness, some desire to be thought well of, some natural affection presenting itself as spiritual?

The lame priest — he can walk, but not with a steady walk. Mephibosheth was lame: he could not go out with David's armies or serve him in any active capacity. But he sat at the king's table. He could partake of the holy things. What he could not do was minister them. And an unsteady walk — the walk of nature intruding — is the lameness that prevents steady priestly service. It is not that service becomes impossible, but that what is rendered is mixed, and the mixture is not acceptable in the same way that the pure offering is.

Unsteady Walking and Where It Leads — 2 Thessalonians 3

Second Thessalonians 3 deals with those walking disorderly — in this case those who would not work and were content to eat at others' expense. Paul does not say put them away from the Lord's table. He does not call it a sin requiring assembly discipline. He says: mark that man, and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. The purpose is recovery, and the act is appropriate to the degree of the failure.

But unsteady walking can develop. It starts with the intrusion of nature into the pathway. It can become a pattern of self-will. That pattern, left unchecked, can

become something that an assembly must address more formally. And left further unchecked, it can come to a point where the assembly must judge it as wicked and put the person away entirely to preserve the Lord's honour. None of this happens suddenly. It all starts with what the disciples showed in Luke 9 — right material handled wrongly because nature intruded. The cure is the same in each case: to have the instructions that are in the Word, to know them, and to walk humbly in them knowing that the flesh ever seeks to intrude.

The Leavened Bread in the Peace Offering — Leviticus 7

Leviticus 7:13 includes leavened bread as part of the peace offering — the communion offering, the offering that speaks of worship. That is remarkable. Leaven in Scripture speaks of sin, or of that which is of nature, working its way through what would otherwise be pure. And here it is present in the offering.

The thought is that when we worship, something of nature often mixes in. I give thanks, and the thought crosses my mind: that was rather well expressed. That is nature inserting itself into praise. It does not make the praise worthless — God receives it — but He receives it knowing the mixture is there, as the leaven was present in the peace offering. It is simply the honest condition of those who bring what they have while still in the flesh. It should humble us, not discourage us.

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. — Philippians 2:5

The Mind of Christ — the Only Remedy

Philippians 2:5 says: let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. And the mind that is described is one that went to the very bottom — taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, humbling Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, the death of the cross. There was nothing of nature in the sinful sense to hinder His service as there is in ours. The question is how that mind becomes ours.

Philippians gives the answer across its four chapters. In chapter 1, Christ is our life. In chapter 2, He is our example. In chapter 3, He is our hope and object — the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for which Paul counted all things lost. In chapter 4, He is our joy and strength. It is by having Christ Himself before us, by meditating on His Word and learning more of Him, that His mind becomes increasingly ours. Not by legal effort, not by resolving to do better, but by the steady occupation of the heart with Him.

Philippians 4:4 and following describe the practical result: rejoice in the Lord always; be careful about nothing; whatsoever things are true, noble, just, pure, amiable, of good report — think on these things. That sustained occupation with what is of God is what keeps nature from getting the ascendancy. The two sisters, Euodia and Syntyche, had been real helpers in the gospel. But something of nature had come between them. Paul's exhortation does not begin with rebuke — it begins with stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved, and ends with rejoice in the Lord always. Christ is the parenthesis around the exhortation. He is the context in which nature's intruding tendencies are subdued.

We carry our defects with us until the Lord comes. Until then, nature always seeks to intrude, whether in the worship of Sunday mornings or in the daily walk. That should not paralyse us — it should keep us humble, prayerful, dependent, and fixed on Christ as the one in whom alone the mind that we need is found.

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