

HOLY RESTRAINT

He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls. (Proverbs 25:28)

There was a time when cities were completely dependent upon walls for their survival. A city with strong walls was a well-defended city. The walls withheld the influx of foreign invaders that would capture the city, loot its resources and leave it in ruins. The walls preserved the life that resided within the city. This proverb directly compares man to such a city that has need of walls, but does not have them. Man's need is due to the onslaught of sins, temptations, lusts, foolish desires, vain ambitions, silly dispositions and reckless actions that constantly assail him. These foreign invaders continuously launch their attack at every man without exception.

Just as man is compared to the city, his rule over his spirit is compared to the city's walls. This rule over his spirit is what can restrain him from ruin. If man has such rule over himself, then he is properly defended as a city with walls. If not, then he is broken down, helpless and quickly overrun. But the reality of man's self-rule and restraint is that he has none. Man is not good; he is not wise, and is by no means capable of ruling himself. O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. (Jeremiah 10:23)

Any man left to his own rule supposing to restrain himself is doomed to total destruction. Man needs walls, but he does not have them. Where can he obtain them? Psalm 37:23 tells us that "the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord". But man is not good and the Lord directs the steps of a *good* man. Since man is not even good enough to take orders, is there any hope?

As Paul in Romans 7:25, I thank God through Jesus Christ, for He is able to save us. Jesus is the only good man, and it is through union with Him by the Holy Spirit that we may be ruled, ordered and restrained by God. Galatians 5:23 tells us that temperance is a fruit of the Spirit of God, not of man. A walk in the Spirit is not merely a desirable option: we must have it if we are to survive. If we do not have this Divine Help, this Holy Restraint, we cannot escape the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. Our "city" will be laid to waste. The only way to save the city and the life within is by a walk in the power afforded only by the Holy Spirit of God. This I say then, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. (Galatians 5:16)

Restraint Taught

Man knows little about spiritual life and the realities of God. We have need of being taught how to walk and live by the Spirit of God. We have to learn how to be led and how to follow.

There are times when God leads us by providence. We can think of times when we were mindful of doing one thing or another, and we were prevented from doing so. It turns out that it would have been to our harm had we been allowed to do it. This was through no restraint of our own. Somehow, we were not sensitive to the leading of God. We were otherwise minded: but God intervened. How gracious it is that He has so prevented us and led us in the right way. However, God does not always do this, and we cannot presume that He will. He clearly expects His people to grow in grace and in sensitivity to the leading of His Spirit, as in Ephesians 4:14-15. There are even times that we can note that God has refused to lead us by providence, allowing us to suffer the sting of the consequences. But by this we see His expectation that we *learn* to follow His lead.

A parent exercises restraint over the child when he is a child so that when he is an adult he may exercise restraint over himself. He does not intend to be the child's restraint all his life. He intends that he learn to care for himself and be subject to the rule of law, even that he may one day so train his own children. God, being our Father, is of this mind.

There are times that even a mature Christian is restrained by the grace of God through providence. He may graciously intervene when we are just too ignorant or weak to follow on our own. But this is not what is desired. I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee. (Psalm 32:8-9)

Restraint Learned

Just as a child who refuses to learn to restrain himself will soon face a world of immeasurable danger, so will the child of God who refuses to learn to follow the leading of the Spirit. It is the Lord Who must lead; we must follow and learn to be sensitive to His leading. We do this by our submission to Him and His instruction, correction, rebuke and reproof. We must also learn to be observant, as to where the Lord leads, and especially to where the Lord refuses to allow us to go. We are expected to identify such occasions of hindrance and learn from them; they are a lesson for us. We should learn to be restrained from forging ahead into ventures where the Lord hinders us.

As we learn, the need to be led by providence, as with a bit and bridle, is diminished. It is not that the Lord never leads us by providence any longer, but that we are expected to respond to what we have already been taught and walk accordingly. We are to be led by the Spirit of God as a man that has understanding and wisdom.

We also learn to be tempered by a Godly fear of finding ourselves, for any single occasion, without God's rule, and so without restraint. Godly fear is a gift from God. It is a result of our budding wisdom and understanding and provides another blessed layer of restraint upon our soul. This Godly fear spurs us into a constant, willful and thoroughly joyful submission which our soul desires as the very breath of our lungs. We learn not to walk out from under the Lord's leading, but to be subject and sensitive to Him. We learn to be led, to follow and to be restrained. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. (Romans 8:14)

Restraint Observed In Christ

The exhibition of holy restraint upon man is found in Christ, who was in flawless subjection to the Spirit of God. Christ was led by the Spirit in all things, making Him perfect so that that the enemy could not find one way to prevail against Him.

Christ did not follow the call of His own pleasure. He did not even yield to the demands of His most basic needs. He was subject to the life and the walk mandated by the Holy Spirit. He followed the lead of the Spirit, though it meant suffering hunger, sorrows, cold and heat, as someone who had no home.

He sought no other love or approval than His Father's. His obedience, subjection to the authority of God's word and demand for truth guaranteed that He would be reviled. He rejected any exercise of authority which would have exalted Him in the flesh. More than once, men would have made Him a king, but He would exalt only the Father by His obedience and constant subjection.

He did not prematurely dispose of His enemies and their nuisance. His life was an endurance of their temptations, assaults and cruel mocking. He waited for the Father's appointed method and hour to secure His victory.

He refused to submit to the love of His own life. He drank the cup appointed to Him by the Father, in spite of its immense horror that provoked Him to plead its removal. His unswerving obedience led Him to the strangest and vilest of places: becoming our sin and suffering the wrath of His Father. Contrary to His own will and understanding, He yielded so fully to the Father that His anguished soul lamented "Why hast thou forsaken me?"

His life and walk was led by the Holy Spirit. His steps were ordered by God. He was led and He followed: the result is a risen, victorious Christ Who has forged for us perfect, insurmountable walls of defense. His lead and rule stand over us as a high and mighty tower, an impenetrable wall about us against which the enemy cannot prevail. Without Him is nothing but death, destruction and desolation. But in Him are wisdom, life, peace, joy and victory forever.

- Gary Gatch