

THE REIGN OF LAW

Romans 6. — “*First pure, then peaceable*” is a divine principle which has many illustrations. The world at large will only arrive at peace when it has been purified by the terrible doings of the Prince of Peace, who will be as a refiner’s fire and fullers’ soap, before he speaks peace to the people. The individual application of the principle is that which mostly concerns us at the present moment. Purity must precede glorification. It is written of the Holy City:

“There shall not enter therein anything that defileth.”

The list of excluded persons includes “*drunkards, revilers, extortioners, fornicators, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind*” (1 Cor. 6:9). Nothing is more incontrovertible in our most holy faith, than that righteousness of a high order is indispensable to secure approval at the hands of the Judge of the quick and the dead. A continuance in sin in any form is fatal to our prospects in relation to that great day when every man will stand nakedly revealed in the presence of men and angels.

This is the lesson brought out in the chapter read, in which are certain collateral aspects of the question interesting to follow. In the fifth chapter Paul had said,

“The law entered that sin might abound: but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.”

This, at first sight, strange statement, yields some beautiful ideas when closely considered, as is the case with all scriptural things. Paul elsewhere says—

“I had not known sin but by the law.”

This is true; for “*sin is the transgression of the law,*” and “*where there is no law, there is no transgression.*” A short-sighted philosophy says, “The more is the pity, then, that there ever was a law to transgress.” “Away with the law,” says this philosophy, “and we shall get rid of the sin and all its consequences.” A short-sighted philosophy indeed! How would it do applied to common things? We see a criminal walked off to prison. If there were no law in England, he could not commit crime, for it is the breaking of the law that constitutes crime, and brings him into the clutches of the policeman. Shall we say, then, “Abolish the law that we may get rid of crime, and so save many a human being the pains and penalties resulting”? This would be the folly of those who, in their presumption, criticise God. No, no; in getting rid of the law, we should not only get rid of the consequences of breaking it, but of all the excellent consequences attending the keeping of it. We should get rid of security, and peace, and property, and life. There must be law. There can be no good without it. Existence itself springs from and continues by conformity to law. Without law, there would be chaos, confusion, and every evil thing. The lawless critics who would get rid of God, would be the first to bemoan their calamity if the sun took to rising at uncertain hours, and keeping away for uncertain days together. Suppose for a change, the condensing vapours of the atmosphere forgot to condense and deprived us of rain, or took to raining up instead of down? The creatures who consider not the operations of the Almighty hand would make a great outcry for the re-establishment of law, even if the rain is sometimes disagreeable and the sun hot. Stability of law in the physical and moral, gives a basis for the peaceful development of rational well-being; and it operates to this result by the very pain which its infraction causes. In a family where law is maintained, you have whipping and tears, but then you have also the sunshine after the rain—the beautiful spectacle of obedient, intelligent, cheerful children, whose society is not a nuisance. In families where there is no law, the children escape the rod, but they get something which is a thousand times worse—the misery of undeveloped minds and wilful, wicked dispositions, which repel sympathy, and lead at last into all sorrow. There is no finer spectacle on earth—it is the beauty of heaven itself—than complete and intelligent submission to law, the disobedience of which is known to bring evil consequences. Away from law, there is nothing but chaos and death. It is, therefore, a madman’s criticism to find fault with the introduction of law because it leads to sin.

“The law entered that sin might abound,” not for the sake of sin, but for the sake of what sin would give an opportunity of developing: for *“where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.”*

We cannot doubt that God foresaw as a consequence of introducing law—first in Eden, then at Sinai—that *“all the world would become guilty before Him,”* and, therefore, utterly lost, giving the opportunity for His kindness to come into play, with the result of drawing eternal gratitude and glory to Himself, and conferring unspeakable and appreciated benefit on such as should be redeemed. But does He show this kindness by dropping the law out of sight, and doing the offenders good irrespective of its condemnation? By no means. This would have been worse than admitting man to life without law at all in the first instance. God came to the rescue on the principle of upholding the law to the uttermost. By His Son, He did what we could not do. In our nature, He fulfilled the law. The Son came for this purpose, *“to do Thy will, O God.”* “Mere man” could not do it.

*“What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, **God** (hath done) sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.”*

The Son said,

“Think not that I come to destroy the law and the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.”

And fulfil them he did to the letter; and then what? Died for those who had failed—took upon himself the curse which the law imposed upon them. This God required at his hand: *“to lay down his life for the sheep”*; by this only, under His arrangement, could the sinning sheep live. The law was upheld. Christ died.

“Through the Eternal Spirit he offered himself without spot unto God.”

Christ was then raised and offered to sinners as a meeting point with God. Belief, acceptance and love of him, submission and obedience to him, are the conditions under which God is pleased to admit perishing sinners into relation with Himself. We look to the uplifted serpent and are saved from the serpent’s bite. We believe in him as God’s appointed sacrifice for sin, and as the fountain of every blessing covenanted in the promises to the fathers, and take upon us his name, and God extends forgiveness of past sins, and promise of life through Christ in the kingdom and age to come. The law is upheld: yet it is all of grace; we could not claim such a glorious arrangement. We were condemned. There is no room for boasting. Yet we are saved by obedience. The glorious result is achieved, that God is magnified as the source of all the benefit, while sinners are justified by believing; and with the answer of a good conscience, and the joy of immortality, ascribe all the glory to God—*“for of Him, and to Him, and through Him are all things.”* But this point of glory could not have been reached without the law entering that sin might abound, that where sin abounded, grace might also much more abound.

Paul then introduces a question which needed to be asked in his day. There was a class who said that since the death of Christ had taken away sin, and his resurrection secured justification for those who believed, it was a matter of indifference how believers lived. Consequently they are said to have indulged in wicked practices while adhering to the faith of the gospel. John warns the brethren against this class. He says,

“Little children, let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil” (1 John 3:7).

“Whosoever,” he says again, *“is born of God doth not commit sin.”*

“Shall we,” says Paul, *“continue in sin that grace may abound?”*

This question anticipates the possibility of someone turning upon him and saying, “If the entrance of sin has led to such glorious results, is it not a good thing for sin to continue?” “*God forbid,*” is his answer. It is like everything else pushed too far: it destroys itself. Grace would not abound with such a continuance in sin, but *“indignation and wrath and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil”* (Rom. 2:9).

“If we sin wilfully after we receive the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries” (Heb. 10:26).

Paul meets the question with another, which we do well to consider:

“How shall we that are dead to sin continue any longer therein?”

Here Paul brings baptism to bear in an important relation.

“Know ye not that as many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into his death?”

This, in the connection of the words, directs special attention to the purpose of the death in which we take symbolic part by baptism.

“He died to take away our sins.”

If so, how shall we who have fellowshiped his death, continue the evil it was designed to remove? There is great logic in this argument. Having been buried with Christ in baptism, we are, so far as moral obligation goes, dead unto sin, that we should henceforth no longer live the rest of our time in the flesh, but to the will of God (1 Pet. 4:2). Dead unto sin, we are *“alive unto righteousness.”* Hence, those who are truly born of God, sin not. They are men of holiness; men who adorn the doctrine of God in all things. Having been planted together in the likeness of his death, it is theirs to realise in their risen state, the likeness of his resurrection, —

“That like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, they also might walk in newness of life.”

“Reckon ye yourselves,” continues Paul, *“to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto righteousness.”*

“Let not sin reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.”

*“Being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your **fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.**”*

Moral regeneration is therefore characteristic of all who shall be saved.

“Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.”

Even as John the Baptist, when he came preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, called upon the people to—

*“Bring forth **fruits meet for repentance.**”*

Without this, baptism is null and void. A knowledge of the gospel is not enough. There must be that love of all things to which it pertains, which will cause it to germinate like good seed in the mind, to the production of abundant fruit. If the knowledge of the truth fail to beget the new man in the heart of the sinner, the baptism following his knowledge is not a birth. It is a mere performance of no benefit to him, but rather to his condemnation.

It ought, therefore, to be seriously considered by all who contemplate that step, and by all who are called upon to assist them, whether there is evidence of death to sin before arrangements are made for burial. The burial of a living man is cruelty. It were better for the sinner to leave God's covenant alone than to make a mockery of it. Let him ponder well his state and his ways. *“Let the sinner forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts,”* before he comes in this matter *“to the Lord our God, who will abundantly pardon.”* Let him *“repent,”* before he is baptised for the remission of sins. Then will he be received as a son with blessing, and his days guided unto life eternal—that is, if his circumspection continue. In Christ he must grow and prosper, *“increasing in the knowledge of God,”* *“always abounding in the work of the Lord.”* He must not be a slothful servant. He must not go to sleep on rising from the watery grave to newness of life. He must not delude himself with the idea that now that his sins are forgiven, and his connection with Christ made sure, he has nothing more to do. A delusion of this sort will be fatal. His connection with Christ is

made sure, but not his salvation. His connection with Christ will prove a terrible thing if he receive not Christ's approval on the day of account. His salvation has to be "*wrought out with fear and trembling*" (Phil. 2:12), "*lest he come short of it*" (Heb. 4:1). He has to make his "*calling and election sure*" (2 Pet. 1:10). The justification of which he is the subject at his baptism does not ensure glorification. It but reinstates him in the position from which Adam fell. This was the position of probation, which, had Adam continued obedient, would have ended in eternal life. So in Christ, if we walk worthy of the position to which we are called, "*as obedient children, not fashioning ourselves according to the former lusts in our ignorance,*" continuing patiently in well-doing to the end, we shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. A right understanding of the matter will, therefore, increase care on the part of those obeying the truth, instead of diminishing it. The danger is that we tire in the long silence and darkness of the night in which our lot is cast. This would be a great mistake. What else is there of hope? Naught besides. If we surrender this, darkness irretrievable is our inheritance; away from God, there is no redemption from the vanity of present existence. But there is more than deprivation to fear. There will be Divine wrath to encounter, and this in the mildest form is a fearful thing. It were better for us never to have known the way of life than to turn from the holy commandment after it has been delivered unto us (2 Pet. 2:21).

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31).

There is terror as well as goodness connected with the Truth. The goodness of God leadeth us to repentance; but if we continue not in His goodness, it were better for us not to have been born.

There is no condemnation to them who are in Jesus Christ, who **walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit**. There is condemnation to all others. All will be condemned who walk after the flesh, even though they be in Christ. The day that comes will be a day of judging every man according to his works, whether good or evil. Those who walk after the flesh will die (Rom. 8:13). They will reap corruption (Gal. 6:8).

"Tribulation, and wrath, and anguish will be on every soul of man that doeth evil . . . in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Christ Jesus" (Rom. 2:9, 16).

"Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord," says Paul, *"we persuade men."*

For such as walk humbly and do justly in the Lord, there is forgiveness for shortcomings and offences. The intercession of Christ is a great consolation for them. It is not available for those who walk in sin; who live according to the course of this world, and whose affections are set on the things of the earth, instead of those things where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. "*To this man*" will God look, not to the man who loves the world and the things therein, and who has no response for the things that are of Christ; but "*to the broken and contrite in heart, who trembleth at His word.*"

"He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation."

Such has this great consolation that, though for the meantime subject to the bondage of hereditary mortality, "*the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made him free from the law of sin and death,*" as will be made visible on the day when Christ shall proclaim all his sins forgiven, and change his vile body, and fashion it like unto his own glorious body. This will be to **the glory of his grace**, who hath made us accepted in the beloved. It will be all of God, for "*what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, that God (hath done) in sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, that for (or on account of) sin he might condemn sin in the flesh.*" Consider this, ye who say Christ was "a mere man." It is because "mere man" could not do the work, that Christ appeared—Emmanuel—God with us.

"God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."

The "**arm of the Lord**" has been outstretched in him to do what we mere men could not do. The law was holy, just and good; nay, it was "*ordained unto life*" (Rom. 7:10), but the weakness of "mere man" made it powerless. Being disobedient from the cradle, he found it unto death, for it cursed him if

he diverged from it in any particular. But though man was weak, God was strong, and being (in Christ) *“made flesh,”* he fulfilled the law and the prophets, and earned the triumph secured by resurrection. Dying and rising thus he constitutionally destroys the curse of the law.

“God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.”

He was made sin for us, who knew no sin. In his own body, he bore our sins on the tree. Thus was the law vindicated and God’s way magnified, and man saved by faith in the slain Lamb of the Passover.

“O, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed to him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things; to whom be glory for ever. Amen.” (Rom. 11: 33-36).

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