

We Know That the Law Is Spiritual

"Do we make void the Law? . . . Rather, we establish the Law!"

The Law, says Paul, was "Holy, just and good" (Rom. 7:12). He says it was "ordained unto life" (Rom. 7:10). Like David (Psa. 119:77, 97), he said he "delighted in the Law" (Rom. 7:22). But elsewhere he calls it a "ministration of death" (2 Cor. 3:7), a "ministration of condemnation" (2 Cor. 3:9) and a "yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1). He notes this apparent paradox:

"Is the Law sin? . . . Was then that which is good made death unto me?" (Rom. 7:7-13).

Can we blame the Law for sin and death, and the failure of man to attain to the life which was ordained by the Law? In both cases he immediately answers, "God forbid!" or more correctly, "Let it not be!" Do not entertain such a God-dishonoring thought, for the Law was a holy ordinance of God. He says,

*"We know the Law is spiritual; but **I am carnal**, sold under sin."*

The Law was ordained to life. It was man who failed. The Law had its perfect fulfillment in Christ. It was designed for him, and he for it. *But the Law could not give life to even a perfectly righteous man without first an atoning death.* This arose from a condition previous to the Law, which the Law itself was powerless to correct. At the very moment of birth, the Law recognized the condemnation that man was born into, and the penalty already due.

Even for the birth of Jesus, Mary must be unclean 33 days and then offer a sin offering—*"A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."* Those turtledoves had no efficacy except in the sacrifice they foreshadowed. *"The Law made nothing perfect,"* but it **signified the way by which perfection must come.**

It may be said that even Christ himself came under the curse of the Law, for *"Cursed is everyone that hangeth upon a tree"* (Gal. 3:13). This is true, and is one of the marvelous details of the working out of God's wonderfully intricate plan, but here again *it was sin, and not the Law, that was to blame.* This particular ordinance of the Law was perfectly just. But sin banded together and hanged an innocent man. The Law did not contemplate the hanging of the innocent. Only sin could do that.

And here is one of the places where we can legitimately make a distinction between the spirit and the letter. The obvious spirit and intention of the Law was, "Cursed is everyone that is *deservedly* hanged on a tree." Christ, personally in character, was free from the slightest shadow of a stigma of this curse in its true intention.

Did he then just come under the letter and not the spirit of the curse, and forfeit the life to which the Law was ordained by an unjust legal technicality? This would not be a fitting ingredient in God's great and glorious plan. His death was to declare the *righteousness* of God, and this could not be done by merely fulfilling *the letter* in violation of the *spirit*. God's arrangements are not technical and mechanical, but living and in harmony with truth.

As a strong, sinless, voluntary representative and covering for his weak but humble and repentant brethren, Christ's sacrifice was beautiful and just. He became a curse for us, not merely when the technicality of the breaking of the Law was fulfilled in the actual crucifixion, but when he freely presented himself in obedience to the Father's will as the Redeemer on whom the history and destiny of the race was centered.

"Our old man is crucified with him" (Rom. 6:6).

There was no technicality about the curse on this old man. The crucifixion on the

cross was the symbol and climax of a life-long victory in the crucifixion of the flesh. That flesh came under the just condemnation of the Law, and hung upon the tree in perfect justice.

These thoughts arise from a consideration of Deut 22. With David we are led to exclaim, "*Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy Law!*" (Psa. 119:18).

Verse 1: "*Thou shalt not see thy brother's ox or his sheep go astray, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt in any case bring them again unto thy brother.*"

The meaning of "brother" here has the same broad, liberal intent that Christ placed on the word "neighbor," for in Exo. 23:4, the same command is worded—

*"If thou meet thine **enemy's** ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it to him again. If thou see the ass of **him that hateth thee** lying under his burden, and wouldst forebear to help him, thou shalt surely help him."*

Could a law of this character be found in force anywhere in the world today? What of the so-called Christian nations who seek to pervert the Old Testament into a justification of their ungodly wars? God's people went to war at *God's* command for purposes that *God* decided, and at *God's* command they be refrained. When God commanded Zedekiah and the children of Israel to submit to the domination of the wicked Nebuchadnezzar, they brought God's anger and punishment upon themselves by a misguided resistance. They felt that, in the wars that God had previously sanctioned, they had ample justification and precedent, **but they did not grasp the underlying principles**. They only had half the picture, and they destroyed themselves in misguided zeal.

It is the principles behind the commands that we must grasp and apply. The Law was holy, just and good. Christ came, not to destroy it, but to fulfill it in all its beauty. "*Do we then make void the Law?*" asks Paul (Rom 3:31). Again that same emphatic, "God forbid—Let it not be so!" "*Rather, we **establish** the Law.*" And he explains that God, through Christ—

*"Condemned sin in the flesh: **that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us**" (Rom 8:3-4).*

The principle in the first command in Deut. 22 is identical with the principle of Jesus' beautiful words on the Mount—

"Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you."

This is the new-old commandment that Jesus brought—new in that it has so rarely been used or understood, old in that they had had it from the beginning.

V.5: "*The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth to a man, neither shall a man put on woman's garments; for all that do so are an abomination unto the Lord thy God.*"

This word "abomination" is a very strong term. It denotes utter abhorrence. The principle here is crystal-clear. Each sex has its proper place in the all-wise arrangements of God, and each in its place is beautiful and fitting and a glory to God, but for either to attempt to fill the position that God has designated for the other is intensely displeasing to Him. The world, in a misguided zeal for what it terms equality, uses all its powers to destroy the individuality and distinction and complementary harmony that God has created in making man and woman. "*In all its works, the world knows not God.*"

V.8 "*When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house.*"

Responsibility—"Am I my brother's keeper?" The principle here is that we *are* responsible for others to the extent that our actions do or could affect them. We think of Jesus' solemn

words:

"Whoso shall offend—or cause to offend—one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea" (Mt. 18:6).

And Paul's inspired commentary upon this:

"If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth" (1 Cor. 8:13).

*"It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, **nor anything** whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak" (Rom. 14:21).*

We cannot run away from this heavy responsibility.

"None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." (Rom. 14:7)

Every action, **and every failure to act when action is called for**, will have its effect upon others which we must answer for. It is easier to build a house without a parapet around the roof. It has certain advantages. We may feel quite safe ourselves, but God says that *in whatever we build, the protecting wall must be there for the sake of others who may not be as surefooted or as quick to perceive the dividing line as we.*

V.9: *"Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seed."*

Here again the principle is unmistakable—

*"Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seed, lest the fruit of thy seed which thou hast sown, and the fruit of thy vineyard, be **DEFILED**."*

"The seed is the Word of God," said Jesus. *"If any man preach any other Gospel, let him be **accursed**."* Hard words indeed, but they are not ours: they are the necessary words of warning from God. In all the world, there is no hope of life except in the true seed. Whoever contributes in the slightest way to the contamination of that seed is *a murderer*, however exalted his intentions may be. This is a matter of life and death. **Very, very few things in this world really matter or are important, but here is one that is vital.**

Whoever we cannot conscientiously welcome to the table of the Lord has another Gospel. We dare not encourage them, nor bid them Godspeed. It is neither kindness to them nor ourselves, nor faithfulness to God, to allow the seriousness of the issue to be lost in a haze of ill-advised fraternization. We are stewards and custodians of something far more important than ourselves. Great plainness of speech is called for, although at the same time great kindness and forbearance.

It is always easy to condemn and destroy, but to build takes time and work. Those who by nature are firm have a natural tendency to be harsh and bitter: those who by nature are soft have a tendency to be weak and compromising. Whatever comes naturally to us must be distrusted, for in our flesh dwells no good thing. There are no natural virtues. The flesh lusteth against the Spirit. **To pride ourselves on our natural reactions—whatever they are—is to glory in our shame.** We are only safe when we are consciously restraining nature and following the Spirit's expressed instructions contrary to nature.

V.10: *"Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together."*

"Doth God take care for oxen? or saith He it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written" (1 Cor. 9:9-10).

An ox and an ass—clean and unclean, a true believer and one with another Gospel. Can

they plow together? Can they have joint activities? Can they join hands in anything and expect God's favor and blessing? What saith the Scripture?

V.11: *"Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts, as of woolen and linen together."*

A variation of the same basic principle, with certain different aspects. What could possibly be wrong with a mixture of weaving materials? God is simply *driving home the same old lesson*—purity, separation, holiness—over and over again, even to the point of not mixing in their clothing—a mixed covering—a mixed protection—a mixed dependence—*wool and linen*: the natural, fleshly, animal covering, or the Spirit's white garment.

If God is our covering, it must be God alone. We must choose, and be faithful to that choice. *"I would that ye were hot or cold!"* Be all the way inside or all the way outside. To stand in the doorway discourages those that are inside and hinders those that are outside. It is belittling to God's Holy Truth, and a mockery of God. How often that lesson is repeated and still it is so hard to learn!

—G.V.Growcott