

# THE DEATH OF LEGAL HOPE



ABRAHAM BOOTH (1734-1806)

# THE DEATH OF LEGAL HOPE

## *AND THE LIFE OF EVANGELICAL OBEDIENCE*

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# Dedication

To the church of Christ assembling in Little Prescott Street,  
Goodman's Fields, London, England.

*“We are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.”—Romans 7:6*

Beloved in the Lord, you have already heard from the pulpit the substance of the following essay; and at your request, it is now made public. The subject, it must be admitted, is highly interesting; but, as to the execution of it, you and my readers in general must judge. This, however, I may venture to affirm: that experimentally<sup>1</sup> to know the truths it contains is to be truly wise; and to live under their sacred influence, enjoying the consolations arising from them, is to be substantially happy. I trust you will ever esteem it your indispensable duty and inestimable blessing to hold fast the form of sound words and to maintain the truth as it is in Jesus (Eph 4:21). Then, while some professors of evangelical doctrine<sup>2</sup> are verging towards Arminian<sup>3</sup> legality, and others towards antinomian<sup>4</sup> licentiousness,<sup>5</sup> it will be your happiness to be preserved from those wide and fatal extremes—so preserved that, while you steadily assert the honors of grace in the salvation of sinners, you may not neglect the interests of holiness; that while you delight in the gospel as the word of salvation and the food of your souls, you may revere the law as a transcript of your Maker's will and the rule of your obedience to Him.

You will do well to remember that the true honor and the real excellence of a Christian church consist not in the number or affluence of its members, not in anything that may dazzle the eye or command the respect of superficial observers, but in its cordial adherence to the truths of the gospel and the ordinances of Christ in their primitive purity; in the exercise of mutual, fervent love among its members; and in a holy, heavenly, useful, conversation.<sup>6</sup> These con-

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<sup>1</sup> **experimentally** – experientially.

<sup>2</sup> **professors...doctrine** – people who profess to believe in the Christian faith.

<sup>3</sup> **Arminian** – pertaining to the theology of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), Dutch theologian, born in Oudewater, the Netherlands. He rejected the Reformers' understanding of predestination, teaching instead that God's predestination of individuals was based on His foreknowledge of their accepting or rejecting Christ by their own free will.

<sup>4</sup> **antinomian** – Greek *anti*, “against,” and *nomos*, “law”; “against law.” It generally means one who holds the theological view that God's law has no place in the life of a believer. See *The Law and the Saint* by A. W. Pink (1886-1952), available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>5</sup> **licentiousness** – disregard for morality; preoccupation with lustful desires.

<sup>6</sup> **conversation** – lifestyle.

stitute the principal glory of a church. In proportion as these abound, the Redeemer is honored and believers are edified. In proportion as these abate,<sup>7</sup> the glory departs, and the interests of religion decline.

That you may have a growing acquaintance with divine truth in all its branches, and an increasing affection one to another for the truth's sake; that the life, fervor, and amiable simplicity of primitive Christianity may be conspicuous in your worship and conduct; that faith may abound in your hearts, and the fruits of righteousness adorn your conversation—is the sincere desire and earnest prayer of

Your affectionate friend and willing servant in the gospel of our common Lord,

—A. Booth, *July 18, 1770*

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<sup>7</sup> **abate** – diminish.

# THE DEATH OF LEGAL HOPE

## AND THE LIFE OF EVANGELICAL OBEDIENCE

### An essay on Galatians 2:19

*I through the law am dead to the law,  
that I might live unto God.*

## Introduction

The words that contain the important subject of the following essay are part of that epistle which was written by Paul to the Galatian churches. It may not be improper, by way of introduction, to observe that in his letter to those churches we have an ancient piece of sacred controversy, and that the truth vindicated in it is interesting to the last degree. For the great question here debated is, in the words of Job, “How should man be just with God?” (Job 9:2). In the management of that controversy, the great apostle proceeds, under the conduct of inspiration, with all the fire of godly zeal (Gal 3:1), with all the affection of a tender parent (Gal 4:19), with all the meekness of heavenly wisdom (Jam 3:13), and I will not say<sup>8</sup> with all the accuracy of logical disputation, but, which is infinitely superior, with all the certainty of infallibility.<sup>9</sup>

Paul was an indefatigable<sup>10</sup> laborer in the vineyard of Jesus Christ, and a successful preacher of the everlasting gospel. He was abundantly useful in the execution of his apostolic office, in turning multitudes of sinners from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Yet, after all his unwearied labors and all his unparalleled success, he did not assume the least share of honor. His language is, “Not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1Co 15:10). Nor was he backward<sup>11</sup> to acknowledge—after all the sufferings that he had sustained and all the works that he had performed for the sake of his divine Master—that, as a saint, he was less than the least; but as a sinner, the first and the chief (Eph 3:8; 1Ti 1:15).

Perfectly sensible that he was utterly unworthy in the sight of his Maker, and that his hope had no support but sovereign grace<sup>12</sup> as revealed in Jesus; being well acquainted with the infinite purity of a righteous God, and the sublime demands of His holy Law; he could accede<sup>13</sup> to no terms of acceptance, nor acquiesce in any doctrine, that did not provide as well for the honor of

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<sup>8</sup> **I will not say** – it so obvious that it has no need to be stated.

<sup>9</sup> **infallibility** – state of not being capable of error.

<sup>10</sup> **indefatigable** – tireless.

<sup>11</sup> **backward** – reluctant.

<sup>12</sup> **sovereign grace** – God’s unmerited favor freely shown, as by a king, according to His will (Rom 9:15-18).

<sup>13</sup> **accede** – agree.

divine justice as for the safety of the guilty soul; which did not maintain the rights of a holy Law and display the riches of unbounded grace.

Such was the faith he possessed, and such was the doctrine he preached. These truths were dispensed by him among the Galatians, and with a considerable degree of success. Sinners were converted and churches formed in Galatia by the instrumentality of this excellent man.

For a time, they lived in mutual peace and regarded the doctrine that Paul had taught as of heavenly origin. They rejoiced in hope; they ran well (Gal 5:7) and seemed to bid fair for obtaining the prize. Such were their happy circumstances for some time after they received the gospel! But, alas, how soon the face of things was altered (Gal 1:6)! How soon, for many of them, their views of the grace of God, and of their justification<sup>14</sup> before Him, were darkened! For Satan, that arch-enemy of God and man, quickly began to sow the seeds of destructive error, and to raise up instruments to propagate a perverted gospel. He transformed himself into an angel of light, and pleaded the necessity of obedience to the Law in order to acceptance with God. Thus were they deceived, under a specious<sup>15</sup> pretense of greater sanctity and of a more than ordinary zeal for the divine commands. Paul had described the righteousness of Christ as the one thing needful for the justification of sinners, and they had regarded it as the only ground of their hope. But they became afraid to trust this alone, supposing it insufficient.

They were taught by the false apostles, and were persuaded in their own deceived hearts, that they were under the necessity of seeking a supplementary aid from their own duties. This doctrine, so flattering to their own vanity, so favorable to human worthiness, and not including professed rejection of Christ and His work, they received with all readiness. For it is much more agreeable to the pride of nature, and a far more popular way of seeking acceptance with God, to use our own skill and exert our own endeavors, as coefficients<sup>16</sup> with divine grace and the great Redeemer, than to rely entirely on the righteousness of another, and be absolutely beholden to a foreign,<sup>17</sup> undeserved assistance.

They entered, therefore, on a vain pursuit of happiness in this plausible and self-pleasing, but delusive, method. They clave<sup>18</sup> to the Law. They relied on their own duties, as copartners with Jesus, in performing the greatest of all works, in obtaining the noblest of all blessings: their justification before the Almighty. The awful consequences of which were: they embraced another gospel, made void the necessity of our Lord's death, and virtually renounced all interest in Him (Gal 1:6; 2:21; 5:2, 4). By such a procedure, they became debtors to do the whole Law, and were liable to<sup>19</sup> its dreadful curse (Gal 5:3; 3:10). Besides, having discarded the glorious truth that Paul preached, they traduced his character, they renounced his fellowship, and treated him as their enemy (Gal 4:16).

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<sup>14</sup> **justification** – justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein He pardons all our sins (Rom 3:24; Eph 1:7), and accepts us as righteous in His sight (2Co 5:21)—only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us (Rom 5:19) and received by faith alone (Gal 2:16; Phi 3:9). (*Spurgeon's Catechism*, Q. 32) See Free Grace Broadcaster 187, *Justification*; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>15</sup> **specious** – having the ring of truth, but actually false; deceptive.

<sup>16</sup> **coefficients** – things which work together to accomplish a purpose.

<sup>17</sup> **foreign** – of another person.

<sup>18</sup> **clave** – adhered.

<sup>19</sup> **liable to** – original was *obnoxious*, replaced throughout this text for modern readers.

Such were the malignant effects of receiving a corrupted gospel! These effects the good apostle beheld with a mixture of indignation and of sorrow. Against their destructive and fatal mistakes, he therefore takes up his pen and makes a resolute stand. The false apostles he considers as their greatest enemies and as being, in a peculiar manner, accursed of God (Gal 1:8-9). He made it appear, by such a determined opposition to their plausible and prevailing tenets,<sup>20</sup> that when the capital<sup>21</sup> truths of the gospel were corrupted, the peace of the Christian injured, and the souls of men endangered, he had no fear of the hideous charge and popular clamor of bigotry to his own way, or of rashness and a want<sup>22</sup> of charity<sup>23</sup> for others.

In this respect, as in his ministerial conduct in general, he is worthy of imitation by all the succeeding servants of Christ. For, though it be their indispensable duty to speak the truth in love, and to follow peace with all men; yet, when the great doctrines of divine revelation are perverted or denied, then they are called in providence, then they are required by the command of God and the love which they bear to the Lord Redeemer, to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3). Nor ought they to regard the persons of men, or fear the consequences that may attend a zealous and prudent defense of the truth.

Happy had it been for the church of Christ in following ages if the errors espoused and propagated by the ancient Judaizing teachers<sup>24</sup> had ceased to exist from the time that their strenuous patrons left the stage of action. But, alas, the same temper and spirit still continue, and still prevail. True it is that names are changed, and the terms of the question then in debate are greatly altered. Now, none professing Christianity pretend to maintain the necessity of circumcision in order to acceptance with God. That is universally esteemed an obsolete rite, though by some of old accounted of great importance under the Christian economy. Notwithstanding, the same principle on which the Judaizing Christians proceeded in maintaining the necessity of circumcision is still retained and operates in various ways.

The grand question then was: In what does that righteousness consist, for the sake of which a sinner may be justified before God? And the article in controversy between Paul and his opponents was: Whether the obedience of Christ, without any addition whatever, *was* that very righteousness? Or whether some doings or endeavors of their own were not necessary for that important purpose? Paul maintained the former; the Jewish zealots the latter. To this one point may the disputations of Paul with the deceived Galatians on the article of justification be reduced—as is obvious from the contents of his epistle to them.

As the same dispute still continues in the world, and as the words which afford matter for the present essay are happily adapted to cast light on this very interesting subject, it may be no unpleasing, perhaps no unprofitable employ, to consider the capital ideas contained in them. May the unerring Spirit illuminate the mind and guide the pen of the writer, that he may not prove an ignorant patron of error, but a well-informed advocate for truth! May the same infallible<sup>25</sup> Guide smile on this feeble attempt for the good of the reader, that the minds of the ignorant may

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<sup>20</sup> **tenets** – doctrines.

<sup>21</sup> **capital** – chief; first in importance.

<sup>22</sup> **want** – lack.

<sup>23</sup> **charity** – love.

<sup>24</sup> **Judaizing teachers** – false teachers who demanded Christians be circumcised and keep the law, as well as follow Christ (Gal 2:4).

<sup>25</sup> **infallible** – not capable of error.



be instructed, the consciences of the unawakened alarmed, the hearts of the disconsolate comforted, and real holiness promoted in all into whose hands these pages may come!

## 1. What Law Is It to Which the Apostle Was Dead?

Our first inquiry must be: What law does the apostle speak of when he says, “I...am dead to the law” (Gal 2:19)? To this question we may obtain satisfaction by consulting the context. There is the highest reason for us to conclude that the law intended here is the same he repeatedly mentions in the sixteenth verse of the chapter: “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Gal 2:16; see Rom 3:20).

Now, it is evident that it is the Moral Law<sup>26</sup> to which we universally are inclined to look for justification and life, though by it we can never obtain those invaluable blessings. When a sinner is awakened out of carnal security<sup>27</sup> and his conscience alarmed with a sense of guilt, he naturally looks either to some devout and penitential<sup>28</sup> exercises of his heart, or to some pious and beneficent<sup>29</sup> actions of his life. Some performances or endeavors of his own engage his attention and yield a deceitful support for his hope. “What shall *I do* to be saved?” is his language.

With this, the apostle was perfectly acquainted. He therefore repeatedly affirms, “By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” This being an article of great importance—and the legal bias of our minds being so ready to lead us astray—he does not content himself with barely asserting that we cannot be justified by it, but he also assigns the reason, affirming that it is impossible for the Law to justify any man because it is become weak through the flesh (Rom 8:3), or through the corruption of nature. Human depravity renders utterly impracticable a perfect, personal conformity to the divine Law; and, without a complete obedience, justification by it is absolutely impossible.

That it is the Moral Law which Paul intends appears from the opposition there is between the *works* of that law concerning which he speaks, and the *faith* of Jesus: “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ.” Now, that law—and its works to which the faith of Christ is directly opposed—must be the Moral Law, because the ceremonial institutes contained a principal part of the gospel of the ancient church. Christ in His person and offices, Christ in His grace and work, was prefigured and signified by them. To Him they had an invariable respect, and in Him they had their final completion.

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<sup>26</sup> **Moral Law** – Historically, Christian scholars have seen a distinction between moral law, civil law, and ceremonial law in God’s Law given to Israel by Moses. Moral law defined action that is by nature right or virtuous in line with God’s created order. Civil law governed relationships between men in Israel’s society. Ceremonial law structured Israel’s life and worship to prefigure truths of Christ, the gospel, and His church.

<sup>27</sup> **carnal security** – natural sense of well-being based on man’s self-confidence and ignorance of God’s wrath against sin.

<sup>28</sup> **penitential** – expressing sorrow for sin.

<sup>29</sup> **beneficent** – kind; benevolent.

Yes, believer, that very Jesus Whom you love and adore and that very grace in which you trust and rejoice were exhibited in typical<sup>30</sup> rites as the hope of guilty sinners and as the joy of enlightened saints. Consequently, the ceremonial law cannot be considered as placed in contrast by the apostle to Christ and to faith in Him. It follows, therefore, that it is the Moral Law he intends when he says, “I am dead to the law”—for it may, with strict propriety, be placed in such a contrasted view. This Law and the works of it are directly opposite to grace, and to faith in a Redeemer, for it makes not the least comfortable discovery to a miserable sinner. It knows nothing of pardoning mercy. It says not a word about atoning<sup>31</sup> blood. Being the formula of that covenant which was made with man in a state of innocence,<sup>32</sup> it makes not the least abatement<sup>33</sup> in point of duty, nor the least provision in a way of mercy in case of failure. Perfect obedience is its constant demand, an obedience personal and perpetual. Whatever mercy the sinner needs, whatever blessings God bestows, are provided in another covenant; are dispensed in another way.<sup>34</sup>

That the Moral Law is here intended appears from a parallel passage in the writings of Paul relating, as here, to his own experience. “I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died” (Rom 7:9). “I was alive”: I supposed myself righteous and thought myself safe, in virtue of my own obedience. But I was then “without the law”: I was far from being acquainted with its vast extent and its high commands. For when the commandment came, shining on my understanding in its purity and operating on my conscience with power, sin revived, and I died to self-righteous hopes. Thus the letter, the Law that was inscribed with God’s own hand on tables of stone, killeth—as the infallible author asserts in another epistle (2Co 3:3, 6). Such, then, is that Law to which the apostle was dead.

However strange this doctrine may appear to any self-righteous professor, we may venture to affirm that no man—after all his resolutions and all his efforts—can ever experience a sense of pardon or enjoy peace in his conscience, can either live to God in holy obedience here or have a well-grounded hope of glory hereafter, till he knows what it is to be dead to the Law. This truth I shall endeavor to prove and illustrate in the following pages.

## 2. Unregenerate Sinners Alive to the Law as a Covenant

### A. Alive to the Law

The Moral Law may be considered either as a covenant of works or as a rule of conduct. In the latter view, it is as unchangeable as that relation between God and man on which it is found-

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<sup>30</sup> **typical** – representing something else as a symbol with similar characteristics.

<sup>31</sup> **atoning** – that which brings reconciliation by paying the debt owed for an offense.

<sup>32</sup> **formula...innocence** – reference is to the Covenant of Works: God’s arrangement with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before the Fall that they would have blessed privileges as long as they did not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and terrible consequences if they did (Gen 2:16-17). The principle is of blessing or curse from God dependent upon what man would do. See *The Covenants of Works and of Grace* by Walter Chantry, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>33</sup> **abatement** – reduction.

<sup>34</sup> **another covenant...way** – the Covenant of Grace is God’s gracious, eternal purpose of redemption, conceived before the creation of the world, first announced in Genesis 3:15, progressively revealed in history, accomplished in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the benefit of which is applied to all that believe in Him (Gen 3:15; Gen 12:1-3; 2Sa 7:5-17; Jer 31:31-34; Gal 3).

ed—and therefore never to be disregarded, as I shall endeavor to show in its proper place.<sup>35</sup> As a covenant of works, it is to be considered not only as prescribing duty, but as promising a reward on condition of perfect obedience, and as guarded by a penal sanction denouncing eternal death against every offender. Now, it is to the Law thus considered that the apostle says, “I am dead.” When a person is described as dead to the Law, it is implied that he was once alive to it—that his former hopes of justification and life by it are now extinct; and that, as a covenant, it ceases to have any further demands upon him, or to pronounce<sup>36</sup> any threatening against him.

We shall make the first of these particulars the subject of our inquiry in the present section. When the apostle says, “I am dead to the law,” the expression implies that he was once alive to it. Death is a privation of life. No man therefore can, with propriety, be considered as dead to the Law if he never was alive to it. Prior to regeneration,<sup>37</sup> all men are alive to the Law; or, in other words, they seek justification by it. Their hopes are founded upon it, their expectations of acceptance with God, and of life eternal, arise from their obedience to it. Such are the hopes of every unregenerate man.

This is the way that nature teaches; this is a method that pride encourages. Man being originally formed for the Covenant of Works, and fitted to live by his own righteousness, being endowed with capacities to persevere in holiness and to enjoy happiness by such a constitution—it is no wonder that, in his fallen and unregenerate state, he should have no conception of living to God, or of obtaining salvation by a covenant of an entirely different kind. Our first parents—while innocent, having no need of that merciful provision which is made for sinners in the Covenant of Grace—had no revelation of it. Consequently, after the Fall, they could have no conception of any such thing, any further than the great Creator was pleased to reveal it.

Now, as all the human race are the posterity of that apostate<sup>38</sup> pair—and we, descending from them, as formed for a covenant of works, and as breakers of it—we not only derive a corrupt nature from them, and are exposed to divine wrath (Eph 2:3); but when reason begins to operate we naturally cleave to the legal covenant, as to that which is suited to the feeble ray of nature’s light and to those principles on which we act. Though nothing but sad disappointment has attended man’s endeavors in this way; yet, when guilt pains his conscience, not being acquainted with any other support against despair, his pride still flatters him with a prospect of better success by means of new exertions.

Yes, no sooner are we conscious of guilt and alarmed with apprehensions of impending ruin, than we flee to the Law for relief. Sorrow for past transgressions, and sincere obedience for the future—the forsaking of our evil courses, and the espousing of a religious profession—are esteemed the most probable means of procuring the pardon of sin and the salvation of our immortal souls: especially if we have some respect to the general mercy of God, and a partial regard to the atonement<sup>39</sup> of Christ, as fully supplying the defects attending our own obedience, or as in-

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<sup>35</sup> In the final section of this booklet: “The Law as a Rule of Moral Conduct to Believers.”

<sup>36</sup> **pronounce** – original was *denounce*, replaced throughout this text; our author uses *denounce* as “proclaim a threat or curse”, but his use of the word with an object (“denounce any threatening”; “denounce a curse”) could be ambiguous to modern readers.

<sup>37</sup> **regeneration** – God’s act of creating spiritual life in a sinner by the Holy Spirit’s power.

<sup>38</sup> **apostate** – fallen.

<sup>39</sup> **atonement** – literally *at-one-ment*; the condition of being reconciled with another; theologically, atonement means reconciliation with God by removing or covering the guilt of sin; this was accomplished through

clining the Deity to make proper allowances and be propitious<sup>40</sup> to us with regard to our many unavoidable infirmities. Ready we are to imagine that, as the Law requires obedience and promises a reward to the performer of it, a sincere endeavor to do the best we are able in our present circumstances (though we can scarcely hope to arrive at perfection) will be condescendingly<sup>41</sup> regarded by a merciful God—regarded as an undoubted indication of an upright heart, and as a sufficient foundation on which to proceed in applying to us the merits of Jesus Christ.

## **B. The Law as a System of Merit**

Thus we make our well-meant endeavors to obey the Law a kind of pedestal on which the general mercy of God and the conditional merit of Christ may be erected to display themselves with advantage in rewarding the worthy, and in distinguishing those who have already so well distinguished themselves as the observers of the Law and the friends of piety. In case of any relapse into scandalous offences, those who are alive to the Law suppose the remedy is obvious. They readily conclude that there must be something added in kind, number, or degree to their penitential and religious exercises—for example, sorrowing more bitterly, praying more fervently, giving alms more liberally, and performing every religious duty with a greater punctuality and warmer zeal. Thus they think to commute<sup>42</sup> with divine justice, or to quit scores for their offences by their duties.

In consequence of such a procedure, they are either elated with pharisaical pride or overwhelmed with desponding fears—with pharisaical pride when possessed of a high conceit of the excellence of their duties and the safety of their state. When they imagine themselves to have performed the conditions required, be they greater or less, they cannot but congratulate themselves on their happy attainments in holiness and the glorious prospects they have in view. Their own free-will and the strength of their moral powers are the idol to which they bow. They offer sacrifice to their own net and burn incense to their own drag (Hab 1:16).<sup>43</sup> They look down upon the common herd of mankind with a supercilious<sup>44</sup> disdain—wondering, in themselves that creatures of an immortal make should act so ignobly and beneath the man, that they should not assert their native dignity as rational beings, and perform their part no better as moral agents. They suppose that it only requires a good resolution in the immoral and profane to break off their vilest courses, to attain virtuous habits, to perform the conditions required in order to eternal happiness, and finally receive the promised reward.

Or, admitting that such persons do acknowledge their obligations to divine assistance in attaining virtuous habits, in performing righteous acts, and in making them differ from others, and even from their former selves; yet—while they are looking to these holy qualities and righteous deeds as being either the cause or the condition, more or less, of their acceptance with God, or of their interest in Jesus Christ—they are alive to the Law and bound to perform the whole. However amiable in their tempers and conduct, or excellent in their characters among

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the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. See Free Grace Broadcaster 227, *The Atonement*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>40</sup> **propitious** – favorably inclined.

<sup>41</sup> **condescendingly** – in a manner as descending or stooping to the unworthy.

<sup>42</sup> **commute** – negotiate.

<sup>43</sup> **drag** – net drawn along the bottom of a body of water to catch everything in its path.

<sup>44</sup> **supercilious** – haughtily contemptuous.

their fellow creatures—however they may please themselves, or be applauded by others—their state, in the estimate of heaven, is the same with his in the parable who said, “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men” (Luk 18:11). The aggravated fault and fatal mistake of this Pharisee did not consist merely, nor principally, in preferring his own state to that of other men in general, or to that of the publican in particular; for he expressly acknowledged his obligations to preventing and assisting grace that enabled him to avoid the sins and to practice the duties he mentions. For surely it never can be esteemed such an aggravated crime for any person of a religious character and becoming conduct, when he reflects on the vicious practices of many, to say, “God, I thank thee that I am not guilty of such enormous crimes, that I am not abandoned to such evil courses, and lost to all sense of divine things. The seeds of those abominable iniquities, I acknowledge, are deeply sown in my constitution; and that they have not sprung up to such a malignant height, is owing to thy restraining grace.” Such language may be used by the humblest Christian or the highest saint without giving any occasion for blame.

The fault, the awful mistake, of the Pharisee principally lay in trusting to that difference, in pleading that preference, in the important article of justification before the tremendous God. Here he was chargeable as an extravagant boaster. Here he was condemnable as a vile offender. For whatever comparative worthiness he might possess in the sight of men, yet, in the momentous affair of acceptance with his offended Maker, he should have ranked himself with the worst of publicans and the most abandoned villains. He, being a sinner, ought to have considered himself as having no other righteousness on which to depend, than what would be equal to their wants,<sup>45</sup> and bring salvation to their souls, were it applied to them—for, in that grand concern, the eternal Sovereign has no regard to anything short of an absolutely perfect righteousness. But of this the Pharisee was destitute as well as the publican. For whatever difference may subsist between man and man as to moral character and religious performances, it has not the least concern in their justification. Of this, the poor deluded self-justifier was ignorant—for, though he did not pretend that he was naturally any better than others, though he did not pretend that his works were meritorious or done in his own strength, yet he supposed that he had, by the assistance of grace, performed the condition on which the pardon of his offences and his acceptance with God were suspended.<sup>46</sup>

Such was the state of this Pharisee; and such, when most promising, are the hopes of all who are alive to the Law. When they think of appearing before the great Judge of the world, they look to their own holy desires and pious endeavors to relieve their anxious minds. In this way is their peace of conscience, such as it is, obtained. This is the method in which they seek to make and preserve their peace with that sovereign Being, Whose majesty they have affronted and Whose laws they have broken. To the Law they appeal, and by it they must stand or fall.

### **C. No Consolation**

When, on the other hand, this way of seeking comfort fails to afford relief, when a reflection upon their pious performances and penitential exercises yields no consolation, then a sense of guilt overwhelms them with desponding fears. The Covenant of Grace with all its cheering promises, the blood of Immanuel with all its atoning efficacy, are overlooked or, if not entirely overlooked, will afford them no peace while alive to the Law. For as it is the righteousness of the

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<sup>45</sup> **wants** – needs.

<sup>46</sup> See Dr. John Owen (1616-1683), *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, chapter xvii.—A. Booth

Law only with which they are acquainted; so it is in that righteousness they desire to be found. It is that on which they principally rely; and, without that, they esteem every other thing insufficient. Persuaded they may be that as their own obedience is greatly imperfect, so they cannot be saved without some assistance from Him Who hung on the cross, or without some gracious indulgence from the mercy of God. But, at the same time, neither the atonement of Christ nor the mercy of heaven will support their minds any farther than they suppose themselves to have performed the condition, or come up to the terms, on which they imagine that assistance is granted and this mercy exercised. So that all their hopes, and all their comforts, are ultimately resolved into their own duties—into that by which they suppose themselves to differ from the altogether worthless and vile.

Hence, it is evident that the peace of conscience which such persons enjoy is founded on their ignorance of the evil of sin, and of the wrath which it deserves. When, therefore, at any time its awful demerit appears to a greater degree than it commonly does, their consciences are pressed with guilt and racked with terrors. Amazement seizes their minds and horror chills their blood. Their cry is, “Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” (Isa 33:14). Nay, if some fresh opiate be not administered to conscience, or the Spirit of God divorce them from the Law and show them a better covenant, their souls will choose strangling rather than life. Such is the case of a sinner who is alive to the Law, when guilt burdens the soul and conscience sharpens her sting.

#### **D. Application**

Let the thoughtless transgressor and the self-righteous professor consider their state and reflect on these alarming facts. Whether my reader be the one or the other, his state is dangerous. Is he one of those careless mortals whose whole time is employed in making provision for the present life, and to fulfil the lusts of the flesh? He is no less under the Law; he is no less subject to its awful curse—though he never thinks about it. But can you rest, inconsiderate sinner? Can you be satisfied in such a condition? Can you imagine that your Almighty Maker and Supreme Judge will be forever as forgetful of you as you are at present forgetful of Him and of His worship? Can the Omniscient overlook you? Or, can He Who declares, I “will by no means clear the guilty” (Exo 34:7), suffer you to sin with impunity? No! While His nature is holy and His Word is true, while He hates sin and has power to punish, it cannot be! You may sleep in your sins for a time, but, if grace prevent not, your damnation will not, cannot, slumber (2Pe 2:3). And awful indeed will be your condition if you continue to sleep till fire and brimstone awaken you. “Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest [He] tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver” (Psa 50:22).

The rich man in the parable (Luk 16:20-31), being in hell, lifted up his eyes; and then were his eyes opened. The bewitching pleasures of the world had lulled his conscience asleep. His elevated station in life became a continual prompter to his vanity, and enabled him to riot in the luxuries of sense. Earthly things engrossed his whole attention, engaged his whole life, and left him no time to think about the state of his soul or the God that made him. The downward road in which he walked—being broad and easy and much frequented—he did not consider where it would terminate till his fleeting moments were all elapsed and his state was utterly desperate. Thus he became a damned soul and lost his all before he apprehended his danger. Beware, reader, lest this should be your case! May the children of this world and the sons of carnal pleasure

be effectually warned by this dreadful catastrophe of their unhappy brother so that they come not into the same place of black despair and endless torment!

Or is my reader a serious person and possessed of an abiding concern for his immortal soul? Permit me to ask: Are you alive to the Law and seeking by your own obedience to gain acceptance with the high and holy God? If so, hear your doom! Behold your danger; for thus the Lawgiver Himself determines the case: “As many as are of the works of the law, are”—what? Pardoned? Accepted? Blessed? Far from it! They are, on the contrary, “under the curse” (Gal 3:10). “Amazing!” cries one. “That avowed rebels against God and the open breakers of His Law—that these who publish their sins like Sodom, and hide them not as Gomorrah—that all such should be under a curse appears equitable. But that persons who are of the works of the Law; who sincerely endeavor to perform its commands, and are looking, in this rational and popular way, for acceptance and eternal life; that they should be in such an awful situation is quite inconceivable and highly unreasonable!”

To which it may be replied: “Ah, those who are of the works of the Law are under it as a covenant. As such, it requires perfect obedience; and perfect obedience it must have, or there is no justification by it.” Now, the apostle, in this alarming passage, takes it for granted that every man has offended and broken the Law. Consequently, those who are under it as a covenant, not having abstained from *every* sin and performed *every* duty, its penal sanction<sup>47</sup> lies against them, and it proclaims a curse upon them. The awful declaration, therefore, is the language of strict propriety, is the voice of truth itself.

How often shall the Most High declare that no flesh, that no mortal, shall be justified before God by the deeds of the Law or by his own obedience to it before you give credit to the solemn assertion or believe the humbling truth? Is the condition of your justification so small or your ability so great that nothing will serve but you must perform it yourselves? Remember, deluded mortals! Remember that pardon of sin is a blessing so immensely rich, acceptance with God is a favor so extremely high, that if all the cattle on a thousand hills were your own, and, together with the first-born of your bodies, were they devoted to make an atonement for the sin of your souls—were you to give all your goods to feed the poor, and your bodies to be burned—all, all would be entirely unavailing to procure either the one or the other. For a righteous God cannot accept the performances or the offerings of a sinful creature as a compensation for the injuries done by his crimes.

Besides, it is the province of grace, and the work of Christ only, to grant the pardon of sin and to render our persons accepted. This is the capital truth of the Bible, the central point in which the lines of divine revelation terminate. Yet if, after all, you will appeal to the Law, to the Law you must go. But remember, that in so doing, Christ shall profit you nothing (Gal 5:2, 4). So...you have no alternative, but to keep it perfectly, or die eternally.

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<sup>47</sup> **penal sanction** – legal penalty.

### 3. Believers Dead to the Law as a Covenant

#### A. Conviction

We have seen in the preceding section that unregenerate sinners are alive to the Law as a covenant. We now proceed to show that believers are dead to it under that consideration. “I am dead to the law.” You are dead to the Law, says the apostle (Gal 2:19; Rom 7:4). As all who are alive to the Law seek justification by it—as their expectations of acceptance with God may be ultimately resolved into some doings or endeavors of their own, some gracious habits or heavenly qualities of which they suppose themselves to be the subjects—so those who are dead to the Law are entirely divorced from every such expectation. These are indeed well acquainted with the beauty of holiness and far from despising a regular<sup>48</sup> conduct, and they would exert their utmost efforts in a way of duty to God, and earnestly desire to bear a greater conformity to the Redeemer’s image. Yet they consider these things as standing in another place, and as designed to answer a very different purpose from that of being causes or conditions, more or less, of their justification. Yea, whatever assistance they may have from the Spirit of truth in performing religious duties, or whatever may be their attainments in holiness through a divine influence, they consider those duties and this holiness as totally distinct from that righteousness on which they depend, from that obedience by which they are justified.

Once, indeed, they were of another mind and viewed things in a very different light. Time was when they thought highly of their own righteousness and were little concerned about an interest in Jesus Christ. But, by the agency of the divine Spirit and the instrumentality of the divine Law, their case is happily altered. They are brought to see their abject poverty and to acknowledge their utter unworthiness. Is the reader desirous of knowing by what means a sinner becomes dead to the Law as a covenant? The great apostle informs us when he says, “I through the law am dead to the law.” The Moral Law in the hand of the Spirit is the honored instrument of producing the happy change. By it the awakened sinner discerns the immaculate purity of the divine nature and the consummate rectitude<sup>49</sup> of the divine will. Its precepts and prohibitions, containing a complete system of duty, are beheld by him as entirely correspondent with the perfections of God. He beholds the unalienable rights of the great Legislator in the demands of His Law. A discovery of that perfect correspondence which there is between the requirements of the Law and the eternal rights of the Deity evinces to his conscience the holiness and transcendent excellence of the Law.

Possessed of such a conviction, the sinner perceives not only its unblemished purity, but also its vast extent. He is obliged to acknowledge that it requires truth in the inward parts; that it extends to all the thoughts and all the desires of the heart; that it demands not only a course of obedience unblamable in the eyes of man, but a purity of desire and a spirituality of affection, a rectitude of design, and a perpetual series of actions, without a failure and without a flaw in the sight of Omniscience. By the Law, he sees the hateful nature and the destructive evil of sin. Sin is a transgression of the Law, a contrariety to the revealed will and to the holy nature of God (1Jo 3:4). Nor does it only manifest what sin is in itself, but also what it deserves. It reveals the wrath of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (Rom 1:18), against every departure

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<sup>48</sup> **regular** – orderly; law-abiding.

<sup>49</sup> **consummate rectitude** – perfect uprightness.



from absolute perfection. It proclaims an awful curse and unsheathes the sword of divine justice against every transgressor. Its language is, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal 3:10). It fastens a charge of guilt on the sinner’s conscience and binds him over to eternal punishment.

As the Law teaches a sinner the holiness of the divine nature and the superlative evil of sin, so he is brought by divine influence to acknowledge the equity of that sentence proclaimed against him, and the righteousness of God in the damnation of sinners. His mouth is stopped; he pleads guilty before his Judge. Sin, he perceives, is an infinite evil and justly deserves everlasting punishment. He is convinced that if the sentence of death pronounced upon him were to be executed in all its rigor, he should have no reason to complain. His language is, “The Law is worthy of God. My Maker is righteous; damnation is my due.” Beholding the aggravations of his offences and the imperfections of his duties, the depravity of his heart and the spirituality of the Law, he despairs of ever obtaining the favor of God, or peace for his conscience, by any future exertions. He sees with amazement, and confesses with grief, the pride and the folly of his former expectations of righteousness and life by the Law. He lies low at the foot of sovereign mercy. Fully convinced of his absolute need of a Savior Who can give the Law its demands and rescue his perishing soul from destruction, Who can satisfy the claims of justice and exercise boundless mercy, he is willing to be justified by the righteousness of Christ—and to be forever indebted to free, distinguishing, infinite grace.

Let us hear the great teacher of the Gentiles deliver his own experience in reference to this affair. “I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died” (Rom 7:9). “I was alive”: elevated with a fond conceit of my inherent excellencies and moral endowments, I imagined myself safe, I thought myself happy. But when this delusive persuasion possessed my heart, I was without the Law. Though *for* it I professed the highest regard, though *to* it I endeavored to conform my life, I was entirely ignorant of its spiritual nature and without the least knowledge of its true design. As the most learned and admired doctors<sup>50</sup> of the age had taught, I supposed that a superficial observance of the duties it enjoins, and an exterior forbearance from the actions it prohibits, were all it required (Mat 5:21-22, 27-28, 33-34, 43-44)!

“But when the commandment came”: when I saw its immaculate purity as an image of the divine holiness, and beheld its extensive demands as a transcript of the divine will; when I viewed it as demanding perfection with a sovereign authority, and heard it denouncing vengeance as with the voice of God against the least offence, my sin revived. A clear and lively sense of sin penetrated my very soul. I saw myself chargeable with innumerable transgressions. I felt myself subject to many abominable corruptions. My heart, of whose purity I was before so ready to boast, I found to be deceitful above all things and desperately wicked (Jer 17:9). The best of my actions, in which I was wont to confide, appeared but splendid sins; and in reference to justification before God, I despised them as worthless and vile. In consequence of which I died. My self-righteous hopes, which before had reared their heads aloft, were now dashed in the dust. The sentence of death, as the desert of sin pronounced by the Law, I acknowledged to be just. All my pleas, all my expectations of life by the Law, were then struck dead.

Nor did I only renounce my past performances and present attainments as insufficient and deplorably defective in the account of a holy God, and in the eye of His righteous Law, but also

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<sup>50</sup> **doctors** – scholars.

despaired of ever doing anything in the future, by any assistance whatever, to gain the favor of my Judge or to obtain acceptance before Him. So that every self-righteous support was entirely removed, and every avenue to comfort, by my own obedience, eternally barred.

Thus it was with Paul after all his sincerity and all his obedience before conversion. And thus it is with every sinner who is brought to the knowledge of the true God, and perceives the purity of the divine Law—for no man beholds the grace of the gospel who does not acknowledge the equity of the Law. We shall never consider salvation as divinely free, till we confess our condemnation to be entirely just. But when the purity of the Lawgiver is seen in the flaming holiness of His Law; when it proclaims its curse against the sinner; and when his own conscience—being stung with guilt—confirms the dreadful sentence, and with an awful emphasis replies, “Thou art the man” (2Sa 12:7); then the relief provided by grace and revealed in the gospel is beheld with an ardent desire, is embraced with exuberant joy. Thus, by the agency of the Holy Spirit, the Law subserves the gracious design of the gospel. Yes, the righteousness and terror of legal sanction are happily useful to illustrate the freeness, and to exhibit the sovereignty, of saving grace.

The sinner, being brought, by divine teaching, to see the insufficiency of his own obedience—and to renounce his former hopes as being no other than a refuge of lies—is filled with anxious inquiries how he may escape the wrath to come. Having tried every expedient that presented itself to his mind, as any way proper to afford relief to his guilty conscience; and finding every expedient fail—he is ready to faint with fear and to sink in despondency. He drops every pretension to personal worthiness and freely acknowledges himself the chief of sinners. So far is he from advancing a claim to heaven on the footing of duty performed, that he is amazed he was not long since transmitted to hell for his crimes.

## **B. The Gospel**

But grace forbids that he should be overwhelmed in despair. That same Spirit by Whose omnipotent agency he was divorced from the Law leads him to Jesus. Now that sovereign mercy, to which he submitted with such reluctance, appears with a winning aspect. Now that boundless grace, which he has so long despised, shines with peculiar glory. To that mercy, as revealed in the atonement, he flees like a murderer pursued by the officers of justice, or like the unhappy manslayer of old before the avenger of blood (Deu 19:6). On this grace, as reigning by Jesus Christ, he rests his all for eternity.

Now the everlasting covenant begins to unveil its infinite stores to his ravished view, and the gospel pours its healing balm into his wounded conscience. The crucified Jesus is now his only hope. That he may “win Christ, and be found in him” (Phi 3:8-9) is all his salvation and all his desire. Riches and honors, crowns and kingdoms, are little, are nothing, to him compared with an interest in the Redeemer. Being dead to the Law, he renounces himself in every view, reflecting on his former ignorance and pharisaical pride with the greatest amazement and the deepest self-abhorrence. Finding an all-sufficiency in the adored Immanuel—not only to supply his wants,<sup>51</sup> but to make him infinitely rich and eternally happy—he rests completely satisfied. The perfect obedience of his divine Substitute<sup>52</sup>—which is revealed in the gospel and received by

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<sup>51</sup> **wants** – needs.

<sup>52</sup> **Substitute** – one who takes the place of another (2Co 5:21). See Free Grace Broadcaster 207, *Substitution*, and *The Heart of the Gospel* by Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892); both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

faith, being that in which Jehovah Himself delights—is an adequate ground for his confidence and an inexhaustible source of his joy.

Such is the state and such are the views of all who are dead to the Law. Having such a discovery of the divine purity and of the divine Law, he is far from boasting over the vilest of men. The more he knows of God, of the violated Law, and of his own sinful state, the more is he convinced that he has reason to say, “Behold, I am vile” (Job 40:4)! Yet he dares, as in the presence of God, to contemplate the holy commandment and to give conscience her full scope, without fear of confusion; being well persuaded, however aggravated a charge may be brought against him, that grace has provided and the gospel reveals a righteousness which is quite sufficient to declare the justice of God in justifying him, even in the worst view he can have of himself—nay, which is incomparably more, in the worst view in which he can appear before the Omniscient. Though he once imagined that the conception of a just God and the fear of eternal misery were absolutely inseparable, yet he now reveres the former without dreading the latter.

### **C. The Scriptures**

That every real saint is dead to the Law, and that his whole hope as to justification centers in the mercy of God and the obedience of Christ—in the grace of the covenant and the blood of the cross—appears from the Scriptures with superior evidence. Out of a multitude of instances recorded in the Bible, we will select a few. We will ask some of the most excellent saints that ever adorned a religious profession in any age of the world, or in any nation of men: On what were their hopes of acceptance with God founded? And we shall find that their uniform answer will be, “Not on anything in us, nor on anything done by us; but on that glorious person, and on His finished work, Who is the desire of all nations and the salvation of the ends of the earth.”

#### **1. Job**

Job, we know, was a saint of no inferior class. He was no less exemplary for his piety than remarkable for his afflictions, and for the patience with which they were suffered. He was favored with peculiar manifestations of the divine will, and Jehovah Himself declared there was none like him in the earth. This eminent saint could not be ignorant of the real worth of his personal obedience, nor of the place in which it ought to stand. No, this obedience he found occasion to plead, and speaks of it as an article of great importance—but where, and on what account? Not before the great Sovereign of the universe, and in order to acceptance with Him; but before his fellow-mortals, and in vindication of his own sincerity. When his friends—not being well acquainted with the methods of providence, and mistaking the true state of his case—charged him with being a hypocrite, and inferred from the variety and severity of his sufferings that he must needs be a wicked man, he pleaded, in defense of himself, the excellence of his conduct and the utility of his life. He, as the apostle James requires, proved the reality of his faith and the sincerity of his profession by his works (Jam 2:18). He knew that a different conduct from the carnal and profane was the only thing that could evidence to the world the superiority of his state in the sight of God, or free his profession from the charge of hypocrisy. To this, therefore, he appeals. This he strenuously and justly pleads against the charge of his mistaken friends in his long controversy with them.

But when the inquiry is, “How then can man be justified with God?” (Job 25:4), then he considers the state of the question as entirely altered. The venerable saint well knew that—as he was before a higher tribunal and in the presence of a Judge Who searches the heart—so the right-

eousness pleadable there must be as much superior to what was sufficient in the former case, as the tribunal at which he stood was more awful, the Judge more holy, or the event more important. For who can stand in any righteousness of his own before so holy a God, before so righteous a Judge? He knew that there nothing short of a perfect righteousness would be admitted; and that by nothing less could he be justified. He therefore entirely renounces his former plea. He drops every pretension to personal holiness; and, so far from advancing a claim on the Deity, he pours out sorrowful confessions of his original pollution and actual transgressions. “Behold, I am vile!” is his language. “I abhor myself”—as the filthiest of creatures, as the basest of criminals—“and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:6; 19:25-27).

Here we see—not the Samaritan woman, not the Philippian jailor, nor the thief on the cross—but the most eminent saint of his day and one of the holiest men that ever lived. Here we see him bearing the marks of deep humiliation in the attitude of a miserable sinner. His language is expressive of one whose conscience is smitten with an alarming sense of guilt, who deprecates<sup>53</sup> deserved vengeance and implores a free pardon—of one who considers himself perfectly on a level, in the sight of God as to justification before him, with the publican in the parable (Luk 18:10-14), and as having no other refuge for his guilty soul, nor any other plea to make, than that publican had. Divine mercy, manifested in a living Redeemer, was the only hope of holy Job; and the same free mercy, revealed in the atonement, was the hope and plea of the profligate<sup>54</sup> publican.

## 2. *David*

Such also was the conduct of the man after God’s own heart. “Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified” (Psa 143:2). This language very strongly expresses the mind of one who is dead to the Law. Yes, these words plainly indicate that David’s heart was deeply impressed with an awful sense of Jehovah’s immaculate purity, the imperfections attending his own obedience, the extensive demands of the divine Law, and the terror of that sentence which was his righteous desert—and must unavoidably be passed upon him, if tried by that sublime standard of duty and according to the tenor of his own conduct. It is very observable that, when the psalmist thus deprecates the awful trial, he considers and styles himself a servant of God. But though he assumes the honorable character, he is far from pleading his services or trusting to his own obedience for justification. Nay, he peremptorily<sup>55</sup> affirms that, before the Lord, no man, no servant of his, can be justified. To these words the apostle refers when he so often declares, “By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified” (Rom 3:20). This is a capital truth, and till this truth be cordially embraced, till the propriety and foundation of it be clearly perceived, no one can form a proper idea either of the character of Jesus or the grace of the gospel—can neither see his danger nor seek for salvation.

With this leading truth, the sweet singer of Israel was thoroughly acquainted. Hence it gains admittance into another of his devout odes and inimitable compositions, in which place he also informs us what was the rock of his hopes and the source of his joy. These are his words: “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared” (Psa 130:3-4; see also 143:2). Instructive, important saying!—

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<sup>53</sup> **deprecates** – prays for deliverance from.

<sup>54</sup> **profligate** – given over to evil, immorality, and extravagance.

<sup>55</sup> **peremptorily** – decisively.

most happily adapted to rebuke the pride of self-righteous confidence, and to raise the hopes of desponding sinners. Here the Lord's anointed flees for safety to sovereign grace, and draws his comfort from pardoning mercy. Being dead to the Law, having all his expectations of being justified by it entirely extinguished, he looks to another covenant and has recourse to another plea. Having the awful judgment in view, and considering the issue of such an exact scrutiny, he trembles at the thought of appearing before his immortal Judge in his own obedience. For in such a way of proceeding, who shall stand? Who can be acquitted? Not one of all the human race!

Were it not for that forgiveness which is with God and is dispensed in the blood of the Lamb, not only the hope of David, but that of every sinner, would have been entirely and eternally eclipsed. But this forgiveness being worthy of God, proceeding from the infinite riches of grace and equal to the wants of the most enormous transgressor, behold, there is hope for the vilest! Forgiveness—delightful word! Forgiveness with God! With Him against Whom we have sinned; with Him Who has authority to pardon, as well as power to punish! This is a solid foundation for your hope, O trembling sinner! Believing this declaration, building on this basis, what should hinder, or who has a right to forbid, that our hope of heaven should be firm as the divine declaration, and bright as the sun in his meridian<sup>56</sup> glory?

Yes, believer, this is your unalienable right; this is your inestimable privilege. For that strong consolation which the Lord is so willing to bestow and for which He has made such ample provision is designed for all those who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them (Heb 6:18). For those who have already fled, and for those who are now fleeing to Jesus, the appointed refuge, the immutability of the divine counsel, the irrevocableness of the divine promise, and the solemnity of the divine oath are all engaged to secure their happiness and raise their joy.

Would the reader be more fully persuaded that the royal prophet was dead to the Law? Let him read the description that David gives of the blessed man, and consider his words. No one can, with propriety, be called blessed, but he who is in a pardoned state and accepted of God; and this the psalmist intimates. For, till his offences be pardoned and his person accepted, he is under a curse and subject to wrath. How, then, does that experienced saint and infallible author describe the blessed man; and to what does he ascribe his justification—to a personal or to an imputed<sup>57</sup> righteousness? Does he attain this blessed and happy state, does he enjoy this great and precious privilege, in consequence of keeping the Law, or because he has performed a sincere, though imperfect obedience? No such thought was conceived in the psalmist's mind; no such thing drops from his pen. His words are, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile" (Psa 32:1-2). The blessed man is here described as one who is, in himself, a polluted sinner, an insolvent debtor, and deeply pressed in his conscience with the burden of guilt.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> **meridian** – noontime.

<sup>57</sup> **imputed** – given by God apart from men's works; put onto one's account apart from one's earning it.

<sup>58</sup> The three terms used in this passage to express the pardoning mercy of God give us these three ideas of sin to set forth in a more affecting view its various malignity: at the same time, to represent in a more striking light the complicated wretchedness of that man whose sins are not forgiven, and to show the superior excellence of free pardon.—*A. Booth*

This blessedness arises not from his own duties, or his well-meant endeavors to keep the Law; but from the pardoning love of God, the purifying blood of Jesus, and the sanctifying operations of the Holy Spirit. His blessedness consists in being cleansed from his loathsome defilement, the non-imputation of his enormous debt, the removal of his intolerable burden, and the renewal of a right spirit within him. The last of which particulars is not the cause or condition of the former, but an evidence of their being enjoyed. The observation that Paul makes on this evangelical and comfortable text is directly to our purpose. He informs us that the design of David in these words is to describe the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works (Rom 4:6-8). Righteousness imputed, “righteousness without works”—an odd kind of language in the account of many, uncouth and mysterious to all who are alive to the Law and seeking justification by it. But it is quite intelligible and highly comforting to such as are dead to the Law; to those who believe in Jesus as the justifier of “the ungodly”; and who venerate His charming name, “The Lord our righteousness” (Jer 33:16). To such persons, the phrases are full of marrow and fatness.

Such divine declarations feast their souls, for they are the words of grace and the language of love. By them, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, their anxious inquiries about acceptance with the eternal Sovereign are satisfied. Being conscious that they have no righteousness of their own, and equally certain that without obedience to the divine Law they cannot be justified, they must have sunk in despair if such a provision had not been made by sovereign grace—if such a righteousness had not been performed by their wonderful Substitute. They need a righteousness without works, one that has no dependence upon, and is entirely detached from, their own duties of every kind; one that is complete in itself and intended for their use. They need an imputed righteousness, being performed for them by Jesus as their representative, and placed to their account by a gracious God. This brings it near to their souls, makes it warrantable for them to call it their own and to glory in it.

### **3. Paul**

Let us once more attend to the dictates, and consider the conduct of Paul, in reference to this affair. Those important words that contain the subject of this essay expressly assert that he was “dead to the law.” It is evident from his writings that he had no expectations of life and happiness from his own obedience to it, but that his whole hope was resolved into the sovereign grace of God and the perfect work of Christ. We shall now consider a few of those passages where these fundamental truths are either expressly asserted or strongly implied.

#### *a. Galatians*

In his controversial epistle to the deceived Galatians, he forms a striking contrast between the works of the Law and faith in Jesus. Thrice he mentions the works of the Law, and thrice he excludes them from having the least concern in our justification. With equal frequency he mentions the faith of Christ, and as often asserts that we are justified by it.<sup>59</sup> These are his words:

We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified (Gal 2:15-16).

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<sup>59</sup> That is, not by the principle or the exercise of faith, but by the object of it, which is Christ and His righteousness.—*A. Booth*

“We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles”: we who are the children of Abraham and the peculiar people of God; to whom the sacred oracles were committed, who have the ordinances of divine worship, and whose situation in all respects is greatly superior to that of the ignorant, profligate, idolatrous Gentiles; we who have so many advantages in comparison with the benighted<sup>60</sup> heathen; we who have all the encouragement that any persons could have, were such a thing possible, to expect justification by our own obedience. Yet we have renounced every hope of that kind, well knowing that a man, whether Jew or Gentile, is “not justified by the works of the law”—being fully persuaded that he is not accepted of God on account of any works which he has done, by any assistance whatever, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, by relying on Him as the end of the Law for righteousness and believing on Him as the justifier of the ungodly (Rom 10:4; 14:5).

“Even we,” possessing such a conviction and acting under such a persuasion, “have believed in Jesus Christ.” Yes, we have renounced our own righteousness as absolutely insufficient, and—under the humbling character of guilty, helpless, perishing sinners—have betaken ourselves to the Lord Messiah that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the Law. That our sins might be pardoned and our persons accepted in this truly evangelical way—no longer desiring, nor any more attempting, to seek these superlative blessings by the works of the Law, either moral or ceremonial. Nor is it without reason that we have abandoned every such pursuit, for God Himself has declared, and it stands on everlasting record to confound every proud attempt to establish our own obedience, that “by the works of the law, shall no flesh be justified.” So that, whether we regard the divine declaration recorded by the psalmist (Psa 143:2), or whether we consider the manifold imperfections attending our best performances, we are fully assured that we never shall, that we never can, be justified by them. Such is the purport of this apostolic testimony.

In this instructive text, the zealous apostle states, asserts, and defends the truth for which we plead in the most emphatic and reiterated manner. This one passage, therefore, if considered in connection with the scope and design of the whole epistle, and the state of the Galatian churches at the time in which it was written, may be justly esteemed a decisive proof of the point—a decisive proof that no man *ever* was accepted of God, that no man *ever can be* justified before Him, by any holiness of which he is the subject, or on account of any works that he has performed; and, consequently, that every true believer is dead to the Law.

#### *b. Philippians*

The views of a man who is alive to the Law, and the hope of one who is dead to it, are finely described by the same infallible author in his consolatory and instructive letter to the church at Philippi. These things he illustrates in his own experience and conduct. The support of his hope and the views that he had before conversion he compares with those he after enjoyed. While alive to the Law and before conversion, the privileges of his birth as a son of the renowned Abraham and his circumcision according to the divine command; the zeal which he had for the traditions of his fathers and the strictness of his religious profession as a Pharisee; his punctual performances of ceremonial institutions; his unblamable conduct in the sight of men; and his sincere obedience to the Moral Law—were the things that he counted his greatest gain, as constituting the foundation of his hope of eternal life. These were the ground of his unwarrantable

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<sup>60</sup> **benighted** – involved in moral darkness.

confidence, and the fuel of his pharisaical pride. If trusting in these things had been either safe or lawful for any mortal, no one had greater advantages or a fairer pretense than Saul the Pharisee (Phi 3:4).

But when apprehended by omnipotent grace (Phi 3:12) and dead to the Law, he builds on another foundation and speaks a very different language. Then he declares that all those things which he once accounted his highest gain, he esteems, not only mean<sup>61</sup> in comparison with Christ, but loss itself. With an air of great solemnity, and as going to utter a truth of the last importance, he adds,

Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith (Phi 3:8-9).

Let us briefly consider the several clauses of this remarkable text. “Yea, doubtless”: I affirm it without the least hesitation, and am determined to abide by it. “I count all things but loss”: whether they be birth privileges or pharisaical zeal, ceremonial rites or moral duties. These, all these, notwithstanding their splendid appearance to an eye tintured with Jewish prejudices, I count but loss. Yea, I do not only thus repudiate all my privileges and all my performances before conversion, but all my apostolic gifts and all my Christian graces; all that I have and all that I do I esteem of no avail in the grand article of justification. These things, though abundantly useful and highly excellent, when standing in their proper places and referred to suitable ends, are little, are nothing, are loss itself compared with the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. Such is the love I bear to my Savior and such the esteem I have for His righteousness, that for His sake I have gladly suffered the loss of all things which once I so highly prized.

Nay, however strange it may seem to a mind that is leavened with legal pride, I again declare that I count them as despicable as the sordid scraps which are thrown to the dogs, and loathsome as dung which is cast out of sight. Such is the amount of my own performances, and such my estimate of them, if set in competition with Jesus and presuming to stand in the place of His righteousness. It is, therefore, now my principal desire and supreme concern that I may win Christ, as quite sufficient to supply all my wants,<sup>62</sup> and to render me completely and eternally happy. Thus, when my Judge ascends the throne, and when none but the perfectly righteous shall stand, I may be found in Him the beloved (Eph 1:6).

“Not having [not depending upon or pleading] mine own righteousness, which is of the law”: my inherent holiness with which as a Christian I am endued, and those righteous acts which I have performed in compliance with divine precepts, and with a view to the glory of God—but being adorned with and depending upon that glorious obedience which is through the faith of Christ; which was finished by Him, is revealed in the gospel, and is received by faith—even that obedience which, to denote its absolute perfection and the way in which it is received by sinners, is called “the righteousness of God which is by faith.”

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<sup>61</sup> **mean** – base; common.

<sup>62</sup> **wants** – needs.



Thus the apostle professes his faith, and thus he describes the foundation of his hope relative to future acceptance. This declaration he made on purpose, to guard the Philippian converts against the subtle attacks of Judaizing teachers (Phi 3:1-2), who strenuously contended that something more was necessary to justification than the righteousness of our divine Redeemer and a reliance upon it. This consideration renders the argument from this passage the more strongly conclusive in proof of our point.

#### 4. *Peter*

Let us hear another infallible teacher<sup>63</sup> and follower of the Lamb, when delivering not his own private sentiments, but the faith of the church in the name of all the apostles. A controversy had been raised about the necessity of circumcision in order to salvation, and it was carried on by the Jewish zealots with no small degree of warmth, and not without much disturbance to the peace of believers. On this occasion, the apostles and elders being convened at Jerusalem to consider the unhappy affair, Peter, after mentioning various things, concludes with a short but comprehensive declaration of his own faith, and the faith of the church in general. Let us attentively hear his words and diligently consider their meaning, for he speaks by the Holy Ghost and delivers the mind of Christ. He speaks on a weighty occasion, and to determine an important controversy. The controversy, in fact, was, whether Jesus only should have the glory of saving sinners, or whether human endeavors and human worthiness ought not to share it with Him? Thus the contest lay between the grace of God and the pride of man; and thus it still continues, however the terms of the question may be varied or whatever disguises it may wear.

The decision given to this controversy in those times, and what will be always valid, is contained in the following words: “But we believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved” (Act 15:11). Salvation is that all-comprehensive blessing which the awakened sinner wants. Let this be granted, and his desires are satisfied; he can have no more—for it includes a complete deliverance from every evil, and the full enjoyment of every good.

#### D. *Grace*

Now, this infinitely glorious blessing is expressly said to be by *grace*; and grace is free favor. In the sacred writings it is directly opposed to all works and worthiness. Nor can it be otherwise, for where works and worthiness come into consideration, there the province of grace ceases.<sup>64</sup> When, therefore, it is affirmed by the oracle of heaven that we are saved by grace, we are led to conclude that our own duties, however sincere or however diversified, have no part in the wonderful work; but that favor—free, sovereign favor—is all in all. The foundation of the spiritual temple, and of our eternal happiness, was laid in the riches of grace. The stones are polished and the superstructure is reared by the hand of omnipotent grace. When the last stone in the magnificent edifice shall be laid, it will be with shoutings, “Grace, grace unto it” (Zec 4:7).

It was free, sovereign grace that distinguished the vessels of mercy in the eternal decree of election. The reason why they were chosen rather than others is to be resolved not into any difference there was originally between them and those that finally perish, nor into any good works

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<sup>63</sup> **infallible teacher** – Not that Peter was personally incapable of error, but that his apostolic writings by the Holy Spirit in Scripture are infallible.

<sup>64</sup> *Gratia non erit gratia ullo modo, nisi sit gratuita omni modo.* Grace is not grace in any way, unless it is free in every way. (quoted from Synod of Dort, *Acta Synodi Nationalis Dordrechtanae, 192*)—*A. Booth*

foreseen, but into the sovereign will of Him Who says, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy” (Rom 9:15).<sup>65</sup>

The same grace was concerned in the constitution of the everlasting covenant of peace, which was made with Christ as the Head of the chosen seed; and in treasuring up all spiritual blessings in Him on their behalf (Eph 1:3). Our redemption by His blood, our regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, and final felicity all spring from the same infinite source, and are all ascribed in the volume of inspiration to the same original and glorious cause. Christ being the great trustee of the Covenant of Grace and the grand repository of all the blessings of grace, infinite grace is manifested through Him in such a manner as to reflect a glory on all the perfections of Deity, as well as to secure salvation to all its objects. As it was an act of unutterable condescension and an evidence of boundless love in the Son of God to undertake the arduous work and become incarnate<sup>66</sup> that He might accomplish it, so we are, with great propriety, said to be saved by His grace—as in the text under consideration: “We believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved” (Act 15:11).

“We believe”: we are fully persuaded and rest in it as a certain, sacred, and most comfortable truth, that though our state be extremely miserable and our persons absolutely unworthy;

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<sup>65</sup> The doctrine of sovereign, distinguishing grace, it must be acknowledged, is too generally exploded as a fiction. It is now discarded as not fitted to gain the assent of the free inquirer in so enlightened an age as the present. The opposers of it generally plead its supposed inconsistency with the ideas we naturally have of the perfections of the Supreme Being. But the true reason is its inconsistency with the pride of man and the opinion of human worthiness, which so generally prevail. Here, it must be owned, there is an entire and an eternal repugnancy. That being cordially received, these must fall to the ground, as Dagon before the ark (1Sa 5). Hence it is that we are naturally so loth to embrace this humbling truth. Nay, some there are who freely confess that salvation is by Christ only, and that justification is through His imputed righteousness, who are not easily brought to admit the doctrine of eternal, personal, and unconditional election into their creed. Though their experience may plead for it, though their other avowed sentiments may involve it; yet they dispute against it as commonly and justly stated by Calvinists [i.e., those who uphold the doctrines of the Reformation], and endeavor to load it with horrid consequences.

This the writer of these pages knows by experience, to his grief and shame. Through the ignorance of his mind, the pride of his heart, and the prejudices of his education, he, in his younger years, often opposed it with much warmth, though with no small degree of weakness. But, after an impartial inquiry and many prayers, he found reason to alter his judgment. He found it to be the doctrine of the Bible and a dictate of the unerring Spirit. Being thus patronized, he received the once obnoxious sentiment under a full conviction of its being a divine truth. Now he considers the eternal, discriminating love of God in the choice of His people as the original source of all those spiritual blessings they here enjoy; and of all that glory they hereafter expect. To the distinguishing love of the Father; to the redeeming blood of the Son; to the almighty agency and sanctifying operations of the Divine Spirit, he now desires to ascribe the whole, unrivalled honor of a complete, eternal salvation. In the firm belief of this glorious and comprehensive truth he desires to live. Enjoying the sweet consolations arising from it, he desires to die. And if the Lord thus favor him, he does not fear but his life will be useful in some degree, his death peaceful, and his end salvation.—*A. Booth*

See *The Doctrines of Grace in the Gospel of John* by R. Bruce Steward, and *Introductory Essay* by J. I. Packer; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>66</sup> **incarnate** – (*Latin: incarnate*, “having flesh”). Incarnation is “the act whereby the eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, without ceasing to be what he is, God the Son, took into union with Himself what He before that act did not possess, a human nature, ‘and so [He] was and continues to be God and man in two distinct natures and one person, forever’ (*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Q. 21).” (Walter Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 601)

though we have forfeited every blessing and incurred every curse, yet “through the grace,” the unmerited favor, and boundless benignity,<sup>67</sup> “of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved.” He, being a person of infinite dignity, has performed a work of infinite value, in virtue of which we shall be completely saved. Saved, while here, from the curse of the Law and the dominion of Satan; saved hereafter from the being of sin and the damnation of hell. So perfectly saved as to fear no evil; so perfectly blessed as to want<sup>68</sup> no good. Such a salvation did grace provide; such a salvation does Christ perform!

In this truly apostolic creed,<sup>69</sup> which was delivered by Peter and recorded by Luke, the grace of God and the work of our Lord are all in all. As it ascribes our whole salvation to the undertaking of Christ, so it secures the whole glory to His adorable name. The avowed belief and the comfortable hope of the primitive Christians being contained in it, we have a striking instance and an irrefragable<sup>70</sup> proof that they were dead to the Law; that the peace of their minds in time, and their hope of bliss in eternity, did not arise from their own obedience but from that revelation of divine grace which is made in the gospel—that sovereign grace which richly provided every blessing and freely furnishes every requisite necessary to everlasting bliss.

## E. Truth and Error

Having considered this apostolic confession of faith as it is preserved for our instruction in the most authentic history of the primitive Christian church, let us once more advert<sup>71</sup> to the writings of Paul. We have already heard him declare that he was dead to the Law. We have also heard him loudly proclaim the excellence of that righteousness by which he was justified. We have seen him carefully describe the foundation on which the most guilty may safely rest the weight of their immortal concerns. Let us now observe him bitterly lamenting over his unhappy brethren after the flesh. These are his affecting words, which are introduced with a solemn appeal to heaven: “I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For...my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.” To which he adds, “My heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved” (Rom 9:2-3; 10:1).

What was the cause of this inconsolable grief? Were they scandalous in their lives and atrociously wicked? Had they renounced the worship of God and sunk into practical atheism? Far from it. The persons over whom he laments had a zeal for God and earnestly followed after righteousness. Of this Paul was a witness, and this he openly testifies (Rom 10:2; 9:31). In what, then, did their fatal mistake consist? For the popular maxim and the reason on which it is founded are, “Be sincere. Perform every duty to the utmost of your power and the best of your knowledge, and you shall obtain the favor of God and the fruition of heaven. For it cannot be supposed, if the heart be sincere in the worship of God and the conduct regular in the sight of men, that the state of a person can be bad, whatever may be his doctrinal sentiments.”

Such is the voice of general opinion, but not of divine revelation. For if this maxim were founded in truth, there could have been little occasion for the apostle’s heart-felt sorrow over

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<sup>67</sup> **benignity** – kindness.

<sup>68</sup> **want** – lack.

<sup>69</sup> **creed** – authoritative statement of the chief articles of belief.

<sup>70</sup> **irrefragable** – undeniable.

<sup>71</sup> **advert** – make reference to.

those of his brethren he here mentions. If, therefore, we would pay a proper degree of deference to the judgment of Paul as an infallible guide, and credit the account which he gives of his kinsmen and of his lamentation over them, we must conclude that this popular maxim is false, and the reason on which it is founded a dangerous mistake. Consequently, supposing a man to act in perfect conformity to it, his state might yet be extremely awful and his end eternally miserable.

The Jews, over whom the compassionate apostle wept, were alive to the Law and seeking justification by it. Though sincere in a religious profession and punctual in their attendance on divine institutions, they were utterly ignorant of the gospel and opposed to the great Redeemer. That sure foundation which Jehovah had laid in Zion for the salvation of His people was rejected and became to them a rock of offence (Rom 9:33). They followed after the Law of righteousness with sincerity and zeal; but its terms were too high and its conditions too hard for them to perform, so that they could not obtain justification by it. For they sought that capital blessing, not by faith in their promised Messiah, but as it were by the works of the Law (Rom 9:31-32). They had a zeal of God and a concern for His worship, but not according to knowledge—as their conduct plainly showed. “For they, being ignorant of God’s righteousness,” of the perfect purity of His nature and the extensive demands of His Law, “and going about,” or seeking by every likely expedient, “to establish their own righteousness” as the condition of life, “have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God” (Rom 10:3). Such was the unwarrantable opinion they had of their own imperfect duties, and so great was the pride of their hearts, that they would not accept of that complete righteousness which was appointed of God and provided by Him—even that righteousness which is able to justify in the most desperate cases, and in which their offended Maker is well pleased (Isa 42:21).

Would we know more particularly what obedience it is that deserves the glorious character? The apostle informs us: “For Christ is the end of the law” (Rom 10:4). All that it requires, He performed; and all that it threatens, He underwent. This, all this, was done and suffered not merely to set us an example, but for righteousness—a real, perfect righteousness. As such it is accounted by the Law, and accepted by the Lawgiver. Nor was it designed for the benefit of Him Who performed it; but it was designed for sinners, and is freely imputed to everyone that believeth, without any respect of persons or any regard to worthiness (Rom 10:4).

To this matchless obedience the self-righteous Jews would not submit. Being ignorant of their guilty state, and in the warm pursuit of acceptance with God by their own duties, they were unwilling to admit the thought of being indebted to grace. To look for justification by the righteousness of One Whom their Sanhedrin had agreed to execrate<sup>72</sup> and pronounced worthy of death; to expect salvation through believing in One Who, loaded with infamy and racked with torture, expired on a cross—this they esteemed highly absurd. A salvation by such unpromising means, and granted in such a singular way as left no room for their splendid duties to make a figure as co-partners in the affair, they would not accept—they thought themselves warranted from their hearts to despise. Nor would they acknowledge that the crucified Jesus was their promised Messiah; though the time in which He appeared, the doctrines He taught, and the works He performed all attested His divine mission and afforded the brightest evidence in support of His claim to the character. Thus they rejected His person, doctrine, and work. As igno-

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<sup>72</sup> **execrate** – curse; declare evil against.

rance of the holiness of God, the purity of His Law, and the evil of sin laid the foundation for that proud opinion they entertained of the excellence of their own duties; and as that issued in their rejection of the Lord Messiah; so the same ignorance and pride cause the generality now to reject His imputed righteousness as totally unnecessary—even when they do not proceed to that daring infidelity which pours open contempt on His person and character. Hence, we may safely conclude that all the supine<sup>73</sup> negligence about eternal things which appears in the world, and all that disregard which is shown to Christ and His work where the gospel revelation shines, proceed from ignorance—ignorance of the evil of sin and the righteousness of God in His Law.

## F. Application

Now, reader, are you dead to the Law? Are all your expectations and all your desires of justification by it extinct? Remember, it is one thing to acknowledge a truth in theory, and another to live under its practical influence. Many have learned in a doctrinal way that believers are dead to the Law, who yet in the dispositions of their hearts and in their own experience were never divorced from it. Their legal apprehensions and slavish fears, their mercenary views in the performance of duty, and their self-elating thoughts when they imagine they have performed it well are evidences that they cleave to the Law. These, when habitual, are a convincing proof that they are alive to it, that they are still, in a partial way, seeking their peace and happiness from their own obedience.<sup>74</sup>

What think you of the Redeemer's righteousness? Have you a superlative esteem for it; and is it with you, in reference to justification, the one thing needful (Luk 10:42)? Do you repose your

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<sup>73</sup> **supine** – lazy.

<sup>74</sup> Here it may be proper to observe that the real believer, even after a long experience in the ways of God, is too ready to look to his own frames and duties for that peace and comfort, which nothing but the blood of Christ and the testimony of the Spirit can possibly give. A legal bias of mind being natural to us, our views of the Savior and of His glorious righteousness are, at the best, so contracted [reduced] that we often lose sight of the excellent object before we are aware. The candid reader and experienced Christian will not be offended if I here introduce a paragraph extracted from the life of a minister of the gospel in the last century—as it may, in some degree, both illustrate and confirm this observation. The minister to whom I refer was Mr. Owen Stockton, a part of whose experience is contained in the following words:

“I find that, though in my judgment and profession I acknowledge Christ to be my righteousness and peace, yet upon examination I observe that my heart hath done quite another thing; and that secretly I have gone about to establish my own righteousness, and have derived my comfort and peace from my own actings. For when I have been disquieted by the acting of my sins, that which hath recovered me to my former peace hath not been that I could find God speaking peace through the blood of Christ; but rather from the intermission of temptation, and the cessation of those sins. When I have been troubled at an evil frame of heart, I do not find that the righteousness of Christ hath been my consolation; but that which has relieved me, as far as I can find, was that afterwards I have found myself in a better temper. Having been in trouble and perplexity, I have read the Scripture, gone to prayer, and in doing these I have been relieved. Yet I do not find that at such times I had a real, true, living communion with God in such duties; or that the Spirit of God did, in those duties, reveal to me my interest in Christ—and so quiet my conscience. Hence I come to see what great need I have, and that it is of singular use to watch over my soul in all its ways, both in reference to sin, that I fall not into it; and when fallen, what the carriage and actings of my soul are at such a time—whether I flee for relief to God in Christ or to my own works. For as Satan keeps some alienated from God by the gross pollutions of the world, so others from Christ by their establishing a righteousness of their own. O Lord, break thou this snare for me!” (John Beart, *Eternal Law and Everlasting Gospel*, Part 1, 15-16)—*A. Booth*

confidence for acceptance in that only, and venture your all for eternity on that single bottom? Is that your plea at the throne of grace, and is it your ardent desire to be found in it when standing at the great tribunal? There you must shortly stand, before a Judge Whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and with Whom is terrible majesty. Examine, therefore, the state of your soul, and cultivate an acquaintance with Jesus Christ. The fruits of an increasing acquaintance with Him are truly desirable and unspeakably precious. For the more you behold of His personal glories and perfect obedience, the less will you cleave to the Law or depend on your own defective duties.

This is a certain truth, and confirmed by all Christian experience. For though you will not be inclined to reject the Law as a rule of moral conduct; or to neglect duty as an evidence of your cordial submission to divine authority, and of gratitude for benefits received and blessings expected—yet you will have a meaner<sup>75</sup> opinion of all that you do, and a stronger confidence in the work of your Savior.

Besides, the peace you enjoy will be steadier, and the works you perform will be more spiritual. Your *peace* will be steadier. For the more clearly you see the dignity of Him Who made your peace, the greater will the worth of that work appear by which it was made. Consequently, your dependence upon it will be more firm; your rejoicing in it will be more constant. Your *duties* will be more spiritual. For in proportion as your views of the all-sufficiency of the divine Mediator increase, so will your love to Him. Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory (2Co 3:18). The love of God being the principle of all acceptable obedience, in proportion as that generous principle is more lively and active, duty will be performed with greater diligence, and be more certainly referred to its proper end: the glory of the ever-blessed God.

Yes, believer, in such a procedure you will find your spiritual account, and grace shall have the glory. Faith will grow firm as a deep-rooted cedar, and hope bright as the day (Col 2:7; Eph 3:17). Love will expand the heart, and holiness blossom as the rose. The life will be vocal of the Redeemer's praise, and even death itself peaceful in His embrace.

“Reveal, blessed Jesus, reveal Thy glory to mine eye, and shed abroad Thy love in my heart! Cause me to rest completely satisfied in Thy undertaking as the fulfilling end of the Law, and enable me to live upon Thy inexhaustible fullness. Empty me of all self-dependence and make me truly humble. Show me the beauty of holiness, as delineated in Thy most perfect pattern; and help me to copy it in my own conduct. Raise my affections to heavenly things, and grant me the abiding earnest<sup>76</sup> of my eternal inheritance. Then, though in a sinful world and a militant state—though harassed with bodily pain, or pinched with worldly poverty—I shall not only be safe but happy. The slavish fears of damnation shall be far distant, and the beams of celestial joy shall shine into my soul. Then, ye sons of sensuality and children of pride, ye may take your sordid pleasures and boast of your tinsel honors. I shall neither covet your lawless mirth nor envy your sounding titles. Being dead to the Law and alive to my God; being safe in the hands of my Savior and blest with a sense of His love; having death in remembrance and heaven in view, I shall despise your mean pursuits and abhor your illicit enjoyments. While the world are satisfied with the feather of fading honors and the froth of perishing pleasures, be it thy concern, O my

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<sup>75</sup> **meaner** – more lowly.

<sup>76</sup> **earnest** – pledge of anything afterwards to be received in greater abundance.

soul, to glorify Him Who died for thee and rose again. Then shall substantial pleasures be thy present enjoyment, and unfading honors thy eternal crown.”

## 4. The Law as Dead to Believers

### A. Works Both Ways

Having shown that believers are dead to the Law, we must now consider the Law as dead to them. All those who are dead to the Law as a covenant, the Law under that consideration is dead to them. As the relation is mutual, while it subsists at all, so is the death. Considered as the offspring of Adam, we are born under the Law as a covenant. We look to it for life, and continue in that situation while unregenerate. But when the Spirit of God enlightens the mind to discern our state and awakens the conscience to apprehend our danger, all expectations of life by our own obedience are blasted. We flee to Jesus Christ as the end of the Law, take shelter under another covenant, and are no longer subject to the Law as prescribing the condition of life—nor any more liable to its awful curse. It is, in that respect, dead; and our deliverance from it is complete.

This comfortable truth we are taught by the pen of inspiration in the Epistle of Paul to the Romans. Thus we read:

Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?<sup>77</sup> For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead...But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held (Rom 7:1-4, 6).

On this remarkable passage, we may observe that the divine Law, by a common figure of speech, is described as a person. It is compared to a husband, to whom some are married and to whom others are dead. To the Law in its covenant-form, men naturally cleave, as a wife to her husband. They look to it for justification, and on their obedience to it they depend for everlasting life. Their hopes of happiness and fears of misery rise and fall in exact proportion to that obedience which they suppose themselves to perform in conformity to its commands, and the consciousness they have of their disobedience to it. Such expectations and fears prove that they are alive to the Law; and this infers that the Law is alive to them—and while alive to them, it has dominion over them.

This dominion of the Law is absolute. It extends to all the powers of the mind and all the members of the body; to all the imaginations of the heart and all their effects in the life. It requires—on the dreadful peril of incurring its highest displeasure and of suffering its heaviest curse—that all these, in every instance and perpetually, should perfectly correspond with its

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<sup>77</sup> That the apostle here designs the law, not the man, has been observed by many. So understood, it seems much better to agree with the following illustration, and with the scope of the place in general.—*A. Booth*

righteous demands. This the apostle illustrates in the following manner: “For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth” (Rom 7:2). In like manner, all who are alive to the Law and married to it are bound to obey it, in all things, so long as it lives. Nothing but death can dissolve the obligation. Either the Law, as a husband, must die to the sinner, or the sinner, as wedded to the Law, must die to all expectations of justification by it—before he can be loosed from its commands as prescribing the condition of life, or be freed from its tremendous threatenings.

That this two-fold death takes place as to the Law and a regenerate man, the unerring writer proceeds to assert: “But if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband” (Rom 7:2). As that relation which the Law of marriage regards was entirely dissolved by the husband’s death, so the Law itself must unavoidably and absolutely cease, together with all its consequences. And as the wife has no further expectations of assistance from him, he being dead, so she has no longer any fear of incurring his displeasure. Being thus freed from her former husband, she is entirely at liberty to marry another man without being chargeable with adultery.

The apostle now proceeds to apply the comparison: “Wherefore, my brethren,” just such is your case. The Law, as a husband, was once alive and had dominion over you; but now it is dead. Ye also were once alive to the Law, but are now become dead to it. Having seen its infinite purity and felt its killing power (2Co 3:6-7), ye were obliged to acknowledge that you could not be justified by it. Reluctantly, ye quitted your self-righteous hopes. But, having heard the glorious gospel, and being by the sacred Spirit enabled to behold the body of Christ—that body which the Son of God assumed when He was made under the Law—and viewing the glory of that obedience which He performed, and the greatness of those sufferings which He underwent in that immaculate<sup>78</sup> body to satisfy the Law and justify sinners, with the utmost readiness ye renounced your own righteousness. Having found Jesus, the pearl of great price (Mat 13:45-46), and in Him all that you need, ye freely relinquished your former pleas. Thus, ye became dead to the Law, that ye should be married to another and a better husband; even to Him Who died on the cross to atone for your sins, and is raised from the dead to present you complete (Col 1:22).

Yes, my brethren, that adorable person is now become the object of your strongest affection. To Him ye look for every assistance; on Him ye depend for all your salvation. This being our happy case, we are delivered from the Law! Its dominion over us is entirely ceased. No longer has it authority to demand obedience from us, more or less, as the condition of life, or to proclaim a curse upon us for disobedience. Nor can it be otherwise with us as believers, or with the Law as a covenant. For the inspired author adds as a reason of his former assertion, “That being dead wherein *we were held*”: we were bound by the Law to sinless obedience. That was the least it required; and for non-performance, it held us accursed. Thus we were held by it and under it—but now it is dead. The obligation we were under to perfect, personal obedience as the condition of life is therefore cancelled. Nor are we any longer liable to its penal sanction, for “we are not under the law, but under grace” (Rom 6:14). Happy deliverance! Wonderful change! Such is the purport of the important paragraph.

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<sup>78</sup> **immaculate** – spotless; in the case of Christ, free from original sin.



## B. The Law Satisfied

Nor has the Law, as a covenant, the least room to complain—for this way of deliverance from its high demands and awful sanction is as equitable in itself as it is comfortable to the believer. Its precepts were not given nor its curse proclaimed in vain. For though the chosen of God were unable to perform the one or to suffer the other in their own persons, yet in their Head, Representative, and Surety,<sup>79</sup> its precepts were inviolably kept, and on Him its curse was fully executed. It was entirely on their behalf that the Eternal Word became incarnate. It was in their name and in their stead that He obeyed the commands of the Law and suffered its penalty. Now, all this being according to the eternal compact in the counsels of heaven, and to manifest the riches of divine grace in the salvation of sinners, it is imputed to them and they are invested with it. What secured them from final condemnation was *theirs*, in the design of God, before they had a being or time began. What frees them from slavish fears and produces in them a holy liberty and heavenly joy is *theirs* in happy enjoyment when dead to the Law. What justifies and saves is *theirs*, to render them complete in the eye of the Law and eternally blessed in the fruition of God.

While sinners are alive to the Law, and the Law has dominion over them, its requisitions are high and its language is terrible! For “what things soever the law [as a covenant] saith, it saith to them who are under the law” (Rom 3:19). But when dead to it, and when they commence as believers, it addresses them in a milder tone and with sweeter accents. Viewing them in Jesus Christ, their exalted Head, the Law’s pacific<sup>80</sup> language is:

I own myself entirely fulfilled; I acknowledge myself completely satisfied. True it is—my nature is not in the least altered; my requirements are not at all abated.<sup>81</sup> My end, as commanding, is still a perfect righteousness (Rom 10:4); my end, as violated, is still extreme punishment (Gal 3:10). I cannot but require perfect love to God, perfect love to man, and perfect holiness both in heart and life. Never abating a tittle<sup>82</sup> of these demands, I proclaim the curse on every offender, and on the least departure from absolute perfection.

But here, believers, is your safety, and this is your comfort: my precepts have been fully obeyed by Jesus, your Substitute. This obedience I consider as far superior to the spotless innocence of your first father while in the bowers of paradise [i.e., Adam before the Fall], and to the sanctity of angels in the glory of heaven. It is possessed of infinite worth, and by it I am highly magnified (Isa 42:21).

This is your comfort, believers, that the curse due to your sins has been executed on your most holy Surety; and His most bitter sufferings were more than equal to your eternal misery. As He performed that matchless obedience and underwent those unparalleled sufferings in your nature and professedly in your stead—I am thoroughly satisfied, and you are completely justified. Now, though I cannot dispense with the least fault or connive<sup>83</sup> at your in-

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<sup>79</sup> **Surety** – one who assumes the responsibilities or debts of another; as our Surety, Christ guaranteed a full legal satisfaction for our sin and our deliverance upon His payment of our debt upon Calvary’s cross (Heb 7:22).

<sup>80</sup> **pacific** – peaceable; conciliatory.

<sup>81</sup> **my requirements are not at all abated** – The requirements that the law places upon believers as a moral standard (not as a legal covenant) are not changed.

<sup>82</sup> **tittle** – smallest stroke used to make Hebrew letters (Mat 5:18); therefore, minute detail.

<sup>83</sup> **connive** – silently approve or excuse.

firmity, yet I behold all your faults laid on Immanuel; I behold all His righteousness imputed to you (2Co 5:21). On His account I acquit you from guilt; I accept you as righteous and pronounce you worthy of eternal life. Hail, ye highly favored of the Lord! Ye are wise, ye are safe, ye are happy!

My Author and your God has pronounced you blessed; and shall I seek to reverse it? Your Redeemer has died, your Redeemer is risen; and shall I dispute whether satisfaction was made? How shall I curse whom the Lord hath not cursed?

Such is the language of divine Law to him that believes in the Lord Redeemer; and, in this, justice itself acquiesces—while both agree to expedite and ascertain his eternal salvation.<sup>84</sup>

What reason, then, has the believer to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory! To rejoice, not in himself, but in the Lord His righteousness. Joy in the Lord is his exalted privilege (Phi 4:4); and thankfulness to God should be his constant business. For in the Redeemer's obedience, he is not only pardoned and freed from punishment, but is also the object of divine complacency.<sup>85</sup> Though in himself loathsome with impurity and foul as the dunghill, laden with guilt, and liable to ruin; yet—being interested<sup>86</sup> in this most excellent righteousness, and vested with this most beautiful robe—he is pronounced righteous by infinite justice and declared absolutely fair in the eye of Omniscience (Num 23:22; Jer 15:20; Song 4:7; Eph 5:27; Col 1:22). While alive to the Law, the righteousness in which he trusted was extremely imperfect. It could neither procure pardon for his offences, nor peace for his conscience; neither adorn him for the glory of heaven, nor screen him from the vengeance of hell; but this—being wrought, finished, and infinitely ennobled by our incarnate God—this, O believer, is all in all! By this you have pardon of sin and peace with your Maker—are delivered from death and entitled to glory. In this you shall be admitted to the marriage supper of the Lamb, and in it you shall shine to all eternity!

### C. The Sinner's Response

But, lest any awakened sinner should complain, "Though the righteousness be supremely glorious, it is quite out of my reach," let it be observed that the righteousness itself, and all the blessings connected with it, are the gifts of the freest grace. For they were all designed, not to distinguish merit, but to enrich the indigent and relieve the miserable. Come, then, trembling sinner! Regard the testimony of God concerning Christ as affording you an indisputable right to rely on the righteousness and to expect the blessings. The divine declaration excludes none, no, not the vilest that are willing to come to Jesus (Joh 6:37; Mat 11:29). The most enormous crimes and the greatest unworthiness are no objection at all on the part of our Savior. Why, then, should they be a discouragement to you? Remember, awakened sinner, that it is grace to which you must apply for relief; and grace, in the very nature of things, has no concern but with the unworthy. Is it salvation, a great salvation, you want? Who, then, are the proper objects of such a favor? The holy? The righteous? Those who can help themselves? No, but the guilty, the miserable, those who deserve damnation! These—let the desponding hear and rejoice! And let the mouth of proud infidelity be forever stopped—these are the proper objects of a great, a free, a

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<sup>84</sup> Adapted from James Hervey, *Eleven Letters to Mr. John Wesley*, 134-135.—A. Booth

<sup>85</sup> **complacency** – satisfaction; the state of being pleased with someone.

<sup>86</sup> **interested** – having an interest or share.

divine salvation. On such, grace will be magnified. From such, Immanuel will have the glory that is due to His beneficent and charming name, JESUS.

May the Lord the Spirit, Whose office it is to lead into all truth and to glorify Christ, direct my reader's inquiries and satisfy his doubts! May he die to the Law and to all self-righteous hopes! Then shall the Law be dead to him. Being married to the heavenly Bridegroom, interested in His person, and endowed with His riches, he shall "bring forth fruit to God" (Rom 7:4). His mind shall be peaceful and his life useful. He shall be attended here with inviolable safety; hereafter, he shall enjoy unutterable bliss!

## 5. Believers Dead to the Law That They Might Live to God

### A. Live to God

Some, perhaps, may be ready thus to infer: "If believers are dead to the Law, and the Law be dead to them, they are quite at liberty to live as they please. They may sin without control from the Law and without any remorse of conscience. Their own obedience not being a condition of their forgiveness—having no hand in procuring the favor of God or the justification of their souls—there is no occasion for it. They may launch into licentiousness, and their state be equally safe—their end equally happy—as if they were diligent in the performance of duty and strictly self-denying."

In answer to such an ignorant cavil<sup>87</sup> and in confutation of such a false surmise, I shall only observe that the great apostle has drawn a very different conclusion from the same premises. For he says, "I...am dead to the law, that I might"—What? Commit iniquity with greediness and sin with impunity? By no means, but—"that I might live unto God" (Gal 2:19).

The glory of God is the ultimate end of our existence itself and of all we enjoy.<sup>88</sup> All the dispensations<sup>89</sup> of providence and all the blessings of grace perfectly harmonize in accomplishing the grand design. But the blessings of grace—being much more glorious in themselves, more beneficial to us, and truly astonishing in the manner of their communication—are more fully adapted to answer that sacred purpose. In such a light the believer views them. As adapted to answer so high an end, he delights in them and is thankful for them. As living to God is his duty, so he esteems it his privilege and desires to make it his constant business.

The persons of whom we speak are said to "live." They live not only by an animal and a rational life, but also a spiritual life. This life they received from Christ. As it is written, "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live" (Joh 5:25). As they received their life from Him, so it is maintained by Him. Its continuance, vigor, and exercise depend on their union with Him, and the communication of grace from Him (Joh 14:19).

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<sup>87</sup> **cavil** – petty or trifling objection.

<sup>88</sup> This capital truth is here taken for granted; but if the reader desires to see it demonstrated, he may receive satisfaction by a careful perusal of the late Mr. Jonathan Edwards' (1703-1758) dissertation entitled, *The End for Which God Created the World.—A. Booth*

<sup>89</sup> **dispensations** – acts of divine ordering and arrangements of events.

They live by faith, for thus the oracle of heaven: “the just,” the truly righteous, “shall live,” shall enjoy all their comfort and perform all their obedience, “by faith” (Rom 1:17). That we might not be at a loss to determine what faith it is by which they live, the apostle informs us when he says, “I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). I live by the faith of Him Whose love to me was great, unparalleled, and absolutely inexpressible in any other way than by its amazing effects in giving Himself up as a surety for me to the stroke of justice and the death of the cross. It is from Him, as my beneficent Substitute, I derive my peace; it is on Him, as absolutely complete, I depend for my all.

Again, they live—not to themselves, in the gratification of their sinful appetites; not to the world, in conforming to its corrupt customs and seeking their happiness from it—but to God. As they live a life of faith on the adored Redeemer, which affords peace to their consciences; so they live a life of obedience to their heavenly Father, which brings glory to His eternal name. This obedience includes genuine love to Him, and a conscientious conformity to His commands.

## **B. Obedience: Genuine Love to Christ**

*Obedience includes genuine love to Him.* The Christian loves God, as He is in Himself an infinitely amiable Being, and as He is to him an infinitely gracious Being. He who does not love the Lord certainly cannot live to Him. For we cannot be considered, with propriety, as living to any particular person or for any particular end, unless our affections be set on the person and the bent of our desires be to obtain the end. But as the sinner who is dead to the Law, the believer who is married to Jesus, beholds the glory of God in the person and work of Christ, so he cannot but love Him with a supreme affection. The attributes of Deity shining through that wonderful medium and the veil of ignorance being removed, he bows before the infinite Majesty and reveres His transcendent perfections as thus displayed. In the great Immanuel, they appear awfully<sup>90</sup> glorious, yet supremely amiable.

On the cross, as an amazing theatre, he beholds mercy and truth meeting together, righteousness and peace kissing each other (Psa 85:10). There he beholds veracity executing her severest threatenings with an impartial hand, and love performing her choicest promises with the greatest alacrity<sup>91</sup>; justice asserting her rights, and mercy dispensing her pardons; tremendous wrath revealed, and sovereign grace exalted. It is there he learns that divine character: the *just* God and the Savior.

Beholding the condescension and love of our suffering Surety and His amazing transactions on the cross, he at once admires His person and confides in His work. He admires His person as altogether lovely; he confides in His work as absolutely complete. In Jesus he beholds the glory of the true God. This glory attracts his adoring regards and commands the sincerest love. The more he sees of his God, the more he loves Him; it is his greatest concern that he does not love Him with a more intense and steady affection. The burden of his mind frequently is that he should be guilty of such ingratitude to that sublime and beneficent Being, Whose infinite excellencies deserve all possible love—Whose boundless grace and immense liberality to an unworthy object lay him under additional and eternal obligations to make a complete and everlasting surrender of his heart and his all to Him.

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<sup>90</sup> **awfully** – creating awe and wonder.

<sup>91</sup> **alacrity** – cheerful willingness.

The love of God being shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5), he loves and adores his Maker, while the imperfections attending his warmest affection to his Father and his God become the matter of his daily sorrow and penitential acknowledgment at the throne of grace. Now he sees the propriety of that apostolic maxim: “We love him, because he first loved us” (1Jo 4:19). This divine flame being kindled in his breast, he lives to God. The language of his heart is, “What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?” (Psa 116:12).

### **C. Obedience: Conformity to Christ’s Commands**

That glorious grace which laid so firm a foundation in the death of Christ for the peace of the believer’s conscience, and formed in his heart the noblest principle for producing acceptable obedience, teaches and enables him to yield a conscientious conformity to the divine commands. Being bought with a price (1Co 6:20), he now considers himself as the Lord’s. The powers of his mind and the members of his body; the talents with which he is endowed and the time with which he is indulged; all that he is and all that he has—he freely acknowledges belong to his God.

As possessed of the powers of reason and surrounded with the blessings of Providence, he discerns his obligations to our bountiful Creator and kind Preserver in a much stronger light than he did while unregenerate. His rational faculties, which he before debased to subserve inglorious designs in the service of Satan, he now desires to devote to his Maker. The favors of Providence that he once abused to the gratification of detestable appetites, and prostituted to the vilest purposes, he now endeavors to improve to the honor of their liberal Donor. Being conscious that he is less than [deserving] the least of all the divine mercies, that it is free favor from which they all proceed, and that he is accountable to God for the use or abuse of them—he is careful to improve them, and to perform the part of a faithful steward in the use of his temporal enjoyments, that in so doing he may obtain the approbation<sup>92</sup> of his Lord. Now the poor among the people of God, whom he once overlooked, have his compassionate regards and, according to his ability, receive relief from his hand. This he does for the sake and in the name of his divine Savior, being well-persuaded that He will consider it as done to Himself (Mat 25:35-36).

The cause of Christ and the interest of religion in general, he is ready to support in proportion to his capacities. Thoroughly persuaded that Jesus is the dearest of names, and His the best of causes, with cheerfulness he lends a helping hand, as Providence calls and duty requires. Being ennobled with that honor which comes from God and an heir of eternal riches, he is not fond of worldly distinctions nor covetous of transitory wealth. If he abound in temporal blessings, he considers himself as only entrusted with them by the great Lord of all for more extensive usefulness. If, by a reverse in the course of providence, he sinks into poverty, he patiently bears it, knowing that He Who gave the abundance has a right to take it away whenever He pleases. Believing the promise, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb 13:5), he knows that all things work together for his good (Rom 8:28). The Almighty is become a guarantee for his safety, and he confides in Him. Jehovah is his portion and he is satisfied with it.

Thus, in proportion as faith and love are in exercise, he lives to God in the enjoyment of providential favors and in suffering afflictions. But as the Christian’s faith is too often like a bruised reed and his love like the smoldering flax (Isa 42:3; Mat 12:20)—and as he finds a law in

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<sup>92</sup> **approbation** – approval.

his members rebelling against the law of his mind (Rom 7:23)—his imperfections in these, as in all other instances of duty, being many and great, are a sufficient cause of holy sorrow and penitential confession before the Lord every day of his life.

He lives to God and enjoys communion with Him in the ordinances of divine worship. While alive to the Law and unregenerate, he attended to these holy institutions as dry duties and in a formal way. To behold the glory of Christ and to feast upon His fullness, to have the presence of God and to rejoice in the light of His countenance, he neither expected nor desired. But now nothing short of these will satisfy his mind. He leaves the house of God and the exercises of the closet with a heavy heart if he have not beheld his Beloved and had some degree of nearness to Him (Psa 63:1-2; 134:1-2; Song 5:6). The gospel is a joyful sound in his ears and a reviving cordial to his drooping spirits. On the unadulterated milk of the Word he feeds with delight, and his very soul is refreshed by it (1Pe 2:2).

Yet often, alas, when engaged in divine worship, he finds that his thoughts wander and his pious affections are dull; the corruptions of his heart work, and Satan attacks him with horrid suggestions—all which interrupt his communion with God and fill his mind with grief. He is fully convinced, by repeated experience, that the best of his duties are defiled with sin, and utterly unworthy of divine acceptance. Nay, such is the sense which he has of their shameful defects that sometimes he is tempted to think they are more likely to provoke the abhorrence, than to gain the approbation, of God. Yet he does not, he cannot, entirely omit them, even in those gloomy moments.

Too apt he is to forget, in such unhappy seasons, that his services, as well as his person, are accepted *in the Beloved*. As our persons are abominably sinful and our services extremely imperfect, if those be not cleansed by atoning blood and these presented by the hand of our great Intercessor, there can be no acceptance for the one or the other. Our acceptance with God in every view, both as to persons and services, is therefore only in Christ and for the sake of His work. It is in Him as our head, and for the sake of that work which He finished on a cross, that our sins are pardoned and our persons justified. It is through Him and in virtue of His intercession that our most righteous performances meet with the least approbation from God.<sup>93</sup> Such is the ground of a believer's confidence, both as to the safety of his state and the acceptance of his duties.

The Christian, having an abiding sense that such are his imperfections, frequently confesses them at the throne of grace, and on their account is deeply humbled. But, though humbled in the dust, he looks to Jesus his heavenly Bridegroom. Having fresh application of atoning blood to his conscience, he is delivered from slavish fear and strengthened for future duty. As a guilty creature he comes, again and again, to the sanctifying stream that flowed from the wounds of a crucified Savior; and in this way he maintains peace in his mind. Conscious of his own insufficiency to perform any duty, to subdue any corruption, or to resist any temptation, he earnestly seeks the aid of the Spirit. Thus the blood of the cross and the Spirit of Christ enable him to live near to God as completely justified and to the honor of God as partly sanctified.

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<sup>93</sup> **through Him...approbation from God** – in Christ, God accepts our imperfect obedience, not as the basis of our acceptance with Him (which is solely the imputed righteousness of Christ), but as an expression of grateful obedience. Apart from Christ, even our best duties are but “filthy rags,” being imperfect and polluted by sin.

Nor is the believer satisfied with paying a due regard to the public appointments of religion, and living to God in attending upon them. His desire is to cultivate a correspondence with his heavenly Father in the family and in the closet, at all times and in all places. Conscious that he is ever under the eye of Omniscience, and always in the presence of Him Who searches the heart, he pays a habitual regard to the inward frame of his mind. Nor does he observe, without real grief, the most secret workings of innate corruption. For he knows that the least deviation from the holy Law is a sin; that the least sin is abhorred by infinite purity, and absolutely inexpiable<sup>94</sup> by any atonement but that which was made by the great Messiah.

His habitual desire, therefore, is to avoid sin as the greatest of evils, and to follow after holiness as the health and beauty of his immortal mind. He does not think it sufficient to be free from scandalous vices, or to abstain from such things as would injure his religious character among his fellow-professors. No, it is his elevated aim so to live and so to walk with God as shall bear the nearest resemblance to the business and the bliss of saints in light that the present imperfect state will admit. That ineffable<sup>95</sup> glory—the fruition of which he expects in the upper world—he desires to partake by anticipation. Nor are these desires in vain. For as he is dead to the Law and lives to God—as he believes in Jesus and walks in the ways of holiness—he enjoys the smiles of his heavenly Father’s countenance and tastes the sweets of celestial joy. He possesses an infallible earnest, and has a delightful prelibation,<sup>96</sup> of the expected happiness.

He remembers that his duration here is short, and the time of his exit extremely uncertain. This is a spur to diligence in the performance of duty, and an incentive to watchfulness against the insurrections of indwelling sin and the incursions of outward temptation. His prevailing desire is to perform the commands of God with punctuality and as under the divine inspection, to fill up every station in life with reputation to his holy profession, and to render himself useful to all around—by a heavenly conduct and a shining example as long as he lives. To be found ready when his Lord shall come, to be found wakeful with his lamp trimmed and burning when the Bridegroom calls (Mat 25:1-13) are matters of infinite importance in his esteem.

As it is the desire of him who lives to God thus to spend his time, and thus to perform his duty, so his principal end in all is the glory of God. This course of obedience and self-denial is not intended to gain the divine favor, or to procure the great inheritance, but for the honor of his eternal Sovereign and infinite Benefactor. Pardon of all sin, complete reconciliation with our offended Maker, deliverance from the wrath to come, and a hope of future felicity are not procured by our endeavors, but freely granted by sovereign grace. Of this the man who lives to God is fully persuaded. He has not, therefore, the most distant thought of procuring them by any of his exertions. But gratitude to the Redeemer and love to the blessed God being the united and powerful principle from which he acts, the glory of the supreme Cause and the honor of the divine Mediator constitute the exalted end. This is the highest end of which we can conceive. The inhabitants of the heavenly world, in all their wonderful orders and in all their noblest services, can aim at nothing superior. Yet, with such views, sublime as they are, ought the believer invariably to act in performing every duty, in resisting every temptation, and in bearing every hard-

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<sup>94</sup> **inexpiable** – not capable of having the guilt of sin removed.

<sup>95</sup> **ineffable** – indescribable; too great for words.

<sup>96</sup> **prelibation** – foretaste.

ship that may attend his progress in a course of sincere piety. And with such views he will act, in proportion as his mind is enlightened and faith is in exercise.

#### D. Application

Now, reader, what is the tenor<sup>97</sup> of your conduct? To what or to whom do you live? Is it the immensely glorious God? Or is it yourself and the world? On what have you placed your affections? To whom have you devoted your heart? Remember Who it is that makes the tender and righteous demand, “My son, give me thine heart” (Pro 23:26). His infinite excellencies require it of you as a man; and, if a believer, your obligations are unspeakably heightened. For as such, you are an object of redeeming love, and a subject of regenerating grace. You are not your own; you are bought with a price. If, then, you profess yourself a Christian, consider the import of that profession. By laying claim to the honorable character, you profess to live to God. The character, how glorious! The profession, how noble! Disgrace not that holy name by which you are called; disgrace not that life you profess to lead—lest you pierce yourself through with many sorrows and cause the enemies of the cross to triumph.

Awful it is to think how many there are that bear the Christian character and profess to believe the gospel who are nevertheless far from living to God. The world has their hearts. It engrosses their warmest affections. The language of their conduct is, “Who will show us any temporal good?” Or, “Where shall we find any carnal pleasure?” Such may do well to remember that to mind earthly things—to be lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God—are the characters of profane persons in the sacred writings (Phi 3:19; 2Ti 3:4). Such, whoever they be, are the children of wrath, and, in the most emphatic sense, the enemies of the cross of Christ (Jam 4:4; Phi 3:18). The state of such is extremely dangerous; and, if grace prevent not, eternal destruction will be their portion.

Reader, is this your case? If so, you ought either to reform your conduct or discard every pretense to Christianity. You cannot obey God and mammon.<sup>98</sup> You cannot serve Christ and the world. They are opposite masters and have opposite interests. If you profess to be dead to the Law as a covenant, you must either live to God or contradict yourself and blaspheme the gospel. Do not imagine that your state must be safe because you have adopted an orthodox<sup>99</sup> creed, and have a consistent view of revealed truths—for such sentiments you may embrace, and such a consistent view of divine truths you may have, yet remain a hardened rebel against your Maker and be a scandal to the great Redeemer’s cause. You may be wise in theory and right in your doctrinal principles, while the state of your heart and the tenor of your conduct are fatally wrong—for it is a certain truth that our religious knowledge will be of no further use to ourselves than as it elevates our affections to heavenly things, meliorates<sup>100</sup> our tempers, and rectifies<sup>101</sup> our conduct. You may attend an evangelical ministry, be a member of the purest visible church, and have a seat at the Lord’s Table, and yet, after all, die unregenerate and be eternally lost.

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<sup>97</sup> **tenor** – general character; tone.

<sup>98</sup> **mammon** – wealth.

<sup>99</sup> **orthodox** – that which pertains to the body of doctrines that are essential to the Christian faith; consistency in belief and worship with the revelation of Holy Scripture.

<sup>100</sup> **meliorates** – improves.

<sup>101</sup> **rectifies** – makes right.



Think, then, O carnal professor, what a shocking figure you must make among the millions of the damned, if at last you should perish! The case of the impenitent Jews or of idolatrous heathens who finally perish will not be so awful as yours. To think of one who had often heard the gospel, who professed to believe its glorious doctrines, and had frequently received the memorial of the body and blood of Christ—to think of such an one not living to God but in allowed iniquity, and of his dying in unbelief, is awful indeed! For the glorious gospel he so often heard will be to him the savor of death unto death; and that superior knowledge, of which he boasted, will give a dreadful emphasis to his torment and aggravate his eternal ruin. It is greatly to be feared that, in the end, many such will be found. Take heed, reader, that you be not of that number!

Do you profess not only to be dead to the Law and to believe the gospel, but also to live to God? If so, what is the principle of your obedience, and what is the end for which you perform it? Is self-love the principle, and self-preservation the end? Or, the love of God and the glory of His eternal name? If the former, you are yet alive to the Law; if the latter, it is the obedience that God accepts. Love to Him Whose perfections are infinite, love to Him Whose grace is unbounded, is the fruitful and delightful source of every work that is truly good.

But as we love the Lord only in proportion to our knowledge of Him, let it be your constant concern to increase in your acquaintance with Him. To that end, study the cross of Christ,<sup>102</sup> for there the glories of the Godhead shine. There they are displayed in the clearest manner and appear with a winning aspect. Those glories beheld in the face of Jesus Christ will have a transforming influence. You will love God; you will desire to be like Him. This will make duty easy and the ways of holiness delightful. You will hate sin, not only as condemning, but also as filthy and abominable. Then, out of gratitude to the bleeding Jesus and for the honor of eternal mercy, you will desire to obey every divine precept. Then you will not only talk about living to God as being a duty, but you will exemplify it in your conduct. You will make it appear that you love Him and that it is your main business to glorify Him. Except you evidence this in some degree, all your pretensions to vital religion and primitive<sup>103</sup> Christianity will be in vain.

## **6. Death to the Law as a Covenant Required before Obedience**

### **A. If Alive to the Law, Cannot Live to God**

Having already observed that the great end of our being dead to the Law is that we might live unto God, we now proceed to show that it is impossible for those who are alive to the Law as a covenant to live unto God in holy and acceptable obedience. Or, in other words, that while a man is looking to his own righteousness as the condition of his justification, he can perform no works that are truly good, nor any obedience that is acceptable to God. This position may appear strange, and perhaps be rejected by many as absolutely false. I am, notwithstanding, fully persuaded that it will be found, on impartial inquiry, to contain an important truth. In proof of it, the following things are offered to consideration.

Let us once more refer to those emphatic words that have furnished matter for the preceding sections, because in them the truth I would now confirm and illustrate is very plainly and

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<sup>102</sup> See *The Cross* by J. C. Ryle (1816-1900) and Free Grace Broadcaster 226, *Christ upon the Cross*; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>103</sup> primitive – of the New Testament.

strongly implied. Thus they read, “For I, through the law, am dead to the law, that I might live unto God” (Gal 2:19). When an unerring writer asserts, “I am dead to the law, that I might live unto God,” does he not signify, beyond all reasonable doubt, that while he was alive to the Law, he could *not* live to God? If the phrase here used has any sense or is used with any propriety, it must suggest that idea. If he might have lived to God while he sought righteousness and life by the Law, or before he was dead to it, what solid reason can be assigned for his thus expressing himself? That the apostle had as good opportunities and as great a zeal as any other man to have done so—if such a thing had been practicable—will not be disputed.

This, therefore, I humbly conceive, is no contemptible proof of the point. The same inspired author, in another part of his invaluable writings, says, “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law...that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God” (Rom 7:4). Here we are taught that we must be dead to the Law before we can be married to Christ; and that we must be married to Him before we can bring forth fruit unto God. The glorious end designed, and the happy effects produced, by the believer’s conjugal relation to Jesus are included in his bringing forth fruit unto God. That relation, therefore, must be prior to this effect; and it is quite evident from the passage that our being dead to the Law is previous to the commencement of that high and honorable relation. As children are called the fruit of the womb (Psa 127:3), so the apostle intimates that those works which are acceptable to God, and which follow upon this relation taking place between Christ and the sinner, may be compared to a legitimate offspring. Consequently, agreeably to this figurative representation, the best works performed by us before we are dead to the Law and married to Jesus, can be accounted no other than spurious and, therefore, rejected of God.

In the same instructive paragraph, it is said, “Now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter” (Rom 7:6). From the plain import of these words, it appears that the Law must be dead to us before we can be delivered from it; and that we must be delivered from it before we can serve God in newness of spirit (acting from a new principle and with new views, having a new and a right spirit formed in us). But this is not the case of any who are alive to the Law. Those who are delivered from the Law—those to whom the Law is dead and those only—are the happy persons who thus live to God.

That no man who is alive to the Law can live to God, will further appear if it be considered that the state in which he lies is that of a condemned criminal. While alive to the Law he is under it as a covenant, and, as a breaker of it, is exposed to its condemning power. Being of the works of the Law, seeking justification by his own obedience in conformity to it, he is under the curse (Gal 3:10). His person is accursed and his state is damnable according to the tenor of that Law to which he looks for life. This is plain from the Scripture. If, then, his person be accursed, his works cannot be accepted. If his state, in the eye of the Law, be that of a condemned rebel, his conduct cannot be supposed well-pleasing in the eye of the great Lawgiver. His state must be good and his person accepted *before* he can live to God or glorify Him in holy obedience. No man can live to God, no man can perform acceptable obedience, while alive to the Law, because he has not vital union with Christ.<sup>104</sup> While alive to the Law, we are in unbelief. While in unbelief, we are in our natural state; but while in our natural state, we are enemies to God and chil-

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<sup>104</sup> See Free Grace Broadcaster 214, *Union with Christ*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

dren of wrath (Rom 8:7-8; Col 1:21; Eph 2:3; Joh 3:36). Consequently, we have no vital union with Christ.<sup>105</sup>

## **B. Jesus' Own Words**

Now, that none who are destitute of union with Him can do any good works is clear from His own words. "Without me," without a union with Me similar to that of the branch to the vine, "ye can do nothing" (Joh 15:5). Ye can neither resist temptation successfully, nor perform duty acceptably; ye can bear no fruit to the glory of God. Here our Lord informs us that the human heart is never influenced by holy tempers, that the human life cannot be productive of good works, till a man be united to Christ—any more than a branch can bear valuable fruit while in a state of separation from the vine. As long, therefore, as persons continue in a state of alienation from Jesus Christ, they, with all their performances, are like a broken, withered branch—fit only to be cast into the fire and consumed from the earth. Before we have a living union with the great Head of the church, we are not partakers of the Holy Spirit. Now, as it is the province of that sacred Agent to enlighten the dark understanding by leading into all the truth, so it is only by His assistance we can perform that which is good, or have the least inclination so to do, according to that saying, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phi 2:13).

"Without faith it is impossible to please [God]" (Heb 11:6). The faith designed "is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen" (Heb 11:1). It is that by which the just live, and to which a divine righteousness is revealed in the gospel (Heb 10:38; Rom 1:17). It has the Son of God for its object and salvation for its end (Gal 2:20; 1Pe 1:9). But all who are alive to the Law are destitute of it. This appears from hence: those who believe in Jesus, believe on Him as the justifier of the ungodly (Rom 4:5). Those who are alive to the Law have no such dependence; it is directly contrary to their views and their inclinations. They are seeking to establish their own righteousness, and look for acceptance with God in that way. They overlook that provision which grace has made for the entirely unworthy, and slight that righteousness which the Mediator performed for the justification of the ungodly. Being destitute, therefore, of that faith which purifies the heart and works by love—being unbelievers, whose mind and conscience are defiled, and to whom nothing is pure (Tit 1:15)—nothing they have, nothing they do, is acceptable to God. Consequently, they cannot live to Him or glorify His name.

## **C. The Goal of Keeping the Law**

The love of God being the principle of all acceptable obedience, and the glory of God the end, the man who does not act from that delightful principle with a view to this exalted end cannot be considered as living to God. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God" (Mat 22:37). "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1Co 10:31). But whoever is alive to the Law acts from a different principle and aims at a different end. Such a person may act from self or pharisaical pride; but

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<sup>105</sup> That the chosen of God have union with Christ, prior to their regeneration, is readily granted. But then, I humbly conceive, whatever other epithets we may give that union, it cannot, with propriety, be called "vital" till life be communicated to the dead sinner, which is done in regeneration. Then it is, and not till then, that we become living branches in the true vine. (See Herman Witsius, *Conciliatory or Irenical Animadversions on the Controversies Agitated in Britain under the Unhappy Names of Antinomians and Neonomians*, chapter 4, sections 1-3.)—A. Booth

he cannot act from love to his Maker and with a view to His glory. As ignorant of God, he cannot love Him (Rom 10:3). As in his natural state, his carnal mind is enmity against Him (Rom 8:7). Depending on his own righteousness and cleaving to the Law for life, he rebels against the gospel and slights the great Redeemer.

Does he abstain from an outward course of sin? It is not because he loves holiness, or from a sense of the contrariety there is in sin to the perfections of the Deity, that he forbears to gratify his vicious appetites to the full extent of his power; but because he is apprehensive<sup>106</sup> that disagreeable consequences would follow upon such a conduct. Does he attend religious ordinances? It is not from love to their great Institutor, or because he delights in them as means of communion with God; but because he loves himself and hopes, by observing the divine commands, to obtain favor at the great tribunal. Would his conscience be easy and his hope of heaven continue without these devotional services, he would drop them without hesitation and leave the performance of them to others. A slavish fear of hell and a mercenary expectation of heaven are the main springs of his moral and religious conduct, and self-preservation is the end which he has in view.

In certain situations in life, a regard to the decency and present usefulness of a moral conversation may bridle the base passions, and strongly urge to a religious profession. But whether we avoid sin and practice duty with a view to obtain the favor of heaven and escape everlasting misery, or with a design to gain the advantages attending a moral behavior and the reputation of appearing religious—it is very certain that we are far from living to God while a sincere affection for Him and a supreme concern for His glory have not a prevailing influence on our hearts and lives. We may, therefore, safely conclude that it is absolutely necessary a man should be dead to the Law—should give up all expectations of justification by his own obedience—before he can live to God in the performance of holy duties and in the practice of real virtue.

#### **D. Obey in Order to Receive Acceptance with God?**

It is affecting to think what numbers there are who, with self-righteous views and a blind zeal, strongly assert the necessity of personal obedience in order to acceptance with God, who nevertheless are not able to perform good works. They, indeed, fondly imagine themselves to be the greatest friends to the interests of holiness because they are strongly attached to the Law as a covenant. As they loudly plead the necessity of living to God, so they greatly please themselves with a fancied obedience to His divine precepts—while the doctrine of sovereign grace, the declarations of a free Savior, and a finished righteousness without their doings or deservings are held in detestation by them. And why? Because they suppose that such doctrines received must make void the obligations of divine Law in every sense, and sap the foundations of all morality. Thus, they gratify their native pride under the fair pretext of a superior regard to the Law and a flaming zeal for holiness.

But, if the arguments already adduced<sup>107</sup> be founded in truth, the vanity of such a pretense is evident. For hence it appears that the doctrine of grace is so far from being licentious, that without an experimental acquaintance with it we cannot live to God nor perform any work that is truly good. Till possessed of such an acquaintance with it, we have no faith in Jesus, no love to

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<sup>106</sup> **apprehensive** – uneasy or fearful about something that may happen.

<sup>107</sup> **adduced** – brought forward for consideration.

our Maker, no desire to live to His glory. It is the gospel, in the hand of the Spirit, by which faith and love are produced in the heart. These plants of heavenly origin grow, flourish, and bring forth fruit under its benign<sup>108</sup> influence. It is the honored instrument, in Jehovah's hand, of enlightening the ignorant and of reforming the profligate. An experience of its power makes the ways of holiness pleasant and the practice of duty delightful.

## E. Application

Yes, reader, the more you know of the glorious gospel, the more you love its heavenly Author. So shall you find, by increasing and happy experience, that as nothing in the world can be compared with it for affording relief to a distressed conscience, so there is nothing equal to it for establishing duty on a solid basis, enforcing it by cogent motives, and directing it to a worthy end. How happy, then, is your state, believer! Your person being accepted of God, your works are pleasing to Him. A remembrance that your labor shall not be in vain in the Lord is a noble encouragement to abound and continue in well-doing. Your works of faith and labors of love—being fruits of a vital union with Jesus Christ and indications of an obedient, grateful heart—are highly pleasing to your heavenly Father. Surely, then, it should be your fervent desire and constant care, as a living branch in the true vine, to bear the most generous fruit in rich abundance.

O believer, it is your happiness to have every sin pardoned and every curse removed, to believe in the Son of God and to enjoy communion with Him. Yours it is to love the Lord and seek His glory, to perform duty by divine assistance, and to have your sacred services presented to God and rendered acceptable to Him by Jesus your great High Priest. Yours is the high prerogative<sup>109</sup> of living to God. Prize the privilege; walk worthy of your exalted station and heavenly calling!

As there are comparatively very few that are capable of living to God, if you, reader, profess to be one of those few, your obligations to obedience are many and unspeakably great. You will do well therefore to remember that to talk of possessing superior advantages for the practice of virtue, and at the same time to live as do the world in common, are a great inconsistency. To pretend that you believe in the Lord Redeemer, are in a justified state, and have a delightful communion with the Best of beings; that you have a clear knowledge of divine truth, and a high esteem for the ordinances of Christ in their primitive purity; to pretend to these very superior advantages, while the only discernible difference between you and the world consists in your entertaining a different set of sentiments, or having different forms of worship, is inconsistent and shameful. If this be the case, your speculative<sup>110</sup> knowledge of evangelical truth is greatly abused. It is converted into fuel for spiritual pride, while your conduct is a standing reproach to the name that you bear and a foul disgrace to the truths that you hold. In proportion as our light is clearer and our advantages greater than those of other men, our example should be brighter and our lives more useful.

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<sup>108</sup> **benign** – kind; benevolent.

<sup>109</sup> **prerogative** – exclusive privilege.

<sup>110</sup> **speculative** – based on hypothetical reasoning; theoretical.

## 7. The Law as a Rule of Moral Conduct to Believers

### A. The Moral Law Was a Rule Prior to Being a Covenant

We have already observed that the Moral Law may be considered either as the formula of the Covenant of Works or as a rule of conduct. Under the former consideration [as a covenant of works], we have shown that believers are dead to it and delivered from it; that it has no demands upon them, nor any dominion over them. It now remains that we consider it under its latter denomination [as a rule of conduct]. Here, therefore, we shall endeavor to prove that, as a rule of moral conduct, it deserves and requires the sincere and uninterrupted regards of all who believe.

That the Law may be considered as the rule of our obedience in general—even when it ceases to have any claims upon us or any threatenings against us as a covenant—is a truth of great importance and easy to be understood. Some persons, indeed, either cannot or will not see the Moral Law in any other light than that of a covenant. They imagine that, if we lose the ideas of the reward it promises to perfect obedience, and of the curse it proclaims against transgression, we lose the idea of the Law itself. Consequently, they must maintain that when a person is delivered from it as a covenant, he is no longer concerned with it under any consideration. But this is a great mistake, and pregnant with dangerous consequences.

In order to set this matter in a clear light, it may be of use to observe that the idea of the Law as a rule is prior, in the order of nature, to our conceptions of it as a covenant. For man being formed a reasonable creature and a subject of moral government, being designed to propagate his species, and fitted for social life, it was necessary that he should have a rule for his conduct, and have the bounds of his duty prescribed. He should have such a rule as included both his duty to God and his duty to his fellow-creatures. When we consider mankind as a race of rational beings, their common relation to the great Creator and their unavoidable connection one with another seem necessarily to require it. Such a rule we have in the Moral Law.

The nature of things required that some such rule, for the substance of it, should have been given to our first parents in paradise—even supposing the eternal Sovereign had not been pleased to connect a promise of life with a conformity to it. As creatures in a state of trial, as accountable to God for the use of all their time and the exercise of all their powers, it could not be otherwise. To deny this is to suppose that Jehovah might have created a number of rational beings in strict connection one with another, and all of them in a state of continual dependence upon Himself; and, at the same time that it would have been consistent with all His perfections to have had no regard to their conduct, whatever it might be either towards Himself or one towards another—which, in reference to moral good and evil, would have excluded providence out of the world.

But though it was necessary that our great progenitor,<sup>111</sup> while in a state of innocence, should have a prescription of duty or a rule for his conduct, there was not, there could not be, any necessity arising from that relation in which he stood to God, that this rule of his behavior should have the form of a covenant. Yet this was actually the case. His bountiful Creator not only informed him of his duty and threatened punishment against his disobedience; but, in the threatening itself, it was very strongly implied that his persevering obedience should be reward-

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<sup>111</sup> **progenitor** – ancestor in direct line; in this context: Adam.

ed with life in a happy immortality. The language of that Law which he was under is, “The man which doeth those things [i.e., who performs a perfect righteousness] shall live by [means of] them” (Rom 10:5). So our Lord, referring to the same Law, says, “This do, and thou shalt live” (Luk 10:28). This promise made to obedience gives to the Law the nature and form of a covenant.

This constitution,<sup>112</sup> therefore, was an act of divine condescension and of divine sovereignty. Infinite justice made it necessary that an offence against the Majesty of heaven should be punished; but the most perfect obedience of a creature that is absolutely and perpetually dependent upon the Creator gives no claim to the least reward. Had our great progenitor, Adam, done all that was commanded, he must at last, Jesus Himself being judge, have been but an unprofitable servant. Not the least pittance of merit could have arisen from the performance of his duty—perfect obedience is a debt that everyone owes to his Maker. Consequently, had our first father continued in his primitive state, he would have had no demand on the Eternal Sovereign—it being absurd to imagine that anyone should be obliged to reward his debtor merely for discharging a just debt. There is, therefore, a conceivable, a real, an important difference between the Law as a covenant, and the same Law as a rule.

Now, as in the order of nature, and in the necessary connections and dependencies of things, the idea of the Law as a rule is prior to that of it as a covenant, so there is not the least absurdity in supposing that, with reference to the believer, it may entirely cease in regard to the perfect, personal obedience it requires as the condition of life, and the curse it annexes to every sin, while it continues in full force as the rule of his moral actions.

## **B. Proofs by Scripture for the Moral Law as a Rule of Life**

That the Moral Law is a rule of life to believers may be proved by various arguments. Some few of the many which might be produced, I shall now offer to the reader’s consideration.

### **1. Paul**

Paul, we find—even in that very chapter where he treats the most largely and explicitly concerning believers being dead to the Law, and the Law being dead to them—asserts with regard to himself, “I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom 7:22). Now, whatever law it be that is here designed, he informs us that he delighted in it after the inward man. By which expression he intends not the soul in contradistinction<sup>113</sup> to the body, but the mind, considered as renewed, in opposition to the corruption of nature, still inherent. This law, therefore, cannot be that which is ceremonial, for that was abrogated<sup>114</sup> by the death of Christ. Nor can it be the law of sin, for that was his greatest burden, as appears from the context. Nor can it be the law of his mind, or that new and holy disposition which was produced in his heart in regeneration; for then the sense would be “I delight in the new disposition of my mind, after my renewed mind.” Nor can it be the Moral Law as a covenant, for to that he declares he was dead.

It remains, then, that it must be the Moral Law as the rule of his obedience to God. In the Law, thus considered, he greatly *delighted*. He saw it was “holy, and just, and good” (Rom 7:12). That supreme love which he had to his God, and that ardent affection which he had to his

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<sup>112</sup> **constitution** – covenantal arrangement formed and established by God with Adam.

<sup>113</sup> **contradistinction** – distinction by opposition or contrast.

<sup>114</sup> **abrogated** – done away with.

neighbor, caused him to esteem it highly and to observe it with diligence. Nay, whoever is possessed of the same holy and heavenly principle cannot but love that Law which requires the constant exercise of it.<sup>115</sup>

In another part of the same epistle, he evidently exhorts his Christian brethren to the practice of duty by setting before them the precepts and prohibitions of the Moral Law. These are his words:

Owe no man any thing, but to love one another; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom 13:8-10).

Now, to what purpose does the infallible teacher make use of these precepts and prohibitions when exhorting believers to good works, if they have nothing to do with the Law? Where is the propriety, where is the reason of his doing so, on supposition that it is not the rule of their conduct? For no one acquainted with the gospel can imagine that he is here urging the Law upon them as a covenant of works which prescribes duty as the condition of life—and yet there is no other light in which to consider it, if it be discarded as a rule of conduct.

I conclude, therefore, that the inspired author has here taught us, in a very emphatic manner, that the Law is a rule of life to believers. The same experienced saint and incomparable man, when writing to the church at Ephesus, says, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.” This exhortation he enforces by adding, “Honour thy father and mother,” which are the words of the Law (Exo 20:12), and “the first commandment with promise” (Eph 6:1-2). Now, is it not strange, exceedingly strange, that the apostle should thus refer to the Law and expressly mention its precepts when exhorting the people of God to perform their respective duties, and that he should do it, not only once, but repeatedly, and to different churches (see Gal 5:13-14), if he did not consider it as the rule of their moral conduct? If the Moral Law had been entirely abrogated, if believers had been freed from all concern with it, he must have known it. But if so, it is absolutely unaccountable that he should, in this manner, make use of it and urge its injunctions when writing to a church of Christ called out from among the Gentiles. What! Was the Lord’s ambassador so much at a loss for motives and arguments to enforce his divine Master’s commands, even on the minds of those who were in professed subjection to Him, that he must, in order to gain his point, make use of an antiquated Law—a Law with which they had no concern!

This was far from him. May the thought be far from us! That first-rate minister in the Messiah’s kingdom was well persuaded that the holy Law was a rule for the conduct of Christians. Our divine Surety having paid it the highest respect in performing that perfect obedience which it required, and in suffering the dreadful penalty which it threatened as a covenant, Paul knew that it deserved the most sincere and uninterrupted regard, from all who profess to believe in Jesus, in the whole of their conversation. Without supposing this, we cannot discern either propriety or sense in his thus making use of it when addressing believers.

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<sup>115</sup> See also 7:25, “So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God.”—*A. Booth*



## **2. James**

We have a testimony to the truth for which we plead from the pen of another apostle, which we may consider since it appears directly to our purpose. James, in perfect agreement with Paul, says, "If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well" (Jam 2:8). That it is the Moral Law of which he speaks, cannot admit of a doubt; for he expressly mentions one of its principal commands. Now says he, If ye believers fulfil the royal law of love one to another without any difference of rich and poor, of high and low, according to the Scripture in which it is written, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well. Ye act agreeably to the will of your heavenly Father, and to the commandment of your divine Lord, Who is King in Zion. Acts of Christian kindness and of brotherly love to your fellow creatures and fellow Christians, proceeding from love to God and with a view to His glory, are good works such as the Lord Himself will acknowledge to be well done (Mat 25:23). Here we may further observe that, in loving our neighbor and in evidencing this love by a series of suitable actions, we should have our eye upon that authority which enjoins it, and upon that Law which requires it. It is the authority of God in His Law that we ought to regard.

## **C. Proofs by Other Considerations**

### **1. Another rule instead**

I now proceed to confirm the truth by other considerations. If the Moral Law be not a rule of life to believers, either there is some other and new rule given in its stead, or there is not. If another, it may be presumed that it is either more or less perfect than that contained in the Moral Law. But more perfect it cannot be without supposing that the old, the eternal Law, was imperfect—to suppose which is absurdly blasphemous. If it be less perfect, the consequence is plain. It is not a complete system of duty. It admits of imperfections. It connives at sin. But for anyone to imagine that infinite wisdom would contrive, and that infinite holiness would give, such a rule for the conduct of rational creatures, is absolutely inconsistent with the divine character and pregnant with blasphemy. Such a rule, therefore, condemns itself and sinks with its own weight.

### **2. No rule**

But if there be not another, then it follows by necessary consequence that as there is no rule to regulate the conduct of believers, they can neither obey nor disobey. Sin and duty, as to them, are unmeaning names and empty sounds; because obedience presupposes a command. It is equally evident that, where there is no law, no rule of action, there can be no transgression (Rom 4:15). For how should that be sin which is not forbidden, which therefore is not the breach of any law? But if all irregularities of temper and conduct be forbidden to believers, and if dispositions and practices of a contrary kind be required of them, it must be by a law—a law they are bound to regard as the rule of their duty to both God and man.

The sentiment opposed represents the Holy One of God as the minister of sin! For it supposes that Christ has, in reference to His disciples, dissolved all obligation to duty. Nothing can be more false, nor more derogatory to, our Savior's honor! The satisfaction that He made to eternal justice delivers the persons of believers from final condemnation and everlasting punishment; but the nature of their actions remains the same. Every affection of heart, and every action of life that the Law forbids and condemns in others, is equally forbidden and equally criminal in them. Nay, they being considered as under additional obligations, as knowing their duty better, and as having superior motives to the performance of it—if there be a difference, on the comparison in

regard to any impurity of heart or irregularity of life, it lies against them. Though redeemed from the curse of the Law, they are under obligation to observe its precepts; nor would it be either to their honor or to their happiness to be otherwise.

I suppose it will not be denied by any who acknowledge the Bible to contain a divine revelation that the saints and people of God under the ancient Jewish economy were bound to regard the Moral Law as the rule of their conduct. Yet, it is evident they were no more under it as a covenant, nor any more liable to its curse, than real Christians under the gospel dispensation.<sup>116</sup> Those who believed in the promised Messiah before He appeared, were pardoned and justified, were sanctified and saved, and that by the same glorious grace and the same all-sufficient Mediator with all who have known the Lord since the eternal Word became incarnate—the way of justification and salvation having been but one and precisely the same in all ages (Rom 3:25).

If, then, those ancient saints were bound to regard the Law as the rule of their moral behavior, what reason can be given why believers now should not be under the same obligation? Especially since our Lord has declared, in the most solemn and explicit manner, that He came not to destroy, but to fulfil the Law (Mat 5:17)—to fulfil it as a covenant by His own consummate obedience, and by His most bitter sufferings, in the stead of His people; and to enforce on their minds, by the most cogent motives, its heavenly precepts as a perfect rule of duty. So that whether we consider the Law as a rule of duty, or as a covenant of works, it is not made void by the coming of Christ, nor yet by the doctrine of grace; but on the contrary, it is firmly established and highly magnified (Rom 3:31; Isa 42:21).

If believers be not under the commanding power of the Law, supposing them to act ever so contrary to it, they are not chargeable with sinning against it, nor can they be denominated transgressors. For instance, the Law says, “Thou shalt love God with all thy heart”—that is, with a supreme and perfect affection. “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” These are its capital commands; these are the sum of the Law (Mat 22:36-40). But if the Law be not a rule of life to the Christian, if he be not under its commanding power, he is no longer obliged to love God or his neighbor. Consequently, on supposition that he love neither of them, he is not guilty in the eye of the Law; for where there is no right to command, there can be no authority to pronounce guilty. If, therefore, the believer be not under the commanding power of the Law, whatever the dispositions of his heart or the actions of his life may be, he is no transgressor of the Law—it having no concern with him. Such are the shocking absurdities, and such the implicit blasphemy, that follow a denial of the truth for which we contend.

### **3. *Christian experience***

We may argue also from the experience of the Christian and the dictates of his own conscience. When he reflects on the corruptions of his heart, the imperfections of his duties, and the exceeding sinfulness of sin, what is the standard by which he forms an estimate of these things? Some rule of duty he must have; some rule he must, in his own conscience, acknowledge; or he could not appreciate the dispositions of his heart and the actions of his life, so as to pronounce them either good or evil, perfect or defective, and be pained or pleased on the reflection.

Now, what rule can this be, but the Moral Law? Is it not a complete one, and fit for the purpose? Is there any sin that is not forbidden—is there any duty which is not commanded by that

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<sup>116</sup> **dispensation** – age; period.

Law which requires the constant exercise of perfect love to God and perfect love to man? Can the believer acquit himself in the court of conscience, when he is persuaded that his tempers or actions are contrary to it? Or does he ever condemn them as criminal, but on a supposition that there is something in them which is forbidden by it? Was it ever known that a Christian should say of his inclinations or actions, “I pronounce these to be evil, though required by the Moral Law; and I declare those to be good, though contrary to it”? An infallible pen has informed us that “by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20). Nor is its usefulness, in this respect, confined to the time when a sinner is first awakened and converted. It is of use, in the hand of the Spirit, in all the future progress of the Christian life. As the believer grows in grace, he sees more of its purity, and is proportionately humbled under a sense of his own depravity. If, then, it be of use to a believer still to convince of sin and still to humble for it; and if sin be no other than a “transgression of the law” (1Jo 3:4), it follows that it must be the rule of his moral conduct.

The Law, considered as moral, is founded on the nature of things. The sublime perfections of Jehovah, the relation in which He stands to man as being his Creator, Preserver, and Governor, and the dependent condition of man and the blessings he receives from his Maker constitute that foundation on which the Law is built as it respects our duty to God in the exercise of perfect love and in the performance of holy worship. As the Law regards our neighbor, it is founded on that mutual relation in which we stand one to another in the present state of existence. As is the stability, therefore, of those foundations on which the Law is built, so must be that of the obligation attending the Law itself. If those relations from which all our obligations to God and one another arise be firm and unchangeable, such also must be the obligations themselves—for the several relations and obligations co-exist. This being the case, it follows, by necessary consequence, that while Jehovah is possessed of absolute perfection, and man a dependent being—while God is God, and man is man—that Law which requires perfect love to our Maker is unchangeable. So long also as our relation one to another continues the same, it cannot but be the duty of everyone to love his neighbor as himself. Consequently, so far as we come short in either of these respects, we fail in the performance of duty and are chargeable with sin.

Why should anyone wish to be free from the Law, considered as a rule of moral conduct? It commands nothing but what is right, nor forbids anything that is not wrong. As the things it requires are worthy of God and useful to man, so the things it prohibits are hateful to Him and hurtful to us. To suppose it possible for God to approve those things that the Law condemns would be a flagrant dishonor to His divine character. To imagine that men might perform them without injuring their own souls is a fatal mistake. Besides, is it not the design of the Holy Spirit, in the regeneration of sinners, to produce in them a habitual desire of doing that which is right? But can those dispositions or actions be accounted right which are contrary to the attributes of God or inconsistent with a due acknowledgment of them?<sup>117</sup> When the divine Sovereign displays His perfections, He manifests His glory; so far as we acknowledge those perfections in a suitable manner, we glorify Him. Now, as the Law requires nothing more of us than to treat God as God, and our fellow-creature as our fellow-creature—in other words, as it only requires us to treat objects and things as they are, in their own nature, and in their several relations to us—its

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<sup>117</sup>Johann Friedrich Stapfer, *Institutiones Theologiæ Polemicæ*, Vol. 1; chapter iii, section 1435-1436.—A. Booth

precepts and prohibitions must be unalterable, and the never-failing rule of the Christian's moral conduct.<sup>118</sup>

It must, indeed, be acknowledged that a complete conformity to this high and heavenly rule is what the most holy and zealous believer cannot attain. A perfect personal holiness is not attainable by mortals. For "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1Jo 1:8). The Law, notwithstanding, is no less the standard of duty, is no less the rule by which we should walk, than if we could observe it with the greatest punctuality. Everyone, therefore, who pretends<sup>119</sup> to faith in Jesus, ought to use his utmost diligence that his tempers and actions may correspond with it as much as possible. This is his indispensable duty; and this, if a real Christian, will be his ardent desire.

Nor has the true believer any objection to it or any fears from it, thus considered. It is no longer "a fiery law" (Deu 33:2), thundering out anathemas and flashing vengeance against him. No, it is mild and gentle. He sees that its precepts are highly salutary<sup>120</sup> and its prohibitions exactly right. He does not wish to have them altered. Love to God and our neighbor is a compendium<sup>121</sup> of its precepts; and in the exercise of that love he desires to abound. As to its prohibitions, he knows that the things forbidden would be an injury to him were they pursued; therefore he esteems it his happiness to abstain from them. The new disposition, received in re-

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<sup>118</sup>The very learned and celebrated Vitringa, when reasoning on this important subject, speaks to the following effect: "When Paul affirms that believers, being under grace, are free from the law, he must not be understood as asserting that they are loosed from an obligation to observe the precepts which constitute the substance of those moral laws which are contained in the writings of Moses. For how absurd, how blasphemous, how shocking it would be to suppose that the people of God, under the gospel dispensation, are not bound by any law to revere, love, and adore their Maker; nor under any obligation to seek the good or promote the happiness of their fellow-creatures! Certain it is that grace and faith neither do, nor were ever intended to, free believers from the obligations and laws of humanity. No, their benevolent design was to restore mankind to happiness and to perfect them in holiness.

But were Christians released from the law of love, they would not be in the common condition of humanity. For what is it to be a man, but to be a creature endued with reason, dependent on God for existence and for all the comforts of life, from Whom only he can expect salvation from every evil and the enjoyment of every good that is necessary to perfect his nature and render him completely blessed?

To God, therefore, as his creator, preserver, governor, and supreme good, he necessarily stands related—so related as to be accountable to Him for the enjoyment of every favor, the exercise of all his powers, and the performance of every action. As Jehovah's consummate perfections demand, of a rational creature that is absolutely dependent upon Him and formed for His glory, the highest acts of adoration; as the dominion of God over all creatures requires obedience and subjection; as the majesty and justice of God challenge humility and reverence—so the boundless goodness of God (which is the source of all the comforts we have received, of all the blessings we now enjoy, and of all the happiness we hereafter expect; that infinite goodness, I say, to which every man's conscience bears witness) obliges the reasonable creature to love God; that is, to cleave to Him with all the force of inclination and all the fervor of affection, as being supremely amiable; and to rejoice in His happiness as a Being of boundless excellence.

Now, as one divine perfection infers all others—and as one relation of God to man comprehends all others, including, at the same time, all the duties of man to God that arise from those relations—so all the duties we owe to God might be demonstrated from almost any of those divine perfections that have a relation to man." (Campegius Vitringa, Sr., *Observationes Sacrae*; Vol. 2. L. VI, chapter xviii, section 1)—*A. Booth*

<sup>119</sup>**pretends** – professes.

<sup>120</sup>**salutary** – beneficial.

<sup>121</sup>**compendium** – short but comprehensive summary of a larger subject.

generation, expresses itself in love to God and in obedience to His Law as pure and holy. The gospel furnishes him with the strongest arguments and the most winning motives to abound in obedience, while it is his earnest prayer that the Spirit of grace would afford effectual assistance for the performance of every duty. It is his greatest grief that he does not more constantly and perfectly transcribe the sacred precepts into his conduct, and cause them to shine in his own example.

Besides, the believer beholds the Law—not in the hands of Moses and as surrounded with the flames of Sinai—but in the hands of that Prince of peace Who is King of Zion. He sees that the dear, the adorable, the ascended Jesus, having fulfilled its high demands as a covenant, and released him from its awful curse, now employs it as an instrument of His benign government, for the good of the redeemed and the glory of His own eternal name. As in the hand of Christ, it is a friend and a guide, pointing out the way in which the Christian should walk, so as to express his gratitude to God for His benefits and to glorify the Redeemer. It shows him also how imperfect is his own obedience, and so is a happy means of keeping him humble at the foot of sovereign grace, and entirely dependent on the righteousness of his divine sponsor.

#### **D. Application**

Now, reader, what think you of the Law as a rule of moral conduct? Is it pleasant, is it delightful to you? In vain you profess to know the gracious gospel while you continue an enemy to the holy Law. For as the Law, in its covenant form, is the appointed means of convincing the careless sinner of his need of that righteousness which is revealed in the gospel for justification before God, so the gospel, exhibiting adequate relief to the distressed conscience, is the happy instrument of conciliating<sup>122</sup> the believer's regard to the Law as a rule of conduct, that his faith may be evidenced in the sight of men.

Thus the Law and the gospel are mutually subservient to one another, while both agree to promote the happiness of the redeemed and the glory of their divine Author. He, therefore, who does not pay a habitual regard to the Law in a course of obedience, has no experience of the gospel in a way of comfort. As he tramples on that divine authority which appears in the former, so he despises that boundless grace which is revealed in the latter. Such an one is an enemy to both, and his state is most deplorable.

Remember, reader, you may talk as much as you please about the holy tendency of evangelical principles, but the adversaries of the gospel will never believe you if they do not see the truth of what you say exemplified in your own conduct. The import of those observations that they make on your conversation is, "You that speak with such fluency and confidence about the doctrines of grace and the necessity of faith, let us see what influence these doctrines have on your own tempers and your own behavior. Show us your faith by your works" (Jam 2:18)! This is a reasonable demand. They are authorized to make it. Woe, woe be to every professor of evangelical truth whose behavior is not answerable to that demand! For if our conduct be inconsistent with our profession, we shall soon be treated as the greatest enemies to Christ and His cause.

Are you a believer in Jesus? One that knows the grace of God in truth? You have the purest and strongest motives imaginable to regard the Law. Has the Son of the Highest done all you were bound to perform as the condition of life, and suffered all you were condemned to sustain

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<sup>122</sup> **conciliating** – gaining over; making friendly.

as the penalty annexed to disobedience? Has He done and suffered all this in your stead, that He might procure a full, final, and everlasting salvation for you, a poor, perishing sinner? Has He expressed His regard to the Law as a covenant, not in words, but in deeds—in such deeds as astonish the universe? And shall you be backward to manifest your love to the Law as a rule of moral duty, by a serious, holy, heavenly conduct?

Did He, Whom angels adore, obey, bleed, and die—die an accursed death—so that the claims of the Law as a covenant might be all answered? And shall it seem hard to you to deny yourself, to subdue your corruptions, and to walk by this heavenly rule? Is it the popular clamor against the genuine gospel that “it makes void the law,” and shall it be your constant business and fervent prayer so to observe the sacred precepts as to be a living confutation of that detestable slander? Do not reason and conscience, Scripture and experience, all concur to show the expediency, the utility, the necessity of conforming your life to the Law as a rule?

O, believer, yours is the happy state! Let yours be the holy life. Let it appear that, though dead to the Law as a covenant, you abhor the things it forbids and delight in the things it commands. Then will you stop the mouths of gainsayers; then will you glorify the name of your God. *Amen.*

