

James Wells on the Law of God¹

THE well-known “WATCHMAN,” in his first part of the “Valiant Men of Isael,” writes the following quaint, but expressive lines, descriptive of the pastor of the Surrey Tabernacle,

“JAMES WELLS, with merry gospel bells,
Law-jangler's music he excels;
We've heard the joyful sound:
Redemption free, through Jesus' blood,
To all the sons and heirs of God,
Complete in Jesus found.”

No minister of Jesus Christ was ever more successful in prosecuting and profiting by his studies, nor in the proclamation of the glorious gospel, than James Wells has been. His course has been one of uninterrupted prosperity; he has attained that zenith of prosperity, and high standing in the church which very few faithful men are permitted to reach. We believe he has been enabled to throw himself entirely into the work, God has given him a thoughtful, powerful, capacious, ingenious, and remarkably fruitful mind; and as regards his fluency, eloquence, and good-humored style, we venture to say there is not his equal. As one of “the elect of God,” we sincerely desire that he may have grace given him, increasingly to “put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, and longsuffering, &c. and that the word of Christ may continue very richly to dwell in him in all wisdom.”²

It will be seen, by reference to our notices, that on the first Friday evening in April, his city lecture will be removed from Red Cross Street to the Welch Chapel, Jewin Crescent; where Mr. Joseph Irons has, for so many years, proclaimed salvation by the blood of the Lamb.

We rejoice greatly in every onward movement in the right way of good men: and we will, by divine help, pray that true gospel peace and heaven-born prosperity may attend his future labors. The following gleanings from a sermon preached by Mr. Wells, from Romans 6:23, at the Surrey Tabernacle, on the 30th of December 1849, have been sent us by a friend:

“The word death, as used in Romans 6:23, must be understood both in a literal and in a figurative sense. There are people who are to be banished eternally from the presence of the Lord; this is what is called the second death, and such finally shall come upon those who know not the Lord, and who obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ. “The wages of sin is death,” by the sentence or the law of God. I shall set before you the law of God in a threefold aspect:

First, what it is in its relation to man apart from Christ.

Secondly, what it is as fulfilled by the Savior.

Thirdly, what it is as being a part or the rule of life under which Christians are brought.

¹ E.V. February 1850 pages 85-86

² This accurate and truthful testimony is by C.W. Banks. His love of the Church of England and willingness in later years to compromise became more evident with time. He was a faithful friend to Wells though out his lifetime.

Thousands in our day do not know what the law of God is in its spiritual sense. The apostle defines the effects of the law of God as 'working wrath, as 'engendering bondage,' as 'the ministration of death,' and as the ministration of condemnation. Adam was afraid of the voice of God; the law wrought in him terror in the first place, and in the second place declared that 'in the sweat of his brow he should eat his bread;' it then drove him out of the garden of the Lord, from the tree of life, and set up a flaming sword to keep him from entering into that state from which he had so lately fallen. Let us go a little further: here is the murderer, Cain; the law sets a mark upon him, and declares him to be a wanderer and a vagabond on the face of the earth. Thanks, not to yourselves, but to an overruling providence that has kept you from doing the same, that has kept you from embrewing your hands in your brother's blood. The Holy Ghost declares that 'by the law is the knowledge of sin.' All the trembling's that you have recorded, both in the Old and New Testaments, the language of Habakkuk and David, whence do they arise? From the knowledge of the law of God. And where there is not this knowledge, there is no falling in really and truly with the saving work of Christ. What did the law do for a sinful and guilty world? It engulfed them in a universal grave. What did it do for the inhabitants of the cities of the plain? Destroyed them by the consuming force of the elements of nature. Let us go a little further. What did the law do for Pharaoh and his host? It rolled upon them the mighty waters of the ocean, and they were eternally lost. Let us go a little further, and look at Moses at Sinai, where, in the presence of God, he exclaimed, 'I exceedingly fear and quake.' Another said, 'the arrows of the Almighty drink up my spirit;' another said, 'the Almighty has consumed me.' The law of God brings us to feel that we are as carnal as sin can make us, that we are carnal from first to last. Those who have made the greatest profession and stood the highest in the eyes of the world, have greater thunders uttered against them by the law of God than those who have made no profession at all; their Christ is a sort of Church or England Christ, just coming in at the end of their prayers. When the law of God met with Paul he exclaimed, 'O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!' What will the law of God do at the last great day? It will first cast the wicked into unquenchable fire, and then it will burn up the universe in one terrific conflagration. To meet God in his law, is to meet sure destruction; for 'our God is a consuming fire;' the law of God is a fiery law. The Lord is punctual in all his threatening's. When the Lord shall call sinners to his bar, and lay open the secrets of their hearts, how different will they appear! When brought to feel their misery, their wretchedness, their guilt, their woe, how low they will appear! It is a solemn state to be brought into to be brought to feel that you are in such a state that the scythe of God is about to enter and cut you down. This is a kind of knowledge that can never be obtained by reading books, this is a kind of knowledge that can never be obtained by hearing ministers, but only by the Lord's own teaching. Let us look at the law of God in another aspect. It commands us to love one another; but it proves that we have hated each other. Love is the fulfilling of the law; and Christ has fulfilled the law, living a life of perfect love to God, and perfect love to man; and at his death taking upon him the sins and iniquities of all his people. If you understand the law aright, you have entered into the secrets of that declaration, that 'Where sin abounded, grace hath much more abounded.' We must have reality. There is another aspect of the law; let us look at it. What is it? The law is fulfilled *for us*, and it is fulfilled *in us*; therefore, against us there is no law. 'The wages of sin is death.'

What is the meaning of the word death?

I. It means a non-spiritual existence.

2. It means banishment from God.
3. It means punishment - eternal punishment.

In opposition to this, the word life means:

1. A spiritual existence.
2. The presence of the Lord.
3. Happiness-eternal happiness.

Christ has subdued by his mediatorial work and power all that would have destroyed us; and he graciously preserves us and will preserve us to the end. Amen.