

THE LAW OF LIBERTY

A SERMON

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“Blessed are they that do his commandments.” Revelation 22:14

MY sermon this morning will consist chiefly of explanation; and I hope, and trust, and pray that it may be such kind of explanation that shall take forth the precious from the vile, the living from the dead, the wheat from the tares, the sheep from the goats, the wise from the unwise, the friend from the enemy, him that serves God from him that serves him not; for this is the end that we must ever have in view, that Christians may more and more see their privileges, and that those who are not Christians may, peradventure, should the Lord have mercy upon them, be convinced that they are not Christians, and be made concerned to be Christians; be made concerned to know him whom to know is life eternal. In order, then, to make our text as clear as possible, I shall take, in the first place, the next verse, namely, the 15th, and I shall show that that verse has no less than three significations; that the verse can be read in three ways, and true in all three. And my reason for taking the next verse is for the sake of showing the necessity and making way for the coming in of the gospel meaning of our text. First, then, *the explanation that shall make way for the gospel meaning of our text*; and then, secondly, *the meaning of our text itself*.

First, then, *that explanation that shall make way for the coming in of our text*. The persons who do the commandments of the Lord, in the sense here intended, have right, present right, and eternal right, to the tree of life; to now enter by faith into the city of the Lord; and are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens of the saints, and of the household of God. But those who do not these commandments are not blessed but are cursed; and hence the next verse says, “For without”, that is, those that are left out of this city, out of the life of God, out of the salvation of God, out of the mercy of God, “For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loves and makes a lie.” Now these are they that are without. And this verse must be read in three ways. First. Those that are without are dogs. What are we to understand by this character? A verse from the 22nd Psalm, I think, will explain this, where you have these words to show that the persons here called “dogs” are determined enemies to the Lord Jesus Christ: “For dogs have compassed me.” Then comes the explanation: “The assembly of the wicked have enclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.” You will thus see

that the same persons who in the first clause of that verse are called “dogs,” are, in the next clause, called wicked; and then in the third and last clause, there is their practical wickedness, that they pierced my hands and my feet. Now, when that grace of God takes hold of a man, that teaches him effectually to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly and righteously in this present evil world, that man then ceases to be a crucifier of Jesus. He then is brought into sweet reconciliation to God. In a word, he is no longer in a state that keeps him under the character of a dog. Such a one, now being reconciled to God, becomes a sheep; hears the Shepherd’s voice drinks of the still waters, and lives in the green pastures of eternal truth. This indeed, is a mighty change. And hence the woman, no doubt, understood the dear Savior, and was not the least offended when he said, “It is not meet to take the children’s bread and give it to the dogs.” She, no doubt, understood that to mean what she was, as a sinner; that she had been an enemy to her own soul and an enemy to Christ; and so far from contradicting him, she admitted her degraded state as a sinner, and yet sued for the crumbs that fell from the Master’s table. And she was not despised nor rejected but received. “O woman, great is your faith!” And then sorcerers also. Sorcerers mean false ministers, and false professors. Pharaoh sent for his sorcerers, his divines, his chaplains, his priests, but they could not interpret his dream; and yet these sorcerers, these bewitching men, had bewitched the people, and poisoned their minds against God, and against everything pertaining to the truth of God. Nebuchadnezzar, also, sent for his sorcerers, you will find the term used, that is, his divines, his priests, but they could not interpret his dream. Hence it was that Simon Magus was a sorcerer, and bewitched the people away from God, and wanted to have the gifts the apostles had, that he might carry on his popularity. And thus, the sorcerer, then, is the man who is bewitched away from God, as all of us by nature are; the man whose mind is poisoned against God. “O foolish Galatians! who has bewitched you?” The original word there, as the learned well know, will convey the idea of poison: “Who has poisoned your minds against the truth?” But when grace takes hold of a sinner, and works conviction in his mind, he can no longer be bewitched away from God. No; those things that bewitched him hitherto can bewitch him no longer now; he comes into a new position, and that new position is this, Jesus Christ has said, “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me;” and now Jesus becomes unto that man the center of attraction; and now there is nothing in that man’s estimation like Jesus Christ. He looks at him in the distance; he beholds the King in his beauty and sees the land afar off; and he bears testimony that Jesus is the chief of ten thousand, and the altogether lovely. “And whoremongers. And so it is that, when grace lays hold of a man, if harlots have been his associates, or when it lays hold of a woman, and she has been a harlot, she will then, by the grace of God, fly from the dens of infamy, will be sensible that, in those dens of infamy, there is death; that the guests of those dens are in the very depths of hell; that her paths go down to the dead, down to damnation; and such will fly from those dens of infamy with “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” And such shall not flee to God in vain; they shall not cry in vain; for, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let; and let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” Now this whoremonger has undergone a change, and he looks at God’s house, and God’s ways, and he says, “How amiable are your tabernacles, O Lord of hosts; my soul longs, yes even faints for the courts of the Lord.” I am now brought to love “the habitation of your house, and the place where your honor dwells.”

The next is that of the murderer. Saul of Tarsus was a murderer. Ah, my hearer! What cannot the blood of Christ cleanse from? What cannot the grace of God do? Saul of Tarsus had been a

murderer. And I know that some have gone from the drop of Newgate¹ to the throne of God. Some have gone from Horsemonger jail, that have there been hanged, that after their crime, and after they were in prison, having been brought to a knowledge of God, to a knowledge of Christ, and Almighty mercy has saved them. And if their crime has not put an end to their mortal career, they would have been murderers no more. No; they are now reconciled to God. They look back and say, "What a wicked heart mine must have been! what a criminal heart! what a devilish heart! what a demoniacal heart! Whence could I have gathered up those awful dregs of hell that led me to the dreadful deed of murdering my fellow-creature? Loathsome wretch that I am! "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." "This day", murderer as you have been, "shall you be with me in paradise."

Oh, there are infinite deeps in the sovereignty of God. And then comes the idolater. When grace takes hold of a man, he may be brought before Nebuchadnezzar. And "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not you serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?" O king, it is true. Well, then, there is the fiery furnace for you, heated seven times hotter than ever. Well, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer you in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace;" and if he does not deliver us, we would rather our bodies should be burned to death in your furnace than that our souls should be cast into the furnace of God's eternal wrath; and, therefore, O king, if it be our lot thus to die, we shall do only that which many of our brethren before us have done; and many more, no doubt, will do. "Be it known unto you, O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up." And in thus standing out and keeping God's commandments the king was defeated, enemies were destroyed, the violence of fire was quenched, and they came out of the fire, and not so much as a hair of their heads was singed. "Them that honor me I will honor." And, again, "Whosoever loves and makes a lie." Now, we are all of us fond of lies naturally; that is, we are fond of those things that are false, without knowing they are false. We are all fond of false doctrines. But when grace takes hold of a poor sinner, and breaks him down under a sight and sense of what he is, that sinner finds out his real condition; and, for the first time in his life, is enabled to confess his real state before God, and then he is prepared for the incoming of God's eternal truth; he shall no longer speak lies, but he shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you "free." But then, this way of reading these words may not take hold of some. I may be speaking to some this morning, and I respect you so far; perhaps you are saying, Well, I am not a crucifier of Christ; I am not a dog; and I am not a sorcerer; I am not bewitched; I rather admire the truth than not; and I am not a whoremonger; and I am not a murderer; and I am not an idolater; and I don't think I am a liar; therefore, say you, it does not touch me. Not this reading; but we have another reading presently to come if you will bear with me. You know what the apostle says upon this matter, taking the view of it that I have taken, when addressing the Corinthians, he knew that this did not take up everybody, and therefore said, "Such were some of you," not all; "such were some of you; but you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." Thus, then, this description morally will take ten thousand times ten thousand of our fellow-creatures, and bring them in guilty; and yet, if we stopped at this, then a great many by mere morality would escape. But we cannot let any escape. It is written, that "There is none righteous, no, not one." Now, this second way, in which you must read this then, that "Without are dogs, and sorcerers," and so on, is internally. And I shall begin this internal reading with this text, 17th of Jeremiah; "The heart is deceitful above all

¹ As he goes on in the next example, when they were hung from their crimes they went straight to heaven.

things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" So, I must now take you internally; and however smooth you are externally, you have in your heart, whether you know it or not, a living enmity against Christ, against God. So that if you are as free as an angel outwardly, yet inwardly there are thoughts, inwardly there is a cage of unclean birds, inwardly there are all the elements of hell, that make you as bad as the worst character that ever lived if you were left to the full force of those elements. But I will not go through the verse clause by clause; I need but just remind you of a scripture or two like this, that at a look, an unhallowed look, is the commission of the crime in the heart. "He that looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery in his heart;" whether the man sees and feels it and is honest enough to confess it or not. "He that is angry with his brother without cause, is in danger of the council;" he is a murderer. So that, if we take you internally, then we shall find you where one of old was when Lord took him internally; it brought to light all manner of concupiscence's; and it was that sin that revived within him that killed him, killed his Pharisaic hope, swept away all his righteousness, all his blamelessness, all his conscientiousness; and the amiable Saul of Tarsus, when God took hold of him, became in his own eyes black as sin itself, black as Satan himself, black as death itself he became in his own eyes a poor destitute sinner and was led to this happy conclusion, "By the grace of God. I am what I am." Thus, then, while this outward description will take in a great many, if we read it internally not one is free. I again quote the words that "The heart" whether you know it or not, not a single thought you have ever had, or have, or can have, that has not been present to your Judge; "The heart is deceitful above a things and desperately wicked." Ah, my hearer, how men that know this can go and sit down and say, "Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners, and incline our hearts to keep this law," incline a heart that is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, to keep that law! Why, you might as well ask God to turn you into a god, as ask him to do any such thing. I could not say such a thing. My wicked heart keep a righteous law! My deceitful heart keep an upright law! My desperately wicked heart do something that the law of God can approve! Very different this from the apostle Paul. "I am carnal," that is all I am "the law is spiritual; I am carnal, sold under sin." But let us give it a third reading. I must now take the words spiritually. And then, if I take them spiritually, I shall have that brought before me that is very dear to the heart of the Christian, that there is no sense in which a Christian comes off so unscathed as he does spiritually; there is no sense in which a Christian stands so clear as he does spiritually. I meet with some men that I hope are Christians, right moralists, punctual, everything as precise as possible, rigid upon little things. I never found much savor in such. It is the man that is knocked about, and tried, and cannot do things that he would, and, as good old John Warburton used to say, that man that is devil-dragged by the world, its adversities and circumstances, that is the man that feels his need of Christ, and that is the man that is spiritually minded, cleaves to God, and cleaves to his mercy, and glorifies God for his mercy. Let me then show how clear the Christian stands spiritually. First, the dog. The dog is the wicked man that would crucify Christ. But so clear does the Christian stand in this matter, that the Christian says, Now, grace enabling me, I would rather I myself should be crucified that I would crucify Christ. Hence it was with the apostles, they must turn around against Christ, and crucify him, if they would escape the vengeance of man; but no, they themselves would rather be crucified that, crucify Christ.

There, Christian you are free. You have your faults; with your flesh, in many respects, you serve the law of sin; but here, in this spiritual sense, you look forth as the morning fair, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners. "The remnant of Israel shall no do iniquity", no enmity, that is the idea; "nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth;

for they shall feed” upon the truth, “and lie down,” under the care of the covenant-keeping God, “and none shall make them afraid.” There you stand clear. “And whoremongers.” See how clear the Christian stands here spiritually. We all know what we think of that man to whom all women are alike, literally so; and we all know what we think, what I think, at least, of those ministers and professors to whom all churches are alike. They are spiritual whoremongers they are spiritual fornicators, sir; they can receive any church, or any minister makes no difference to them, whether it is free-will, or duty-faith, or anything else.

But of those before the throne of God it is said, “These are they which were not defiled with women;” not defiled with false churches; they are united to the one pure church of Christ, and they can distinguish that church from all other churches; they are united to the one husband, Christ Jesus, and with all that chastity divine they can look up with a clear conscience, and say, “Whom have I in heaven but you? and there is none upon the earth I desire beside you.” “Other lords beside you have had dominion over us; but by you only will we make mention of your name.” If there is one character more clear in the Christian spiritually than another it is that of his spiritual chastity; he is devoted to Christ, married to Christ, stands out decided for Christ; he abhors all others, he will have no other; he glories in his name, and there he stands, as I have said, looking forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and shall, in this position, be ultimately victorious as an army with banners. “And murderers.” The Christian spiritually a murderer! Oh no. The Christian tread underfoot the Son of God! Dear Son of God, precious Son of God, wondrous Son of God, you glorious Son of God, dear to my heart, dear to my soul, tread you under foot! Oh no, that I can never do. I cannot find it in my heart to do that. Count your blood, your precious blood, your infinitely precious blood, the blood of your wondrous person, count it unholy! That I can never do. Dear, dying Lamb, your precious blood is the life, and joy, and theme of my soul. I have no hope of ever seeing God with joy, but by the efficacy of the precious blood of the Lamb. And do despite to the spirit of his grace! That I can never do. Ah, I told you how it was that the Christian, look at him spiritually, he comes off unscathed, he comes off, and stands before the throne of God, without fault, without blame, without spot, without blemish or wrinkle, or any such thing. “And idolaters.” What, spiritually so? No. There is a good deal of bending, and turning, and twisting about in our day, till we do not know what some ministers and some people are, hardly; but there is not a more excellent grace the Christian can possess than that of solemn and immoveable decision for the truth as it is in Jesus, remember, that false worship, however sincere, is idolatry. “In vain do they worship me, for their fear toward me is taught by the traditions of men.” They set up the golden calf and did not intend to worship the calf; but intended to worship the true God through a god which they themselves set up; but the word of God calls it idolatry. So, false worship is idolatry. “We,” says the apostle, “are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” There the Christian stands clear; he will worship no other God, and he will worship after no other order. Ah, we must use means, you know. Yes, but if they are not God’s means, we shall not come to God’s ends. Depend upon it, the Lord God Almighty will never be indebted to the inventions of man for the establishment of his counsels; for the wisdom of this world, however much admired by the world itself, is foolishness with God. Here, then, take the Christian spiritually; there he stands, free from error; there he stands, chaste to Christ; there he stands, in sweet reconciliation to Christ; there he is, delivered from idolatry. And he love and make a lie! He hates lies. I hate duty-faith and duty-faith doctrines. I hate free-will and Roman Catholic doctrines, and all the doctrines that cast insults upon the Eternal Three, upon the new covenant, and the order thereof, I hate them all. I know what I am saying, I

have proved it now thirty-four years. The Lord has kept me during that time standing as an iron pillar, as a defended city, and as brazen walls; and I believe I shall die happier than I have lived. There is nothing like standing out. "I hate," said one, "every false way." "Let God be true and every man a liar." And God convinces us, that just in proportion, as we sanction false doctrines we put on the image of the devil, for the devil is a liar from the beginning, he lied against God and just in proportion as we consent to false doctrines, we put on the image of the devil. The Lord help us to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and then we shall put on the image of God and shall appear before him arrayed in his precious truth, where we shall be accepted. Now, I hope I so speak as to be understood, giving that verse that threefold reading; first, morally, showing how the Lord's people are delivered; second, internally, taking it in that way none can escape; third, spiritually, taking it spiritually none but spiritual people can escape. I must be born of God, and have a spiritual existence, or else I cannot walk after the Spirit; if born of God, I walk by faith in Christ after the Spirit. And then, if I walk in this new, this spiritual life, then I am in Christ Jesus; and there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, that thus walk, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Now, I will come to *the second explanation, that of our text*. "Blessed are they that do his commandments." Now, the commandments here cannot mean the law of works. If we take it to mean the law of works, we shall then run counter to the new covenant altogether. You read of the law of faith; and it is the commandments contained in the law of faith that are here referred to. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin; and without faith it is impossible to please God." And shall I give an interpretation of this doing these commandments, in a way that will set the Savior aside in any measure? God forbid that I, or you, or any one of his people should fall into such an awful error as that. Better set the sun in the firmament aside, if we could do it, then set Jesus Christ aside; for the time will come when we shall not need the sun, but the time will never come when we shall not need Jesus Christ. It cannot mean the law of works, then, because Jesus Christ himself was under the law of works, not for himself, but for us, and his righteousness is imputed to them that know their need of it, and believe in him, that he went to the end of the penalties of the law, that he was made sin for us, made a curse for us, and the law is dead to us, and we are dead to it. The commandments, therefore, here cannot mean the commandments of the law of work but must mean the commandments of the law of faith. Now then, none but the real Christian will be able to accompany me in the next part of my subject. I will take the doing of the commandments, first, in the general sense, and then go into detail just as far as my time and eight pages will allow, and that will not be far. Now the Lord gave Noah a plan by which he was to escape the flood, and Noah was commanded to keep that plan, to abide by it, to work it out; and so, he did, he never gave it up. The Lord said, It is to be an ark; I will not leave you to choose the wood that you think is most suitable, the Lord chose the very wood; it was to be made of gopher wood, pitched within and without, three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits broad, and thirty high; one door and one window, the window at that top, to get the light of heaven, the door at the side, that poor sinners may go in. And Noah kept the commandment, abode by it, and the Lord came and sealed the whole, "And the Lord shut him in."

Just so now, my hearer, keep the truth, hold it fast, the way in which you are saved, and God will come by and by, and shut you not in an earthly ark, but in a heavenly; he will say, "Well done, you good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things. I will make you ruler over many things: enter you into the joy of your Lord." Again, Moses. The Lord said to him, Now you are to establish a tabernacle and a sacred order of worship, sacrificial worship, by which I will

show mercy to the people, and by which they from time to time shall have nearness of access to me for all they call upon me for; but see that you make it according to the pattern shown to you in the mount. Moses abode by it, altered not a tack, nor a loop, nor a cord, nor a socket, nor anything; and when it was all finished, just as the plan given, the Lord came and filled the tabernacle with his glory, and Moses was satisfied. Just so now, my hearer, hold fast the truth, and the time will come when your soul shall be filled with the glory of God. The tabernacle may be an ugly-looking thing in process of completion, but when once completed and filled with God's presence, then the inferiority of the tabernacle is lost in the superior glory of the Lord; he shall swallow up all our ugliness, all our inferiority, in the superiority of his glory. "See that you abide by the pattern shown to you in the mount." Next, Solomon. Now, some learned architects in our country have written eloquently and largely to show that Solomon derived a great many departments of the temple, in its walls, and carvings, and so on, from Egypt. Learned men these are, very learned men indeed. But it so happens, a simpleton like myself, I read the Scriptures, and I find that David received the plan from the Spirit of the Lord himself, 1 Chronicles 28:12, and gave it to Solomon. So, which am I to believe; these learned men, or God himself? The plan of the temple came from God himself, by the Spirit of the Lord; and Solomon went to work, and altered not a thing from beginning to end; and when the temple was finished, here again comes Divine approbation; fire descended, the sacrifice accepted, the people exempted, and they fell on their faces and said, "Praise the Lord, for he is good, and his mercy endures forever." I will pass by Zerubbabel and come to the New Testament. The Lord Jesus Christ delivered unto his holy apostles a gospel, the gospel, the gospel of the grace of God, the gospel of eternal salvation, and those apostles' abode sincerely, undeviatingly, most earnestly, and most solemnly by that gospel. And when persons brought in foreign doctrines to pervert this gospel, the apostle, in all the solemnity of a man of God, and in all the solemnities of the name of the Most High, under the unerring teaching of the Holy Ghost, said, "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again. If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that you have received, let him be accursed." Well, but here is Peter giving way a little. Then I will withstand him to the face; we will have no other gospel. And so, the apostles never altered the gospel, but preached it just as they received it. Hence the apostle tells us this, that what he received, that he preached. And so, they kept the commandments in keeping the truth. Hence the apostle sums up the whole, "I have fought a good fight;" that is, he had contended for the truth;" "I have finished my course." How have you done it? Why, "I have kept the faith." Well, but your text speaks in the plural; you have given it us only in the singular. I can give it in the plural, as many as you like. Come, then, we will have a word upon the outward first, just a word. "Blessed are they that do his commandments." Baptism is a commandment. "He commanded them to be baptized." Some of you Independents tell us we are so fond of the water. I am not fond of the water, but I am fond of that which is signified by it. The Lord's Supper is a commandment. Ah! say you, You are so fond of the wine. I am not; but I am very fond of that which it signifies. It is not the water in the one, nor the wine in the other, but the things signified by both that have my best affections. "Blessed are they that do his commandments."

But let us look at these commandments spiritually in detail. First, his commandment is everlasting life; then I keep the testimony of everlasting life. Everlasting life is the gift of God; I keep that, I hold fast that, I contend for that, that hope of eternal life which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world was, and that this life is in his Son, and he that believes in him has everlasting life. I hold that truth fast; that is one of the commandments I keep. "Blessed are they that do his

commandments.” Salvation is a commandment. He has given commandment to save me; and I hold fast the truth that salvation is of grace; I keep that commandment, and I know I am blessed in doing it, for salvation has cheered my heart many times, and so it has yours; you know it has. Many times, you have said,

“Salvation, oh, the joyful sound.”

It is a joyful sound. Whatever things go wrong, salvation comes in and puts them all right. This made one say, “Restore to me the joy of your salvation.” This made another say, “But I am poor and sorrowful; let your salvation, O God, set me up on high.” So, we keep those commandments pure and unrebukable. His loving kindness is a commandment; he has commanded his loving kindness: “Continue you in my love.” Not in our love, for that ebbs and flows, but in his love; continue there; let your confidence be in his love. You come and tell me that that doctrine of the eternity and immutability of his love has no attraction for you. I should say, Well, if it has not for you, it has for me; if you don't want it, I do; if you don't care about it, I do; if you don't enjoy it, I do, if you are not at home in it, I am. I shall not come where you are, because I have been where you are; but you have not been where I am, though the Lord in his mercy may yet bring you there. Fourth, his covenant is a commandment, “He has commanded his covenant forever.” This was made known to David in his youthful days, and in some of his earliest Psalms he sings out some of the items of this covenant; and to show that David had kept this covenant which God had commanded him to keep, he, in his dying hour, says, “He has made with me an everlasting covenant.” Oh, then, you are keeping the commandment. Yes, here I am. “He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.” He commands us to call upon him in the day of trouble; and grace enables us more or less to do so. He commands us to cast our burdens upon him, and he will in sustain us, and his grace more or less enables us to do so. He commands us to cast our care upon him, for he cares for us. And so, we may go through these gospel commandments, and see how precious they are, how beautiful they are.

Now these are they that have right to the tree of life and shall enter in through the gates into the city. These persons stand in Christ; they stand clear; there is no laws against them, there is no sin against them, no fault against them; they stand dear, and clear forever.