

LAW AND GOSPEL

A SERMON

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“Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yes, we establish the law.” Romans 3:31

THERE have been, in times past some very fierce controversies among good men upon the question whether the moral law is the believer's rule of life, or whether it is not. Some have advocated the doctrine that it is; others in *toto* have denied. I have watched, and did watch the controversy at the time, and it appeared to me to be a controversy that had no practical value in it. On the one hand, those that said the moral law was not the believer's rule of life, that language appeared to me then, and appears to me now, to have rather a loose and a lawless kind of sound; it did not fall upon my ears in a very pleasant way. I never could join with those, that deny that the moral law is the believer's rule of life. On the other, hand, those who assert that it is the believer's rule of life, I could not join, with them, because that seemed to have a legal twang, to have a tendency to lead away from the faith of Christ, and to build up people in self-righteousness, making them hold those who deny the moral law as the rule of life in great contempt. Hence we see the strong antipathy between, two very able, exemplary, and excellent men, I mean the late Mr. John Stevens, who held that the moral law was the believer's rule of life, and Mr. Gadsby, who denied that, and that controversy between those two great and good men produced a great deal of antipathy. I watched the controversy, and I could accord with neither. So, I came in my own mind, to the conclusion that the preceptive will of God in Christ Jesus, as recorded in the New Testament, is the believer's rule of life. I leave out the question of the moral law, pro or con, and take the precepts of the New Testament, wherein we have the will of God, the legislative, shall I call it? gospel will of God declared. And the precepts of the New Testament direct us in all the relations of human life. This, therefore, appears to me to be the proper rule to look to, the preceptive will of God in Christ Jesus as recorded in the New Testament. I thought, if they could but agree upon that one point, it would end the controversy, end the bitterness; for there were excellent men on both sides, and I am sure we have plenty of differences and disputations without unnecessarily creating any.

Now, before I enter upon the subject, I must just remind you that the word “law” does not confine itself to the ten commandments; you will have pretty good proof of this as we proceed. Also I must remind you that whatever is conditional is law; whatever is unconditional, I mean pertaining to the

things of eternity, is gospel; and the law is, "If you shall obey the voice of the Lord your God;" it matters not whether it was in Eden, or in the land of Canaan, or under what circumstances, whatever is conditional is law; whatever is unconditional is gospel. And therefore, that that is conditional, though not found in the ten commandments, is nevertheless law. And if you seek God by that which is law, though outside of the ten commandments, and by something else, yet if you seek to be saved by that which is conditional, then nominally you may be seeking to be saved by grace, but in reality you are seeking to be saved by the works of the law. Now, then, whatever is conditional is law; whatever is unconditional is gospel. Hence the gospel is all summed up, as you all know, that know the Lord, in these two expressions, "I will" and "they shall;" that is the order in which the gospel stands. But I have to deal this morning with the law, not in its relation perceptively merely to man, for it is too late to dwell much upon that now. I mean too late, in consequence of the fall having taken place. The fall having taken place, we are all sinners by the disobedience of one, all men became sinners. Therefore, we have to deal with the law as a law of condemnation; and to ask in what way we are to be delivered from that law. The apostle here lays down a very beautiful challenge: "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid; yes, we establish the law." I will then this morning, as concisely as I can, guided more by the subject contained in our text than by the mere words of the text itself, take a fourfold view of the law of God, and show in each department as I go along, that it is faith in Jesus Christ, and faith only in him, that can establish the law, and place us in entire harmony with all its sanctions, as well as with all the counsels and perfections of the most high God. First, then, I will notice *the law in its testimony of what we are*. Second, *the law in its testimony of where we are*. Third, *the penalties to which the law tends to bring us*. Fourth, and last, *the infallibility of the law*; not a jot or tittle shall fail.

I will first, then, notice *the law in its testimony of what we are*. And whether we know it or not, there is the testimony, and God cannot be mistaken. But then, as it is literally with the criminal, so it is spiritually with the sinner. The criminal cares nothing for the law until the law apprehends him for his crime; and then, when the authority places its finger upon his shoulder, and says, "You are my prisoner," that man begins immediately to say to himself, "I wonder what the sentence of the law is for the crime that I have committed? I wonder what will be done to me?" He then begins to be concerned. Just so spiritually. We are all sinners before the law seizes us; but then there is this difference from the natural man, he is not literally a dead man, but we are spiritually dead, and therefore unconscious of what God's law is, unconscious of its testimony concerning us, and unconcerned as to what will be done to us, and what will become of us, what our destiny will be. And Satan and the flesh find plenty to occupy our minds, and make us pass our time away in frivolity, in vanity, and in seeking the mere passing, perishable, and dying shadows of this world, until Satan gets us down into his den; then commences our agony and his triumph. So, every man and woman, every son and daughter of Adam, that does not know the law in this world, will, to their infinite and eternal cost, know it in the next world. Hence the apostle, writing to those who were by grace made acquainted with what the law was, writes with freedom to them. He says, "I speak to them that know the law." Let us, then, look at the law in its testimony of what we are. Its language is, "There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understands, there is none that seeks after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that does good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulcher; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: their feet are swift to shed blood", to shed the blood of the Christ, of God, and of the people of

God: "destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes." Now, said the apostle, "what things so ever the law said, it said to them who are under the law;" and all by nature are under the law. This, then, is the testimony of the law. Now did the Lord Jesus Christ live for himself or for us? Did the Lord Jesus Christ die for himself or for us? Are not the Scriptures as clear upon it as possible? "By one man's obedience many shall be made righteous." If, then, I read what I have just now quoted in the light of the Savior, there I see the law is established. He is righteous, no one doubts that; and he understood God's truth; he sought God; he never went out of the way; he never became unprofitable; he always did good, he went about doing good; grace was poured into his lips; nothing unhallowed could have access into, or a lodgment or place in, his pure mind. Deceit was not found in his mouth, and so far from the poison of asps being under his lips, there was honey and milk, that sweetened up the bitter spirits he met with; spirits filled with bitterness, a word from Jesus makes all right and well. "Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." But the Savior's mouth, just read the beginning of the 5th of Matthew, was full of blessing and sweetness. "Their feet are swift to shed blood;" but his feet were swift to save life; for he rejoiced as a strong man to run a race; he gained the prize, and hands over all the happy consequences of his wondrous doings unto his brethren. "Destruction and misery are in their ways;" but salvation and mercy were in the Savior's way. "There is no fear of God before their eyes but he was of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord. Thus, Jesus Christ answers to all this. If you are favored to receive him, then the law itself will pronounce you righteous, the law itself will pronounce you an understanding man. For upon the people that do not understand this way of salvation the Lord will not have mercy, that is, dying in that state; for "he shall come in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." If you thus receive the Savior, you receive one that sought God in perfection; you receive him that never received anything into his mind but that which was pure, holy, and just, you receive him that went about doing good. All these clauses must either be met by the eternal damnation of your soul, or else met by a surety for you. You must be damned as an unrighteous, an ignorant, a filthy person, an evil-doer; you must be dealt with as a murderer, as a deadly enemy to God; or else dealt with according to what Jesus Christ is; and if led to receive him, then you are dealt with according to his righteousness, and according to all his doings. So, that Jesus Christ has thus not made void these terrible penalties; he has met them all; he was just the reverse of the whole. "Do we then make void the law through faith?" Why, these are the very persons that establish the law. Some of you young Christians may not be able, perhaps, to set your seal to it so readily; but there is not an advanced Christian within the sound of my voice this morning that cannot lay his hand upon every one of the fourteen clauses that I have read and say, "That's me; that's me; that's just me;" you will confess the whole of it. And, on the other hand, you will say, But Jesus Christ was precisely the reverse of all this so that if I receive him, I then become precisely the reverse of all this. While I am as a sinner everything that is bad, yet by receiving Jesus Christ I become everything that is good. Thus, the law in its testimony of what we are becomes established, for we acknowledge the truth of it; Christ has met the consequence of it, and we are brought to receive him as the end of it. There is a great deal more in that scripture than may at first sight appear, wherein he is said to be "the end of the law." He is the end of all these clauses I have read, and you have no more to do with them now, having received Christ Jesus, than the surviving widow is under the dominion of her husband deceased. If the husband be dead, she is free. So, by Jesus Christ here is the legal death; all these clauses are dead to you, and you are dead to them, but alive unto God by our Lord Jesus Christ.

I will now come, if possible, closer; for I have, secondly, to notice *the law in its testimony of where we are*, as sinners considered. And it is this, that “as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse.” Now I do earnestly desire, to be clearly understood in this part. You may be a believer in God’s love; you may be a believer in the substitutional work of Christ, in the work of the Holy Spirit, and after a fashion in the gospel, and yet all the time be under the law. Hear it, all of you. Would you believe it, that if you are holding a conditional gospel, you will, notwithstanding all your profession, be dealt with as a man under God’s law? Free-will, duty-faith, both come near to the truth; but they both hold conditions. Every man that is under either of those systems, whatever gospel professions he may make, he is under the law. When that man reads the scripture, “As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse,” “Ah,” he says, “I am not there. I believe in Jesus Christ”, so you may; “I believe in Christ’s substitution; I believe in God’s mercy, so you may, and be under the law all the time. That one conditionality brought into the gospel distorts it all, misrepresents God the Father in his counsels, and God will not allow himself to be fatally misrepresented to his own children. They shall have a right knowledge of God as their Father. And the Savior will not suffer himself forever to be misrepresented to his bride. She shall have right views of him, a right estimation of him. The Holy Spirit will not suffer forever misrepresentations of his testimony. Now, to show that I am right in what I have said, mark this one scripture in the Galatians. There were teachers that came to the Galatians Yes, said they, that apostle Paul is right up to a certain degree. He tells you it is all of grace from first to last; but we tell you this, there must be something done by you. It is preposterous to suppose that the Lord will save you whether you will or not, said these false teachers. There must be something. Now if you will but be circumcised and keep the law, get up a sort of something for yourselves, and then come to God, then you will be saved. The apostle Paul, by the inspiration of the eternal Spirit (and from his testimony there is no appeal), the apostle Paul, in the deep solemnity, with which he was blessed, declares that that man that attaches a condition to the gospel is a debtor to do the whole law. Where are you then, my hearer? Are you rooted right out of self? Have you given up your duty-faith, your free-will? your creature goodness, are you completely stripped? are you laid down; if not so conspicuously or with so much terror as was Saul of Tarsus, are you brought down into utter helplessness? Do you see and feel that the work of eternal salvation must be entirely of God, and that the things that accompany salvation must be as much of God, as free, as firm, and as sure as salvation itself? Now if you hold an erroneous doctrine, that erroneous doctrine is a lie, and that inspires you with antipathy to what you are pleased to call, though you know not why, high doctrine; it inspires you with an antipathy to that glorious gospel, the whole of which, from first to last, is, “I will and they shall.” This, then, is the testimony of the law: first, what we are; and second, where we are. “As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse.” If it is only one or two works, if you view it as conditional, you will be dealt with not as a believer, but as a man under the law. The law and the gospel are as distinct as death and life, as wrath and love, as eternal indignation and everlasting mercy; they stand entirely distinct. What is the remedy to the believer here? Does he make void the curse of the law? No, he reads on, “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law.” Is that redemption conditional? is it partial? is it defective? is it uncertain? is it in any way fallible? Is it not declared that he has obtained eternal redemption? “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ.” Thus, then, is it our happy lot to know what the law says as to what we are, and do we receive the Lord Jesus Christ as the entire remedy for the whole?

Second, the testimony of *the law in testifying where we are*, under the curse. And the apostle declares all that bring any conditionality to be under the curse. Yes, you know what solemn language he uses. He reckons any error brought in as a cause of distorting the whole of the gospel. "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." And the apostle mentions it twice, to show that what he was saying he was not saying in a hurry, So, then, if you would be in harmony with the law, it must be by faith in Jesus Christ; and if you would escape the curse of the law, you must renounce all hand in it yourself. The bounds are set around Sinai, and you must not go near enough to have any hand in it; your experience must be a confession that you cannot endure that which is commanded, and your prayer will be, "Let not this voice speak unto us again," for it has spoken nothing but wrath and indignation. But when brought thus to receive Jesus, here you see a covenant God, just and yet the justifier of him that believes. Here, then, Jesus is all the law demands, but the Savior endured for us what was commanded; here his atonement is all that the penalty could inflict. He suffered all there was to suffer. Do we then make void the law? Jesus Christ has established the law, and thus delivers us from where we are, brings us out from under the law; we have done with Sinai, our place is at Mount Zion, where there is the ark of the covenant, where there is the mercy-seat, where there is the great High Priest of our profession, where we have boldness to enter by the blood of Jesus into the holy of holies.

Thirdly, I notice *the penalties to which the law tends to bring us*, if we are found under it. Passing by many things, let us accompany the apostle in the instruction that he gives us concerning the law in contrast to the gospel. "Tell me," he says, "you that desire to be under the law." Now, mind you, to desire a conditional gospel is the same thing, whatever is conditional is law; whatever is unconditional is gospel. See the new covenant everywhere in its unconditionality. "Tell me, you that desire to be under the law, do you not fear the law?" and though he refers to the place where the law was given, yet he does not quote from the ten commandments; showing that the word law extends to everything conditional, not only to the ten commandments, but everything conditional. "For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh." How many thousands have been nominally born of God, but only after the flesh! They are converted, but to what are they converted? Not to God's truth; not to God's eternal and immutable counsels; not to God's Christ; they are born into a profession, but they are born after the flesh. They are converted by the bondwoman; they join a bond woman church, and they hate the gospel; they call it by all the ugly names they can think of. "Which things are an allegory," these two women, Sarah and Hagar; that is, they mean something beyond their mere history. What does Hagar represent? She hated Sarah, and so does the false church hate the true church to this day; the bondage church hates the free church to this day. "This Agar is Mount Sinai in Arabia," that is, under the law, and genders to bondage, according to their own showing. You talk to any of these legalists, perhaps I am speaking to some this morning; and if I am, the Lord help them to understand what I am saying, and open their eyes, and bring them out of it. Now if I am speaking to any of these legalists, you know what your doctrine is. You think that just as you do your part, in the same proportion the Lord will love you, and bless you, and be with you, and will do you good; and that he marks every little fault about you, and that a little fault robs you of a great many things. And you quote that scripture, which is a law scripture, not a gospel one, where it is said, Your sins have hidden his face from you, and your iniquities have withheld good things from you. That is a law scripture. Why, in the

gospel the Savior's atoning blood defies all sin; in the gospel the Father's infinite embrace of my soul in his boundless and everlasting love swallows up all my sins.

"Ten thousand sins, that reach the skies,
Are swallowed up, O love, in you."

The Holy Spirit rushes into the valley in the universality of his power, brings the bones together, lays sinews and flesh upon them, clothes them with skin, and they stand up an exceeding great army, each looking round and saying, Where is he, that I may fear? Behold, God is my salvation, God is my strength. Though ten thousand set themselves against us, we will not fear; for if God be for us, who can be against us? Whereas your beggarly language, you legalists, I am not saying it reproachfully, but kindly; you know we must be rough sometimes, even in our kindness, your poor crawling language is, Well, I did not hear well; and my minister told me if I did not prepare myself before I left home, I could not expect to hear well. You are not prepared. Well, says the poor man, if poverty, if wretchedness, if my being tossed about, if my being tried as I am, if all this be any preparation, then I am well prepared. But if something smooth and easy be a preparation, then I had better not go. Ah, bless the Lord,

"The poorer the wretch the more welcome there."

Away, then, with conditionality; let us have the I will, and they shall." The law of conditionality genders to bondage; but in Christ Jesus we have freedom. "If the Son make you free, you shall be free indeed." "Genders to bondage." I read one of these bondage sermons, sometimes now; what pretty tales they tell! "Now I have invited you to come; I have offered you salvation, if you will only have it." What is all this? The language of the law; and he who is thus converted is converted with a fleshly conversion; it is all of the flesh from first to last; there is no spirituality in it. Now Jesus Christ came into our bondage. Perhaps I shall express myself better if I say he came into our law responsibility. "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" He was bound with all our law responsibilities; he worked himself righteously, by his life and by his death, out of that responsibility. "It is finished;" he is free, perfectly free, eternally free; and we are free by him. The law has had its demands satisfied, and now asks nothing more.

"Nor aid he needs, nor duties asks,
Of us poor feeble worms;
What everlasting love decrees,
Almighty power performs."

"Do we then make void the law?" It is by Jesus Christ that our liberty is lawful. If our freedom were unlawful, we should feel guilty; we should feel we had no business to be at large. But the debt is paid, the fault is forgiven, the reparation has been made, the righteousness brought in, mercy and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other. "For this Agar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answers to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above" that is, the new Jerusalem, the new life, the new heaven, the new covenant, the new earth, the heavenly river, is free, "which is the mother of us all." So, then, this conditional system, keeps the soul in bondage. It is a solemn thought that thousands are

converted with a fleshly conversion; their religion is fleshly; they have never thoroughly renounced all confidence in the flesh, so as to have their hope in a covenant God, and in no other. They profess it, but they do not. And these conditional people generally go down, and down, and down; and even their ministers that preach a little truth sometimes, if they have a man to preach for them, they generally have a man four or five degrees lower than themselves; and when the people go away, they generally go to a low doctrine place; for not knowing their need of the truth, they do not seek it. Look at the antipathy then. The apostle said, "As then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now." You cannot reconcile the two, no; it is no use. Some of you in the country, if you are living where you cannot go and hear the truth, then stop at home and read your Bible; do not go to hear error. Ah, but I hope they will come, round by and by. Not they, unless God should convince them of what they are and where they are; if they should be so convinced, and brought to see how entirely ruined they are, then they would come to you, but not before. Let them come over unto you, but go not you over unto them; and if we would be deceived, let us hold a conditional gospel; it is nothing else but law in disguise. If we would go on from bondage to bondage, until we are shut up in the prison of hell, then let us go on and hold a conditional gospel.

If we would hate the liberty of the gospel, if we would hate the new and everlasting covenant, and all that are decided for it, then let us hold fast a conditional gospel. But if we would be free, if we would have an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, then let us hold fast grace, and grace only; for in that way, and that way only, can we serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear. Hagar and Ishmael are to be cast out. What says the Scripture? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son." One of the things to which I attribute the success we have had as a church is in being very cautious as to whom we receive among us. And if you think you are coming to put your name down, if you come with an Ashdod, legal twang, depend upon it; if we should do with you then just as the priest of old did with the leper. When there were some spots about the leper, and the priest hardly knew whether it was the leprosy or not then he shut him up seven days to see how it went on, and then, if it had not spread, he was to be shut up again; and then, after another seven days, the priest was to see him again, and if the leprosy covered the man from head to foot, the priest was to pronounce him clean directly. This would seem rather paradoxical to the leper. Why, he would say, when there was not much the matter with me, the priest pronounced me unclean? but now I am a leper all over, he pronounces me clean. So, if we do not see a thorough conviction of sin, we must stand aloof, and see how the matter will go. Then, when you come again; if we find the leprosy of sin has spread all over you, that is, if you are convinced of your utter wretchedness and helplessness, and are brought to know the truths of the new covenant, then we can receive you. We follow the Master's example, "This man receives sinners." Of course, he did. He did not intend to receive any others. He received the poor publican, the thief on the cross.

But, lastly, I notice the *infallibility of the law*. Now you must take the word "law," as I have said, to mean anything that is conditional. The Savior, in the 5th of Matthew, says, "One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law." But some laws have been suspended, and others have been abolished; and yet he says, Not one jot nor tittle shall fail. How is that? say you. We must quote the other clause, "Till all be fulfilled." Why, the Savior, in the 5th of Matthew, abolishes three laws. I suspended only one, and yet they got up a protest. Where were the protesters in that day? Why, they must have been talking, or pursuing, or on a journey, or asleep. The Savior abolishes

three laws in that chapter, after declaring the law is infallible. He abolishes the law of oaths. He says, "You have heard that it has been said you shall not forswear yourself," in the 30th of Numbers, 2nd verse; "but I say unto you, Swear not at all." Why does he abolish these oaths? Because his one oath swallows up every other oath. Jesus Christ was made a priest by an oath, and that one oath binds everything, so that you have no occasion, by your oath, to bind anything. Under the Old Testament dispensation, it was conditional, and they brought an oath to bind themselves, but this one oath binds everything. Second, he abolished the law of retaliation. "You have heard" 19th of Deuteronomy, 21st verse, "that it has been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, That you resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also." Adopting the Christian principle of forgiveness, Jesus has met the law of retaliation. Justice retaliated our sins upon Christ; he was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him. The law of retaliation is thus met. The law of hatred, too, he abolishes in that chapter. "You have heard that it has been said, You shall love your neighbor, and hate thine enemy." That is right; it is all inspiration. The Jews were commanded not to seek the peace or the friendship of the Moabites all the days of their life forever. There was hatred. But now I say unto you, I come to slay the enmity; I come to put love into the place of hatred; therefore "love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." How beautifully, then, the Savior has ended the law by establishing it! "One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." Point, if you can, to one jot or tittle of any one conditional scripture in the Bible that the Savior has not met, then I will give up my point.

Thus, does the righteousness of faith exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, and that in all respects the righteousness of the Pharisee is after the order of a conditional gospel, and is, as I have said, nothing but law in disguise. The righteousness of faith is fourfold; and it exceeds that of the Pharisee, 1st. Equitable righteousness. Christ's righteousness is equal for ever to all the demands of law and justice. This is the everlasting righteousness of faith. So that it may be well said that whom he justified, them he also glorified. 2nd. Evidential righteousness. The evidential righteousness of the true believer lies in his true reconciliation to God, and in his works, like Rahab, of gospel decision. But the believer of a conditional gospel is not truly or rightly reconciled to God, and is not, as Abraham was, the friend of God. 3rd. Prospective righteousness is by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He is risen, and therefore they are right in looking for eternal life by him; for because he lives, they shall live also. Last, the ascriptive righteousness of faith.

But your time is gone; and all I can say in conclusion is this, if you thus look, then, at the testimony of the law as to what we are, where we are, the evils it inflicts, the Savior is the end thereof; and the conclusion is that our ground is firm, our prospects are clear, the truth is certain, the gospel must prevail, and our souls must forever be saved.