

i.e., 'rather than,' sacrifice." We are here taught that God prefers the possession of the spirit to the observance of the letter, that he sets more store upon the internal than the external, that the essence is more precious in his eyes than the form, that he attaches greater value to morals than to rituals.

There are two great classes of obligations which God has imposed upon men: the moral and the positive. The former arise necessarily out of the relation in which we stand to God and to our fellows: the latter are of special appointment. The moral are eternal in their nature: the positive may be changed or abrogated altogether, as many of them have been. Love, truth, justice are examples of the one. Sacrifices, tithes, fasts, feasts, Sabbaths and sacraments are examples of the other. It should not be difficult, one would imagine, to perceive that there is a difference between these two classes of duties. Both are binding, doubtless, yet both do not stand upon the same level. The truth is they are related as end and means. God's great delight is right affections, and graces of heart and life. In his wisdom, however, he has seen best not simply to inculcate these, but to institute ordinances calculated to promote them. It must not be forgotten, however, that these ordinances are only means. The former are the end for which they exist, and hence of prior import. Christ himself pronounced them "the weightier matters of the law" forever settling their relative value, and again he has spoken in the words of our text "I will have mercy and not sacrifice."

Strange to say this very thing men have always shown a marvellous tendency to forget. They have ever manifested a decided disposition to separate positive and moral, regarding the former as alone constituting religion and having to do with eternal salvation. So far from recognizing the distinction laid down men have exhibited a fatal determination to reverse the order of the text and proceed as though God's declaration had been "I will have sacrifice and not mercy." The Pharisees at the time of Christ furnish us an example in point. In fact the whole Jewish people were largely imbued with this spirit. How careful they were with regard to religious observances. No people could be more so. They went even beyond the strict requirements of the law in their zeal for forms and ceremonies. They were accustomed to fast not only when the law ordained, but twice in the week. They tithed not simply that which the law prescribed, but mint and anise and cummin and every insignificant herb that grew in the garden. Their Sabbath