

On the whole I think it must appear to every impartial enquirer that they who depreciate the law regard it as the Jews regarded it, rest in its bare—mere letter only, instead of looking upon it, as they ought to do, as a living development of the great law of love, stretching forth its branches in every direction in which human transgression had extended, and saying to us evermore, as it repoves our diversified offences, not only 'depart from evil' but 'do good.'

It is this Jewish view of the law which St. Paul everywhere combats, and his language has probably, being grievously misunderstood, given occasion to the objections which are made against the law.

Let us take one, perhaps the most perplexing, case (1 Tim. i. 9,) "the law is not made for a righteous man." As if the apostle had said, read as they read it, obeyed as they obey it, it is no rule of life for a righteous man; had men been righteous, they would never have had such a law. They glory in not being subject to the condemnation with which its letter visits the grossest criminals.

It was needful for man in his fallen state that the law of love should be thus interpreted, expressed under this negative and prohibitive form; but the law which is thus interpreted is made for a righteous man; the interpretation, taken by itself, is made for the lawless and disobedient.

On the whole then we conclude that under the christian system the law of the ten commandments still subserves its original purpose of convicting of, and restraining from sin; that under the teaching of the Holy Spirit it is an instrument for the restoration of the soul, that it convinces of righteousness; and again that it is a law in which the Christian man may delight, regarding it as a friendly monitor and guide, inasmuch as he is enabled to yield it a true obedience, and is not subject to its condemnation.

With reference to this last position it may be desirable to quote language used by one of the Plymouth Brethren, who writes under the signature C. H. M. "The law" he says "knows no such thing as a distinction between a regenerated and an unregenerated man; it curses all who attempt to stand before it. It rules and curses a man, so long as he lives; nor is there any one who will so fully acknowledge that he cannot keep it as the true believer; and hence, no one would be more thoroughly under the curse."

To this we must reply that we fully confess that the law is not a ground of justification, that we cannot by obedience to its prescriptions commend ourselves to God's favour, or deserve His blessing; but that it is quite another thing to allow, that they who *have been justified* freely by God's grace are still obnoxious to the curse of the law, and that the only escape from the curse lies in God's repealing His own enactments, and altering the thing that is gone out of His lips.

It is the wondrous grace of the gospel that the law of God is put in our minds, and written in our hearts: while that sacred writing of the finger of God remains uneffaced must we not believe the apostle's declaration (Gal. v. 23,) that "against such there is no law." Our Lord's blessing surely cannot co-exist with the curse of His own law, yet His blessing is given to them 'that mourn,' to them "who hunger and thirst after righteousness." And this very mourning, this hunger and thirst argues a condition of imperfect attainment—of manifold deficiencies and failures of duty.

Finally the Plymouth Brethren seem to dream of some higher standard of duty which is proposed to the Christian, and of which even perfect obedience to the law would fall grievously short. In reply to this groundless imagination we can only say that no higher rule of duty can possibly be imagined than the law of the ten commandments as interpreted by our blessed Lord and His apostles, whether in the way of reducing the several commandments to their grand fundamental principle, or of evolving their wondrous depth and breadth severally considered, or of presenting them under their positive aspect. The new commandment is still the old commandment which has been from the beginning. Love, gloriously illustrated indeed by the Redeemer's teaching and example, yet love to God and man as it was written on the heart of Adam ere he fell.

We need not direct attention to our Lord's most emphatic assertion of the eternal duration and unchangeable obligation of the moral law; if those words are misinterpreted it is not because they speak not with sufficient clearness, but because men approach the Scripture with pre-conceived opinions, and are consequently incapacitated for receiving its most obvious teaching.

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