



THE LAW

AND

THE GOSPEL.

By C. H. M.

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WE desire to dwell for a little upon two grand questions which are suggested and answered in our Lord's interview with the lawyer, namely, What is written in the law? What is revealed in the gospel? These questions have only to be named to secure the attention and awaken the interest of every intelligent and thoughtful reader. It is surely most needful to understand the object, nature, and range of the law; and in no way can these things be so clearly seen as when examined in contrast with the glorious gospel of God's free grace in Christ. Let us, then, in the first place, proceed to inquire,—

WHAT IS WRITTEN IN THE LAW?

This question may be very simply answered. The law reveals what man ought to do. This is what is written in the law. We often hear it said that the law is the transcript of the mind of God. This definition is altogether defective. What idea should we have of God were

we to regard the ten words uttered on the top of Mount Sinai, amid thunders and lightnings, blackness, darkness, and tempest, as the transcript of His mind? How should we know God, if it be true that "the administration of death and condemnation, written and engraven in stones," is the transcript of His mind? May we not, with great justice, inquire of the framers of the above most objectionable definition, Is there nothing in the mind of God save death and condemnation? Is there nothing in the mind of God save "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not"? If there be more than these, then it is a mistake to affirm that the law is the transcript of the mind of God. If it be said that the law declares the mind of God as to what man ought to do, we have no objection to offer, for that is what we hold the law to be. But then, let the reader remember that the declaration of what man *ought to do*, and the revelation of what *God is*, are two totally different things. The former is the law, the latter is the gospel. Both, we need hardly say, are perfect—divinely perfect; but they stand in vivid

contrast; the one is perfect to condemn, the other is perfect to save.

But let us see how this point is unfolded in the scripture before us. "And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted Him, saying, 'Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' He said unto him, 'What is written in the law? how readest thou?' And he answering said, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.' And He said unto him, 'Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.'"

Now, the great law-question "What must I do?" is here proposed and answered. If a man is to get life by keeping the commandments, he must keep them. There is no mystery about this. It is so plain that the question is, "How readest thou?" A man has only to read Exodus xx. in order to know his duty toward God and his duty toward his neighbor.

But then, dear reader, the solemn inquiry is, Have I done my duty? have I

loved God *with all my heart?* and my neighbor *as myself?* Alas! alas! I have not; far—very far from it. I have proved, times without number, that I loved many things which are quite contrary to God; and that I have indulged in lusts and pleasures which God condemns; that my will is thoroughly opposed to God's will; that I hate the things which He loves, and love the things which He hates. In a word, then, it is perfectly manifest that I have not loved God with all my heart, yea, that I have not given Him a single affection of my heart. And as to my neighbor, have I loved him as myself? Have I, at all times, and under all circumstances, as sedulously sought to promote my neighbor's interests as though they were my own? Have I rejoiced as unfeignedly in his prosperity as in my own? I dare not answer in the affirmative. I have only to bow my head and confess that I have utterly and shamefully failed in my bounden duty, both toward God and toward my neighbor. I own it, most fully, to be my duty to love God with all my heart, and my neighbor as

myself; but I own, as fully, that I have done neither the one nor the other.

What, then, can the law do for me? Curse me and slay me on the spot. Is there no mercy? Not in the law. There is no mercy at Mount Sinai. If a man stands before that fiery mount, the tremendous alternative is, *duty* or *damnation*. There is no middle ground. "This do, and thou shalt live," is the solemn, conclusive, and emphatic language of the law. "The man that doeth these things shall live in them;" but on the other hand, "cursed is *every one* [without a single exception] that *continueth* not in *all things* which are written in the book of the law *to do* them." (Gal. iii. 10.) "He that despised Moses' law, *died without mercy* under two or three witnesses." (Heb. x. 28.) The law makes no provision for imperfect obedience, however sincere. It makes no allowance for infirmity. Its one brief, pointed inquiry is, Have you continued in all things? If you say, *No* (and who can say otherwise?), it can only curse you. And why? Because it is perfect. Were it to pass over a single transgression, it would not

be what it is, namely, a perfect law. Its very perfection insures the condemnation of the transgressor. "As many as are of works of law [that is, as many as work on the principle, stand on the ground, occupy the platform, of works of law], are under the curse," and cannot possibly be any thing else. This establishes the point unanswerably. The law can only prove to be a ministration of death and condemnation to the sinner, simply because he is a sinner and "the law is holy, just, and good." It is no use for a man to say, I am not looking to the law for life or justification, but merely as a rule, and for sanctification. As a rule for what? For the sanctification of what? If you say, For my old nature, the answer is, So far from being "a rule of life," it is "a ministration of death;" and so far from sanctifying the flesh, it condemns it, root and branch. If, on the other hand, you say it is for the new nature, then is your mistake equally obvious, inasmuch as the apostle expressly declares that "the law is not made for a righteous man." (1 Tim. i. 9.)

This is plain enough for any one who

is content to take the holy Scripture as his guide. The law can neither be the ground of life nor the rule of life to a fallen creature; neither can it be the ground of righteousness nor the power of sanctification. "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin." (Rom. iii. 20.) This one passage is conclusive both as to justification and sanctification. No flesh can be justified in God's sight by the law; and as to sanctification, how can I ever become holy by means of that which *only* shows me my unholiness? If I measure a short web by a true measure, I must prove it short. A true measure cannot make a short measure its proper length; it can only show what it is. Just so with the law and the sinner.

Again, "The law worketh wrath." (Rom. iv. 15.) How is this? Just because it is pure and I am impure. The law and the sinner are perfect opposites—wholly irreconcilable. I must get a new nature, stand upon new ground, be in the new creation, ere I can delight in the law of God. "I delight in the law

of God after the inward man." (Rom. vii. 22.) But how do I get this "inward man," this new nature? How do I get into the new creation? Not by works of law, of any shape or description, but by faith of Jesus Christ. I become united to Christ in the power of a new and endless life, upon which the law has no claim. I died in Christ, and hence the law has no further demand on me. If a man is in prison for murder, and dies there, the law has done with him, inasmuch as the life in which the crime was committed is gone. Thus it is with the sinner who believes in Jesus. God sees him to be dead. His old man is crucified. The sentence of the law has been put into execution upon him in the person of Christ. Had it been executed upon himself, it would have been death eternal; but having been executed upon Christ, His death is of infinite, divine, and eternal efficacy; and moreover, having the power of eternal life in Himself, He rose, as a Conqueror, from the tomb, after having met every claim, and—wonderful to declare!—the believer, having died in Him, now lives in Him forever. Christ

is his life, Christ is his righteousness, Christ is his rule of life, Christ is his model, Christ is his hope, Christ is his all and in all. See, carefully, Romans vi, vii, *passim*, Gal. ii. 20, 21; iii; iv; Eph. ii. 4-6; Col. ii. 10-15.

But we must not anticipate what properly belongs to the second grand division of our subject, to which we shall pass on, having first sought to meet a difficulty which may perhaps exercise our reader's mind. It is possible that some may feel disposed to inquire, If the law cannot yield life, furnish righteousness, or promote sanctification, then for what end was it given? The apostle anticipates and answers this question. "Wherefore then the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made." (Gal. iii. 19.) So also, in Romans, we read, "Moreover, the law entered [or came in by the way, between the promise and the accomplishment] that the offense might abound." (Chap. v. 20.) These two passages declare in simplest terms the object of the law. It is not said, The law entered in order that we might get

life, righteousness, or sanctification by it; quite the opposite—it was “because of transgressions,” and “that the offense might abound.” Where is it said in Scripture that the law was given that we might get life, righteousness, or sanctification by it? No where. But it is expressly declared that “the law was added because of transgressions,” and that “it came in by the way that the offense might abound.” It is not possible to conceive two objects more diverse. The legal system speaks of life, righteousness, and sanctification by law; the Scripture, on the contrary, speaks of “offense,” “transgressions,” and “wrath.” And why? Because we are sinners, and the law is holy. It demands strength, and we are weak; it demands life in order to keep it, and we are dead; it demands perfection in all things, and we are perfect in nothing; it is holy and just and good, and we are unholy, unjust, and bad. Thus it stands between us and the law; and it matters not in the least, as regards the principle of the law, whether we are regenerate or unregenerate, believers or unbelievers,

saints or sinners. The law knows nothing of any such distinctions. It is addressed to man in the flesh, in his old-Adam condition, in his old-creation standing. It tells him what he ought to do for God, and, inasmuch as he has not done that, it curses him, and it cannot do any thing else. It shows him no mercy, but leaves him in the place of death and condemnation.

Thus much as to “what is written in the law.” Let us now proceed to inquire, in the second place,

WHAT IS REVEALED IN THE GOSPEL?

This is unfolded, with uncommon beauty and power, in the touching parable of “the good Samaritan.” The lawyer, like all legalists, “willing to justify himself,” sought to ascertain who was his neighbor; and, in reply, our blessed Lord draws a picture in which is most vividly presented the true condition of every sinner, be he lawyer or aught else. “A certain man *went down* from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which *stripped* him of his raiment, and *wounded* him, and de-

parted, leaving him *half dead*." What a picture of man's career and man's condition! "A certain man"—the writer or the reader of these lines—"went down." How true! Reader, is it not so? Has not thy course ever been a downward one? Hast thou ever, when left to thyself, taken a step upward—a step in the right direction? There is no use in generalizing, in making statements about mankind, the whole human race, Adam's posterity, and the like. What we want is to bring the matter home to ourselves, and say, each for himself, I am the "certain man" of this singularly beautiful parable; it is *my own* very figure that appears in the foreground of this masterly picture; *my* course has been a downward one; I have gone down from the innocency of childhood to the folly of youth, and from the folly of youth to the matured wickedness of manhood, and here I am, "stripped" of every shred in which I might wrap myself; "wounded" in every region of my moral being, and having the painful consciousness that death has already begun its terrible work in me.

Such is the career, such the condition, of every sinner—his career, downward; his condition, death. What is to be done? Can he keep the law? Alas! he is not able to move. Can the "priest" do aught for him? Alas! he has no sacrifice, and no ability to rise and get one. Can the "Levite" not help him? Alas! he is so polluted with his wounds and bruises that neither Levite nor priest could touch him. In a word, neither law nor ordinances can meet his case. He is utterly ruined. He has destroyed himself. The law has flung him overboard as a defiled, good-for-nothing, condemned thing. It is useless talking to him about the law, or asking him will he take it as a means of justification, a rule of life, or the power of sanctification. It has cursed, condemned, and set him aside altogether, and he has only to cry out from the profound and awful depths of his moral ruin, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Now, it is when a man is really brought to this that he is in a position to see the moral grandeur of the gospel. It is when

he has discovered his own guilt, misery, and ruin, and also his entire inability to meet the just and holy claims of the law, or profit, in any wise, by the appliances of the legal system in its most attractive forms, that he is prepared to appreciate the ample provisions of the grace of God. This is most strikingly illustrated in the scene before us. When the poor man had got down from Jerusalem to Jericho—from the city of God to the city of the curse (Joshua vi. 26; 1 Kings xvi. 33, 34.); when he lay stripped, wounded, and half dead; when both priest and Levite had turned from him and gone their way; it was just then that he was in a position to prove the grace of the good Samaritan, who assuredly is none other than the blessed Lord Jesus Himself, who, blessed forever be His balmy, precious name! here appears in the form of a Samaritan only to enhance the grace that breathes forth upon our souls in this lovely scene. "The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans," and hence, had the Jew in this parable had sufficient strength, he would not, we may safely aver, have suffered the stranger to touch

him. But he was so far gone, so powerless, so under the power of death, that the gracious Samaritan had it all his own way. And oh, what a tender way it was!

"But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, *came where he was*: and when he saw him, he *had compassion*, and *went to him*, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow, when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, 'Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.'"

Here, then, is what is revealed in the gospel. Man has ruined himself: he has gone down from God; he has fallen under the power of the enemy; he is the victim of Satan, the slave of sin, the subject of death. His case is hopeless, so far as he is concerned; but, blessed be God, the true Samaritan has come down into all the ruin. The Son of God left His Father's bosom, His eternal dwelling-place, came down into this

world to remedy our ruin, to bear our guilt, to endure the wrath of God in our stead. All this He did, beloved reader, as the expression of His own tender compassion and love. "He had compassion," and came to bind up our wounds, to pour "the wine and oil" of His own most precious grace into our souls, to heal, restore, and bless us, and to put us into His own position, according to the power which had brought Him into ours, to make ample provision for all our need, until that bright and happy moment when we shall be ushered into His presence, to go no more out forever.

The page of inspiration does not present a more touching picture than that which the Master's pencil has drawn for us in "the good Samaritan." It is perfectly beautiful, and beautifully perfect—it is divine. Every expression is fraught with exquisite moral loveliness. "He came *where he was*"—not half-way, or nine-tenths of the way, but all the way. "And *when he saw him*"—what then? Did he turn away in disgust at his appearance, and despair of his condition? Ah, no! "*He had compassion*

on him. His tender heart yearned over him. He cared not what he was or who he was, Jew or Gentile, it mattered not: the streams of tender compassion came gushing up from the deep fountains of a heart that found its delight in ministering to every form of human need. Nor was this "compassion" a mere movement of sentimentality—an evanescent feeling, uttering itself in empty words and then passing away. No; it was a real, living, acting thing, expressing itself in the most unmistakable manner. "*He went to him.*" For what? To meet his every need, and not to leave him until he had placed him in a position of security, rest, and blessing.

Nor was this all. Not only did this gracious stranger fully meet the wounded one's present need, but, ere leaving, he dropped these touching words, "*Take care of him.*" How this must have melted the poor man's heart! Such disinterested kindness! and all from a stranger! yea, from one with whom he would naturally have "no friendly dealings."

Finally, as if to complete the picture,

he says, "*when I come again.*" He awakens in the heart, by these last words, "the blessed hope" of seeing him again. What a lovely picture! And yet it is all a divine reality. It is the simple story of our blessed Jesus, who, in His tender compassion, looked upon us in our low and utterly hopeless condition, left His eternal dwelling-place of light and love, took upon Him the likeness of sinful flesh, was made of a woman, made under the law, lived a spotless life, and fulfilled a perfect ministry down here for three and thirty years, and, finally, died on the cross as a perfect atonement for sin, in order that God might be just and the justifier of any poor, ungodly, convicted sinner that simply trusts in Jesus.

Yes, dear reader, whoever you are—high or low, rich or poor, learned or ignorant, Jesus has done all this, and He is now at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. The One who was nailed to the cross for us is now on the throne. Eternal justice has wreathed His sacred brow with the chaplet of victory, and that, be it remembered, on our behalf.

Nor is this all. He has said, "*I will come again.*" Precious words! Say, wouldst thou be glad to see Him? Dost thou know Him as the good Samaritan? Hast thou felt His loving hand binding up thy spiritual wounds? Hast thou known the healing virtues of His oil, and the restoring, invigorating, and cheering influence of His wine? Hast thou heard Him speak those thrilling words, "*Take care of him.*" If so, then surely thou wilt be glad to see His face: thou wilt cherish in thy heart's tender affections the blessed hope of seeing Him as He is, and of being like Him and with Him forever. The Lord grant it may be so with thee, beloved reader, and then thou wilt be able to appreciate the immense difference between the law and the gospel—between what we ought to do for God and what God has done for us—between what we are to Him and what He is to us—between "do and live" and "live and do"—between the righteousness of the law" and the "righteousness of faith."

May the blessing of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost rest upon

