

CHRIST'S RELATION TO THE LAW

There are, beloved friends, many subjects in Scripture as to which a large number of God's dear people are of one mind, and of one mouth. There are other subjects as to which they are, in measure, of one mind, but when they express themselves they begin to misunderstand one another. There are some topics as to which they are largely of one mouth but they mean different things by the same words; and there are yet others as to which they are neither of one mind nor of one mouth; and all these differences should humble us before God, that with confession of sin, and application of the blood of Christ, with confidence in God and with realization of the work of His Holy Spirit, we may experience spiritual progress toward the unity for which our adorable Lord prayed. I suppose that when we approach the topic of Christ's relation to law we are on ground which has often been made a centre of combat rather than a basis of thanksgiving, and this is sadly resultful. As soon as any topic becomes a centre for combat, some dear children of God are afraid to venture near it. If the cry of heresy is raised some have a curiosity which draws them thither without spiritual-mindedness, and others have a dread lest they should be branded with the hateful name and hateful description of 'heretic'. And so the majority are afraid to venture into certain parts of God's truth, but no part of God's truth is really dangerous ground, though we all have to be careful lest we be misled to leave God's truth when we are professedly studying that Truth. That the Lord Jesus Christ Who was OVER-ALL God blessed for ever became a real Man, and that as such He had a real body which was prepared for Him, and that He walked this earth as One Who hungered, Who was wearied, and Who was obedient throughout, and doing ever those things which pleased the Father, of Whom the Father said more than once "I am well pleased"; that this is so we MUST acknowledge. Not to recognize the wondrous humanity of the Lord Jesus would be a serious attack on the unveiling of Scripture. He Who was over all God Blessed for ever came in the flesh. "The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us" but He was only in the likeness of SINFUL flesh. There was no taint of evil. There was no relationship to Adam's original sin. There was no response to the temptations of the wicked one. "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me". Our glorious Lord when He became Man, became under the law. This is the testimony of Scripture. He Who was above law, Who was infinite

in every possible way was pleased to become UNDER THE LAW. It is a denial of Scripture to deny this. We cannot and would not go away from the Divine declaration, nor can we omit the added words "Made under the law to REDEEM THEM THAT WERE UNDER THE LAW that we might receive the adoption of sons"(Gal. 4.4,5). If He had not been under the law, could He have finished the work which was marked out in the prophetic Scriptures as His work? Is not redemption connected with the fact that God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law? In redemption we rejoice; and in all the Divinely appointed parts of the work of the Lord Jesus we find a resting place for spiritual faith. I have referred to the testimony of Phil. 2 that He was obedient unto death. Not only IN death but unto death. No disobedience marred that spotless life of the tested Lamb of God. He was without blemish and without spot. He fully kept the will of the Father, as Ps. 40 quoted in Heb. 10 has declared. Indeed in the wondrous testimony which He gave in Matt. 5 He said "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets, I am not come to destroy but to fill"(v.17). I would desire, beloved friends, to emphasize that the prophets and the psalms, together with the law, reveal that Christ would fully meet the Divine requirements. Do you tell me that it is but a general statement in the law, that it is only a general principle where we read, "Ye shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man do he shall live in them"? Do you tell me that passage only brings before us a principle? The words may look so in our English version, but there is no 'if', and there is no indefiniteness of expression "A man" in the original. The Scripture reads "Which THE MAN WILL do and live in them". I venture to urge a definite stress on this prophecy of Lev. 18.5(cf. Ezek. 20.11). It is a prophecy OF CHRIST as definitely as those which bring Him before us as the Shepherd smitten for His people, and as the righteous One Who, having finished His life, made naked His soul for the death. Christ is before us in Lev. 18 as definitely as in Deut. 8.3 where we read "THE Man shall not live upon bread alone, but upon every thing that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" - the Man Christ Jesus. Twice over in Deut. 8.3 is there the stress upon "THE Man" as distinct from all other men. All other men did NOT live upon the words of God, but He did. This was His characteristic in the days of His flesh.

I said the prophets gave their parallel testimony. In

Isa. 42. 21 we read "The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness sake, He will magnify the law and make a robe" (as we may render it). I recognize the expression "Make it honourable" as a possible rendering, but "make a robe" is included, and Isa. 53.11 is perverted by those who render "That He will bring the many to righteousness" - rather is it "He shall cause a righteousness for many". Our English Version adds "FOR He shall bear their iniquities", and not a few think this states that He causes the righteousness BECAUSE He bears, but there is no 'for' in the original. "He shall cause a righteousness, AND He shall bear" - cause it in His life, and bear their iniquities in His death.

The Psalms give the same testimony. Who is the wondrous INDIVIDUAL of Whom they speak? We have no doubt in Psalm 2. We have no doubt in Psalm 110. But what are we to say respecting Psalm 15? "Lord, Who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in Thy holy hill? ~~HE THAT~~ WALKETH UPRIGHTLY and worketh righteousness and speaketh the truth in His heart". The answer is not in the plural. Yet the answer is not "There is no man who will thus dwell". The answer is definite that there is one Person, even the One of Whom Psalm 24 says, "He That hath clean hands and a pure heart...He shall receive the blessing from the Lord and righteousness, from the God of His salvation". Cf. Ps. 22.21. Moreover the Father identified Himself with the salvation which His beloved Son wrought. What is the blessing from the Lord? "There the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore". The Man Who hath done these things shall LIVE. "I am He that liveth and became dead, and behold I am alive!" "He was delivered because of our offences, and raised again BECAUSE OF our righteousnessing". We have seen the words "worketh righteousness", they call to mind Isa. 64.5. "Thou meetest Him That rejoiceth and worketh righteousness". Who is This? It is the One of Whom Psalm 45 tells us "He loved righteousness", and "is anointed with the oil of gladness above those who share with Him". There is more about Christ in the earlier Scriptures than we are apt to realize. I have just given you passages from the three sections to which our beloved Lord alludes. for in Luke 24 we read He said, "All things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, AND IN the prophets, AND IN the Psalms concerning Me. This remains till today the division of the Hebrew Scriptures in any Hebrew Bible. The whole of the Hebrew Scripture is full

of Christ, and to fulfil prophecy we must behold Him in the Gospels as the One under the law.

We approach next those precious narratives of some of His earthly life. What is His relationship to law at the beginning? He is marked out as the Holy One, and yet under the law. Eight days are accomplished, He is brought manifestly into the covenant of circumcision. His Name is called Jesus. Sacrifices are offered, but though in the language of Luke 2 there is a reference to purification, it is NOT HIS purification. He is distinctly said to be HOLY to the Lord, but the sacrifice is that which is marked out in the law of the Lord. Thus we have in His early life a stress upon this, and when He was a child of 12 years there was the journey to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. We approach the 30th year, and the time when He was manifested to Israel, or would have been manifested had not Israel gone away: - He was manifested to John who saw and bare record. John realized that Christ was then the Lamb of God, and as such had a perfect obedience. The whole principle of the sacrifices would bring out this thought. "Unto Adam and his wife did the Lord God make coats of skin and He clothed them". The skin was perfect, on the animal first, THEN was there death, AFTERWARDS the skin was covering the sinful flesh of Adam and Eve. Righteousness for the unrighteous. Obedience pictured by the animal skins made available by death; but the Antitype excels the type. We do not receive a mere transfer of the obedience of our Lord, but we become (and remain on resurrection ground) the righteousness of God in HIM (2 Cor. 5.21). He, as the Obedient One, unlike the animals, MUST receive "life". He must be raised. This is the award, and if we are to have His obedience is cannot be by a bare transfer, but it must involve union with Him. There are some dear children of God who have been occupied disproportionately with the earthly obedience of the Lord Jesus. Others have been occupied disproportionately with living union on resurrection ground, and they have come to hard words with one another, whereas they both have a part of truth, and need grace to rejoice because of the sacrifice which links the two parts of truth in the whole of that life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus with its fulness of meaning to His blood-bought people.

But as I said, we approach in meditation that wondrous time when He was manifested. We listen, moreover, to His words

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets, I am not come to destroy but to fill". Does He say anything which would imply that He broke the law? Or does He take the appointed position under the law? Is He not the PERFECT "Servant" in accord with Isaiah's prophecy, and Phil. 2 ? We recollect His attention to the arrangements of Israel. Of the temple He said, "My Father's house". If He went to Nazareth, as His custom was He went into the synagogue. He, the true Israel of Isa. 49, the true Jacob of Ps. 24, fulfilled all the Divine arrangements. In one synagogue is a man with a withered hand, and the Lord says to those who are watching, "Is it LAWFUL to do good on the sabbath, or to do evil, to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace". He never suggests that He will break the sabbath. What He declares to be permissible and approved is to DO GOOD on the sabbath. He shows that THEY are the sabbath breakers. He does not take the position of breaking the sabbath, or of saying the sabbath is set aside during His life. He speaks with respect to the law of Moses definitely even in Matt. 23. "The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat, all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do". He quickly adds, "Do not ye after their works", and refers to THEIR heavy burdens and THEIR traditions. But the law of Moses He acknowledges, nor does He ever speak against it.

We come to the last Passover. He speaks wondrously at that last supper just before the first supper; rather shall I say that the first supper extracted from the last supper, and to it He gave a new meaning and appointed in His limiting simplicity for those who were delivered from the yoke of the Jewish ceremonialism. But on this occasion with respect to that last Passover (until another dispensation) hear HOW He speaks. The Divine narrative has told us that the feast of unleavened bread drew near, and "Then came the day of unleavened bread when the Passover must be killed, and HE sent Peter and John saying, "GO and prepare us the Passover that we may eat. And they said unto Him, Where wilt thou that we prepare?" Arrangements are next made as to how they shall find out the appointed place. They are to say to the master of the house, "The Teacher saith unto thee, Where is the guestchamber where I shall eat the passover with My disciples. And he shall show you a large upper room furnished, there make ready". They made ready the passover, and when the right hour was come, He sat down, and He said, "With desire I

have desired to eat this Passover with you". During the time together He takes an earlier Passover cup, before the third cup of blessing and, giving thanks He says, "Take this and divide it among yourselves, for I say unto you, "I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God shall come". Now all this is deeply suggestive. The law of Moses NEVER said one must drink the fruit of the vine; it said there must be the Passover lamb, and Christ emphasized that He WOULD eat the Passover lamb. The fruit of the vine has a wonderful message. He was about to appoint this to His disciples, for when we reach the third cup, He gives THAT to His disciples, with a new meaning, and says, "THIS DO with a view to My remembrance". But even as to that which appears to have been the second cup He would not partake for a perfect reason. If it had been part of the law of Moses it is evident from the context He would have partaken. Thus was He obedient throughout His wondrous life.

We approach His death. In that wondrous death He fulfils the Scriptures, even saying "I thirst", and "My God, My God, Why hast Thou forsaken Me?" And why is He hanged upon that tree? Gal. 3 gives the answer. He is made a curse to fulfil Deut. 21. But why a curse? "Christ hath redeemed us FROM THE CURSE OF THE LAW". Do you say we are delivered entirely apart from law? I answer, Yes, so far as WE are concerned. But unless Christ had met EVERY demand of the law, we could not receive every blessing of grace. There is no judicial law to us, and no judgment against us. But there was law to Him, and there WAS judgment against Him. In His life He was under the law, in His death He met the curse of the law. The apostle shows in the epistles that OUR salvation is entirely apart from law, and the righteousness to us is without the works of the law. Undoubtedly! WHO gives it to us? God, the Sovereign Ruler gives to us that righteousness in absolute grace. In absolute mercy we are linked with His beloved Son. But to the Lord Jesus Christ there was strict justice, and His death, becoming a curse, under the curse of the law, is a witness that we establish the law by faith. Our faith resting upon HIM declares that law has been FULLY satisfied in all its positive and negative demands. It is deeply important to realize this.

I have suggested that the sacrifices show this same aspect. The value of a sacrifice was this, that it could bear

wrath because "righteous". The animals could only do this TYPICALLY, but they must do so, though they give only a skin to cover the BODY. The sacrifice COULD NOT be vicarious, unless it had "merit", or a picture thereof. Without a perfect skin there was no acceptance. The value of the true Sacrifice was this, that He could bear wrath for others, and give a perfect righteousness. The animal sacrifice, according to Hebrews, sanctified to the purifying of the flesh. OUR flesh is NOT purified. The body is dead because of sin. When Israel stand before God as men in the flesh in the millennial kingdom they will have animal sacrifices AS WELL for the purifying of the flesh. We do not worship in the flesh, but worship God in the spirit. Hence we have no animal sacrifices. The animal can only give a cover to the flesh, but our beloved Lord has borne wrath which an animal could not feel, and He has given a covering to the SOUL. He was able to die for us because He had an obedience to give us. How could the sacrifice be accepted unless there was an obedience to be given to those for whom the sacrifice died? What is the law's demand? Is it simply. Do this one action? Nay, it is a positive command, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart". The blotting out of sin MUST BE the imputation of righteousness. Have you ever thought of this? If the command were simply, "Thou shalt not steal", or a negative command like human laws are, this would not apply; but if you blot out the sin against a POSITIVE law, "Thou shalt do this", there must be the IMPUTATION of a positive righteousness, else there is still a falling short, and the sin of falling short is still there. Do you not see, beloved friends, that if one could NEARLY fulfil that law there would be sin? Now there is to be the blotting out of the whole sin, then there must be the blotting out of every falling short from an absolute obedience. There must be the imputation of a POSITIVE obedience, and there IS, in Christ Jesus, on resurrection ground. Hence He must have fulfilled the WHOLE work. The apostle shows this in Romans 4. Quoting from Psalm 32, where we have, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity". He says, "To whom the Lord imputes righteousness". Not to impute iniquity is to impute righteousness, and that is the glory of the gospel.

Let us hear the testimony of men concerning the Lord Jesus. Nicodemus comes to Him and recognizes Him as a Teacher come from God. Do you think if the Lord Jesus was marked out as the law-breaker, as One Who broke the sabbath, that Nicodemus

would have come thus? Surely not. Our beloved Lord could appeal to men, and say "Which of you convinceth Me of sin"? and they could not answer.

But now we approach another deeply important part of our subject. Objections have been made, objections were made by some cavillers in the olden times. (I do not mean that all who make them NOW are cavillers), objections that our blessed Lord broke the law. This has been brought forward as an argument for suggesting, for example, that He may have used leavened bread at the Lord's Supper. Thus you can see the subtlety of this error and its wide results, hindering believers' true perception of His work. To me this is a matter of the gravest importance. For if HE broke the law, HIS truthfulness is broken. If HE broke the law, His obedience is broken. If HE broke the law, our salvation is broken, for an untruthful Saviour could not save. HIS character is involved, and our glory with Him is involved as well. It is not a mere subject for speculation, but for earnest and prayerful consideration. I know it is possible to speak of Him in this connection in a way that seems to exalt Him. It may be said, Christ was over all God blessed for ever. He was Lord of the sabbath and could do as He pleased. Granted He had a right to do what He pleased. God limits Himself as One Who CANNOT lie. The Lord Jesus had power intrinsically to do whatever He pleased, but would He break the prophecies? Would He destroy the law which He came to fulfil? Would He deny Himself? It is written that God CANNOT deny Himself. This APPARENT exalting of the Lord Jesus as able to do anything is actually derogatory to His character. He is NOT able to dishonour His own Name. He is NOT ABLE TO BREAK His own truthfulness. He is NOT able to alter His own purpose of eternal love to those whom He came into the world to save, and WOULD save at all cost. The objections, that Christ broke the law, made in the days of His flesh, were very unsatisfactory. In John 5 a man is healed on the sabbath, and we read that "the man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus Who had made him whole, and therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus and sought to slay Him because He had done these things on the sabbath. But Jesus answered them 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work' Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill Him because He had not only broken the sabbath, but said also that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God". Do we accept the charge of the Jews? Then we accept

that He MADE Himself equal with God. We know He was equal with God, and made Himself of no reputation. It is dangerous to argue from this passage. When the Lord Jesus refers to miracles on the sabbath He does not apologise for them, or suggest that His accomplishment of them is breaking the law. We have seen the testimony of Mark 3. May I remind you of Luke 13. The ruler of the synagogue objects to a miracle of healing. Christ answers "Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? and OUGHT NOT this woman being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day"? Christ declares it is a RIGHTFUL thing to do. Again, in Luke 14, a certain man had the dropsy. "Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?(Is it permissible) And they held their peace. And He took and healed him, and let him go, and answered them saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day? And they could not answer Him again to these things". In John 7 Christ refers to circumcision, and says that this took place on the sabbath, and He argues in this connection of the Divine arrangement, adding these words, If a man on the sabbath day receive circumcision that the law of Moses SHOULD NOT BE BROKEN, are ye angry at Me because I have made a man every whit whole on the sabbath day? Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment". To say that Christ broke the sabbath is to judge according to the appearance. In Matt. 12 where He speaks of David going into the house of God and eating the shewbread, He does not add that David was blameless. The argument is this, David broke a Divine appointment in an emergency, and you are not so concerned about that as you are when I break your appointment. When Christ speaks of the priests in the temple profaning or making ordinary, the sabbath, He adds, "They are blameless". Why? Because they had Divine authority for extra sacrifices on the sabbath. Thus Christ shows how the Jews misunderstood the sabbath law, and that He was perfectly right to heal, and His attitude was not breaking the Divine appointment. How about John 7? There we find that Christ goes up to the feast of tabernacles, but first of all He says "My time is not yet". Ah, but He goes up in the midst fulfilling the word "Three times in the year shall all thy males appear before Me".

But you say, We have not a RECORD that He kept Pentecost. Silence is not a denial. We are told as to His keeping of the Passover because of its typical fulfilment. His holding aloof from primary emphasis on Tabernacles was with SPIRITUAL MEANING ("Tabernacles" picturing "That Day"), and the silence as to Pentecost till we reach Acts 2 is equally suggestive. Again let it be emphasized, silence is not denial. In John 8 a woman is brought before the Lord Jesus, and after convicting those who brought her, He says Neither do I condemn thee. Does this mean He broke the law? The Pharisees had said, Moses commanded such to be stoned. Did He go against Moses? Let another Scripture answer. "Master, speak unto my brother that he divide the inheritance with me, Man Who made Me a Judge or a Divider over you?" Our adorable Lord came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and He came not to judge but to bring a message of mercy, and to die for guilty sinners. "I came not to judge the world" is His consistent testimony. He did not take the position of carrying out the law and its sentence. Hence His words "Neither DO I CONDEMN thee" were not an attack on the law, but appropriate from His obedience standpoint. In John 9 He was accused of breaking the law. He healed a man who was blind, and those who were so full of casuistry said "This Man is not of God" Why? "Because He doth not keep the sabbath". Others said, How can a Man That is a sinner do such signs? and there was a division among them". But we have seen it was right for Christ to heal, and the charge breaks down.

In Matt. 19 our beloved Lord alludes to part of the law, and says, "Moses gave it you for the hardness of your heart, but from the beginning it was not so". But He does not attack the law. He explains, yet recognizes its temporary arrangement, and He could well do this, for by His DEATH He was to bring in a new dispensation. The law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth. Rom. 7 is clear. Death separated. There is the new dispensation for those linked with Christ on resurrection ground. They are not under the law. We are no longer to keep sabbaths, says Col. 2, and Christ often referred to the work which He would accomplish which would remove the Mosaic law, so that believers are no longer under it, but under grace and in a law to Christ Himself. But this does not mean He broke the arrangement while preparing for our acceptability in Him. That He might be able to die and bring us to a new position HE KEPT THE LAW. He ful-

filled the first covenant that we might glorify God in the new covenant. The testimony in Matt. 5 - 7 is clear. "It was said to them of old time...But I say unto you", - a clear witness. The Lord never weakens the law, He only shows a 'NARROWER' binding for those who would follow Him. He acknowledges the rights of LAW to punish, but that His people are not to be the executors of law. Hence He would never take a position in the politics or government of the country. If He had, He would have approved of carrying out the Mosaic law, which could not then be carried out because the Romans had authority. But He took the position of the Humble and Lowly One, meek and lowly in heart. Further, He says, The Law and the Prophets were till John, but mark the added words in Luke 16, Does He set aside the law and mean "I am not keeping it"? Nay, "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass than one tittle of the law to fall". Then He refers to the husband and wife, and shows there cannot be a putting away, but must be a death. This is, I would suggest, the very passage to which Paul alludes in Romans 7. You cannot become free from law except by death. There is no other way of getting free from law, and thus our beloved Lord magnified law throughout.

May I add further that we have the vindication and manifestation of His keeping the law in His resurrection. "The Man Who hath done SHALL LIVE". He is raised up, He lives, as the One Who hath DONE, as the One Who has fulfilled, and that glorious resurrection of our beloved Lord is the PROOF that He has met every demand of law. Beloved friends, again I bring before you the solemn thought that Christ's position under law in life, and meeting the curse of law in death, is deeply important, for if He had been careless about the Divine arrangements. He would not have been the Truthful and Accepted Saviour. If, to take the one point which suggested this subject, He had altered the bread in Matt. 26, and used leavened bread, which He gave to His disciples, we should have no confidence in the other parts of His teaching. We should be in confusion as to that finished work. But thanks be unto God there is no suggestion that He altered it, and we can rest on His truthfulness, and on His wondrous atonement for His people. Thus, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we realize that in Him, linked with Him, we shall NOT come under law's penalty, being now in a fresh relationship, for we are not under law, but UNDER GRACE, and in this sphere we would ever listen to His words,

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"If ye love Me keep My commandments!"

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