

# THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

"Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." Rev. 22:12

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**“COMMENTS ON GALATIANS 3 - No. 9.” (Page 534)**

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WE think the reader who has carefully followed us through the seventh of Romans and the third of Galatians, will have no difficulty in seeing how thoroughly the majesty of the law is vindicated throughout, and its perpetuity shown, and also how beautiful is the harmony between the law and the gospel. Right here we wish to quote a pertinent passage from John Wesley:—

"It is the ordinary method of the Spirit of God, to convict sinners by the law. It is this, which being set home on the conscience, generally breaks the rock in pieces. It is more especially this part of the word of God which is 'quick and powerful,' full of life and energy, and sharper than any two edged sword. "This, in the hand of God and of those whom he hath sent, pierces through all the folds of a deceitful heart, and 'divides asunder even the soul and spirit;' yea, as it were, the very 'joints and marrow.' By this is the sinner discovered to himself. All his fig leaves are torn away, and he sees that he is 'wretched, and poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked.' The law flashes conviction on every side. He feels himself a mere sinner. He has nothing to pay. His 'mouth is stopped,' and he stands 'guilty before God.'

"To slay the sinner is then the first use of the law; to destroy the life and strength wherein he trusts, and convince him that he is dead while he liveth; not only under the sentence of death, but actually dead unto God, void of all spiritual life, 'dead in trespasses and sins.' the second use of it is to bring him unto life,—unto Christ that he may live. It is true, in performing both these offices, it acts the part of a severe schoolmaster. It drives us by force, rather than draws us by love. And yet love is the spring of all. It is the spirit of love which, by this painful means, tears away our confidence in the flesh, which leaves us no broken reed whereon to trust, and so constrains the sinner, stripped of all, to cry out in the bitterness of his soul, or groan in the depth of his heart,—

'I give up every plea beside,— Lord, I am damned, but thou hast died.'

"The third use of the law is to keep us alive. It is the grand means whereby the Holy Spirit prepares the believer for larger communications of the life of God. I am afraid this great and important truth is little understood, not only by the world, but even by many whom God hath taken out of the world, who are real children of God by faith. Many of these lay it down as an unquestioned truth that when we come to Christ we have done with the law, and that in this sense 'Christ is the end of the law to every one that believeth.' 'The end of the law'—so he is 'for righteousness,' for justification, 'to every one that believeth.' Herein the law is at an end. It justifies none, but only brings them to Christ, who is also, in another respect, the end, or scope of the law,—the point at which it continually aims. But when it has brought us to him, it has yet a farther office. namely, to keep us with him. For it is continually exciting all believers, the more they see of its height, and depth, and length, and breadth, to exhort one another so much time more:—

'Closer and closer let us cleave; To his beloved embrace; Expect his fullness to receive, And grace to answer grace.'

"Therefore, I cannot spare the law one moment, no more than I can spare Christ, seeing I now want it as much to keep me to Christ as I ever wanted it to bring me to him. Otherwise this evil heart of unbelief would immediately 'depart from the living God.' Indeed, each is continually sending me to the other,—the law to Christ, and Christ to the law. On the one hand, the height and depth of the law constrain me to fly to the love of God in Christ; on the other, the love of God in Christ endears the law to me above gold or precious stones." *Sermon 34, Properties of the Law.*

The above view of the law is a just one. But all have not so clear an understanding of the law and the gospel as Wesley had. Since some, following the lead of Dr. Clarke, have either confounded the moral law with the Levitical or ceremonial, or else have supposed that the third of Galatians refers principally to the ceremonial law, it may not be amiss to show briefly why it is impossible that the ceremonial law should be the subject of discourse in that chapter. A few points will suffice.

1. Paul says that "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." Verse 13. Now (a) There was nothing in the ordinances of the ceremonial law to condemn any one. Condemnation could come only through violation of the ten commandments. The ceremonial law was the sum of the gospel ordinances in the Jewish age. And there was no curse in any way attached to it, any more than there is to the gospel. It certainly did not curse those who carried it out with a sincere heart; for such, like David, offered "sacrifices of joy;" and those who neglected it and thus showed their unbelief, were condemned by the moral law alone, because of their sins; as Christ said, "he that believeth not is condemned already." (b) Even admitting that the ceremonial law had a curse connected with it, or was itself a curse, "we" never had any connection with that law, and consequently could not be redeemed from it. (c) The Galatians, to whom this epistle was personally addressed, were chiefly converts from among the heathen, and had never had any connection with the ceremonial law. Therefore, although Paul might properly tell them to keep clear of it, he could not say that they had been redeemed from it. (d) The result of Christ's being made a curse for us is "that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." And the blessing of Abraham comes on the Gentiles only as they are redeemed from iniquity,—the transgression of the moral law.

2. Therefore "the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." Gal.3:22. Only the moral law could conclude men "under sin." There was nothing in the rites and ceremonies of the Levitical law that was of primary obligation,—nothing that could show men to be sinners.

3. "But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed." Gal.3:23. This is in no sense true of the ceremonial law. It did not precede faith, but followed it. No one ever heard of such a thing as the ceremonies of the Levitical law being performed by one who knew nothing of Christ. But it is true of all men that, before they have faith in Christ, they are "under the law," condemned, and "shut up" to the faith which may be revealed to them, as the only means of freedom from condemnation.

4. "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." Gal. 3:24. By no possibility can this refer to the ceremonial law. This text is sometimes read as though it said that the law was our schoolmaster to *point* us to Christ, and then it is asked, "What is there in the moral law that points to Christ?" The answer is, of course, that there is nothing. But the text says the law *brings us* to Christ. We have shown how the moral law does this, by giving the convicted sinner no rest until he flees to Christ. The ceremonial law, however, brought no one to Christ. It was simply the means by which those who already believed in Christ as the one who should be offered for sin, might indicate their faith in him. The ceremonial law comprised the gospel ordinances of the Jewish age. The order was, first the moral law to convict of sin and show the necessity for Christ, and then the rites of the ceremonial law to indicate and keep alive the faith that they already had. See Leviticus 4. noting especially verses 2, 13, 22, and 27. Justification has reference only to the moral law. From the

transgression of that, man needs justification; but the law cannot justify any sinner, it can only condemn. And so it drives him to Christ, that he may be justified by faith.

"But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster." Gal. 3:26. But it was only after faith came that people had anything to do with the ceremonial law. Is there a man in this age who has more faith than Moses, or David, or Isaiah, or Jeremiah, or Daniel, who all prophesied of Christ, and who looked to him for salvation? Those men "through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." Heb. 11:33, 34. And yet all their lives long they performed the rites of the ceremonial law. If Gal. 3:26 refers to the ceremonial law, those faithful men ought never to have offered one of the sacrifices of that law. It was their faith, however, that led them to offer the sacrifices of the ceremonial law, as Paul says, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. Heb. 11:4.

"The law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith." Gal. 3:24. The past tense can be used here only by those who have come to Christ and have been justified by faith, as Paul shows in the next verse. Since the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, it must still be the schoolmaster (pedagogue) to those who are not in Christ, and must retain that office until every one who will accept Christ is brought to him. Therefore the law will be a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ, as long as probation lasts. But the Levitical law passed away hundreds of years ago; therefore it cannot be the law referred to here. To put the matter briefly, we may say that if the law is a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ, to divest it of that office while there are men still out of Christ, yet willing to come to him, would be to prematurely cut them off from hope of salvation.

We would by no means be understood as holding that the ceremonial law does not figure in the epistle to the Galatians. The controversy over the ceremonial law drew out the epistle. But there was in that controversy, which this epistle must have effectually settled for all candid minds, something deeper than the mere question whether or not men should be circumcised. Paul repeatedly asserts that it makes no difference whether or not a man is circumcised. "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing." But when men submitted to it as a means of justification, that moment it became a serious matter, for such an act is a rejection of Christ.

Suppose a man has accepted Christ and in him has been made "a new creature." Now suppose that he is led to accept circumcision, or any other work, as a means of justification, thereby rejecting Christ; what will be the immediate result? He will at once go into sin; for out of Christ no man can by any possibility refrain from sinning. No matter to what heights of holiness a man may have attained, just as soon as he loses sight of Christ as his "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption," he becomes carnal and cannot please God: This was the case with the Galatian brethren. They had been called into the grace of Christ; but some had troubled them with another gospel—a gospel of works and not of faith—which was no gospel at all, and by accepting it they had lost their faith in Christ, and consequently had become sinners "under the law." And it is on this account that the apostle exclaims, "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth (Compare Ps. 119:142, 151), before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?" (Gal. 3:10 and again, "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?" Gal. 5:7.

But this is sufficient. We did not design to discuss the whole book of Galatians, but simply to show that it gives no comfort to the enemies of the law of God. We wish the reader to keep in view the main thought in our study,—that God desires that all men should be saved. His love is as boundless as the universe, and reaches to the least of his creatures. But he cannot save a wicked person. Sin is entirely out of harmony with his character, and he cannot endure it in his presence. Neither could the sinner be happy in the presence of the pure and holy God. Nay, more, it would be impossible for the sinner even to look upon God. Everything that dwells with God must be in perfect accord with him. But all men have violated his holy law, and are by it condemned to death. God has a glorious

inheritance promised to the righteous, but who can obtain it? No one can make himself righteous. The sinner studies the law, and learns what sort of a character he ought to have, but that only condemns him the more. It provides no way of escape, but drives him toward the door of mercy, which is ever open. Then, instead of profitless struggles, being justified by faith he has peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus the law proves to be the strongest ally of the promise by faith. And this tutorship it exercises until the Seed comes to whom and through whom the promise was made, and then God's people being all righteous, it ceases to drive them. They are "in Christ," and the law is in their hearts. In Christ they find everything. No need have they now to teach one another the way of truth, because the truth is in their hearts. More than this, they are all taught of God, and their peace is like a river, constantly flowing. Fully reconciled to God, they see his face, and in his presence find fullness of joy, and at his right hand enjoy pleasures forevermore.

Reader, "now is the accepted time: now is the day of salvation." "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." but if with sincerity you pray with the psalmist, "Create in me a clean heart, O God and renew a right spirit within me," he will for Christ's sake pardon all your iniquity, and then, being a new creature in Christ, you can say, "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day." Ps. 119:97.

W.