

Two Laws

From what has preceded, it will be evident that there are two laws just as there are two covenants, occupying the same relation to each other that the two covenants do to each other. One is the shadow of the other, the result of placing the veil of unbelief before the Light of life.

"For the commandment *is* a lamp, and the law a light; reproofs of instruction *are* the way of life" (Prov. 6:23). But Christ is the only Light of the world, the Light of life; so that the true and living law is found only in Him. It is His life, because it is in His heart, and out of the heart are the issues of life. He is the Living Stone, where we find the law in Person, full of grace as well as of truth. Of this, the law on tables was but the shadow, albeit an exact and perfect shadow. It tells us exactly what we shall find in Christ.

Although the law on tables of stone describes the perfect righteousness of God, it has no power to make itself manifest in us, no matter how greatly we may desire it. It is "weak through the flesh." It is a faithful signpost, pointing out the way, but not carrying us in it. But Christ has "power over all flesh," and in Him we find the law so full of life that, if we but consent to the law that it is good, and confess that Christ is come in the flesh, it will manifest itself in the thoughts and words and acts of our lives, in spite of the weakness of the flesh.

To those who know the law only as it stands in a book, and who consequently think that it rests wholly on them to do it, it is a law of works, and as such it does nothing but pronounce a curse upon them. But to those who know the law in Christ, it is a law of faith, which proclaims the blessing of pardon and peace.

As known only on tables of stone or in a book, it is a "law of sin and death," (Rom. 8:2), since "the sting of death *is* sin, and the strength of sin *is* the law" (1 Cor. 15:56). But as known in Christ, it is "the law of the Spirit of life" "because of righteousness."

As "written and engraved in stones," it can never be anything else than "the ministration of death." He who preaches simply the written law, telling people of their duty to keep it, and inciting them to do the best they can to keep it, is but ministering condemnation. But the same law written in fleshy tablets of the heart, "with the Spirit of the living God" (2 Cor. 3:3), is "life and peace;" and he who preaches that Christ "is come in the flesh," (1 John 4:2), and that when He dwells in a man today He is as obedient to the law as He was eighteen hundred years ago, is a minister of righteousness.

Known only as a code of rules to which we must make our lives conform - a "law of commandments contained in ordinances" - it is but a "yoke of bondage," because one's best efforts to keep it are themselves only sin; "for the Scripture hath concluded [shut up] all under sin;" and with each work "done in righteousness which we did ourselves," the law but tightens its death grip on us, and strengthens the bars of our prison. But "the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17). Therefore in Christ the law is the "perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25).

When the Jews at Sinai volunteered to work God's works for Him, they undertook their own salvation. They ignored the history of Abraham, and God's covenant with him, to which their

attention had been specially called. But God is long-suffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance; and so, in harmony with His covenant with Abraham, He did not cast off the people, but endeavored to teach them of Himself and His salvation, even out of their unbelief. He gave them a system of sacrifices and offerings, and a daily and yearly round of ceremonies that were exactly in keeping with the law, which they had elected to keep, namely, the law of works.

Of course this sacrificial system could not save them any more than could the broken law of works out of which it grew. Any man who had understanding enough to know the nature of sin and the necessity for atonement, had sense enough to know that pardon and righteousness could never be obtained by the ceremonies connected with the tabernacle. The very offering of a sacrifice indicated that death is the wages and fruit of sin. But anyone could see that the life of a lamb, a goat, or a bullock, was not worth as much as a man's own life. Therefore none of those animals, or all of them together, could answer for the life of a single man. Thousands of rams, or even a human sacrifice, could not atone for a single sin.

The faithful among the people understood this well. David said, after he had committed a great sin, "You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give *it*; You do not delight in burnt offering" (Ps. 51:16). And God, through the prophets, taught the people: "To what purpose *is* the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" "I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats" (Isa. 1:11). "Your burnt offerings *are* not acceptable, nor your sacrifices sweet to Me" (Jer. 6:20). There was no virtue in them, "for the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, *and* not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect" (Heb. 10:1).

It would of course have been better, nay, the very best thing, if the people of Israel had preserved the simple and strong faith of Abraham and Moses, in which case they would have had no tabernacle but the one "which the Lord pitched, and not man;" no High Priest except Christ Himself, "made an High Priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek;" no limit to the priesthood, but every one of them a priest "to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ;" no law but "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ;" in short, only the reality, and not the mere shadow. But since the people did not believe, it was a wonderful exhibition of God's kindness and love and forbearance that He gave them what must have served as a continual object lesson. The very "weakness and unprofitableness," (Heb. 7:18) of the law of works was always apparent to every thoughtful person; and when the soul became awakened, that law whose only profit was conviction, and whose only power was death, directed them to Christ, to whom it shut them up for freedom and life. It made evident to them that in Christ, and in Him alone, they could find salvation. The truth as it is in Jesus, is the truth that sanctifies.

HOW FORGIVENESS COMES

Another point that it is necessary to notice particularly, although it has already been fully covered, is that nobody ever received salvation or the pardon of any sin by virtue of the law of works or the sacrifices connected with it. Moreover, God never caused the people to expect that the law could save, and nobody who truly believed Him ever thought that it could. Samuel said to Saul, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, *and* to heed than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22).

The prophet king, from a heart melted to contrition by the mercy of God, wrote: "For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give *it*; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart— these, O God, You will not despise" (Ps. 51:16, 17). Through Hosea the Lord, said: "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6). Instead of the offering of fat beasts, the Lord desired that the people should "let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream" (Amos 5:24). (Recall the chapter on drinking in the righteousness of God).

"By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous" (Heb. 11:4). He did not obtain righteousness by the sacrifice of the firstlings of the flock, but by the faith, which prompted the offering. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). And so it was from the beginning; for "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness," and the same is affirmed of Enoch and Noah and all the patriarchs and prophets.

After the building of the tabernacle, sacrifices could not be offered in any other place; yet many of the people would necessarily be far away from it. Three times a year they were to assemble to it to worship. But they did not have to wait for those seasons to come, in order to receive forgiveness of the sins that they might have committed in the meantime. Wherever a man might be when he sinned, and became conscious of the plague of his own heart, he could acknowledge the sin to the Lord, who was always at hand, and experience, as well as we can, that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). This is demonstrated in the case of David, when the prophet of God reproved him. David said, "I have sinned against the Lord;" and immediately came the assurance, "The Lord also has put away your sin" (2 Sam. 12:13).

When this had taken place, then the repentant and forgiven soul could "offer the sacrifices of righteousness" (Ps. 4:5; 51:19), which would be acceptable to God. Then would the Lord be pleased with burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings upon His altar. And why? -Because they showed the gratitude of the heart, and because they were a recognition of the fact that all belonged to God, and that everything came from Him. In all true sacrifice there is the underlying principle that He who saves the soul is abundantly able to supply all physical needs, even though every vestige of worldly goods should be consumed. It is not the thought that we are giving to God, but that God gives to us, that makes the true sacrifice, since the only real sacrifice is the sacrifice of Christ. This was plainly manifest in every sacrifice that was offered. The people could see that they were not enriching the Lord, for the sacrifice was consumed. Every one who offered intelligently-everyone who worshipped in spirit and in truth-simply indicated that he depended solely on God both for the life that now is and for that which is to come.

THE OLD COVENANT VALUELESS

The old covenant, therefore, together with the law, which pertained to it, was never for one moment of any value whatever for pardon and salvation from sin. It was "made void" even from the beginning. A demonstration of this is furnished by the pleading of Moses with God, when the children of Israel had made and worshipped the golden calf. When God said, "Now therefore, let

Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation." Then Moses pleaded with the Lord his God, and said: "Lord, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit *it* forever'" (Ex. 32:10-13).

Not a word was there about the covenant that had just been made, but only the covenant with Abraham. No particle of dependence was placed in the promises that the people had made, but only in the promise and the oath of God. If that covenant from Sinai had ever been of any value, it would surely have been when it was first made; but we see that even then it sunk entirely out of sight. It had no more power to save the people than had the parchment on which it was written.

Jeremiah in later years prayed: "O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do it for Your name's sake; for our backslidings are many, we have sinned against You." "We acknowledge, O Lord, our wickedness *and* the iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against You. Do not abhor *us*, for Your name's sake; do not disgrace the throne of Your glory. Remember, do not break Your covenant with us. Are there any among the idols of the nations that can cause rain? Or can the heavens give showers? *Are* You not He, O Lord our God? Therefore we will wait for You, since You have made all these" (Jer. 14:7, 20-22). That was all the plea God desired then, as well as now, for He said, "'Return, backsliding Israel,' says the Lord; 'I will not cause My anger to fall on you. For I *am* merciful,' says the Lord; 'I will not remain angry forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the Lord your God'" (Jer. 3:12, 13). It was as true then as now, that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins."

God's power as Creator and Redeemer, and His promise and oath, are all that any really repentant Jew ever depended on for salvation. None of them ever thought of depending upon their own works or promises, as the means of salvation. In short, from the days of Abel until now, there has been but one way of life and salvation; only one way of approaching to God; only one Name under heaven by which men could be saved. Since the day when salvation through the Seed of the woman was made known to Adam and Eve, before they were driven from Eden, there has been no more change in the plan of salvation, nor in God's requirements for salvation, nor in the number to whom salvation was offered, than there has been in God Himself and His throne in heaven.

Men have changed, but God has not. There have always been men who have trusted in their own words and promises, and in ceremonies; but that does not prove that God wished them to do so. In the days of Moses and of Christ the majority of men trusted mostly in form and ceremony; and so they do today. Men have always been more ready to grasp the shadow than the substance. But that does not prove that in the ancient days God expected men to be saved by the law of works, any more than it proves that justification is not by faith now.

WORKS OF SUPEREROGATION

There has always been a tendency among men to multiply rites and ceremonies. This is the inevitable result of trusting to works for salvation. So it was in the days of Christ, and so it is now. When men get the idea that their works must save them, or that they themselves must do God's works, they cannot be content with attempting to do no more than God's commandments. So they teach for doctrines "the commandments of men," adding to them continually until no man could even enumerate the "good works" that are required, much less could he do them. The yoke which even at first is galling and insupportable, becomes heavier and heavier, until at last religion becomes a matter of merchandise, and men for money or some other consideration buy themselves off from the necessity of doing the works that have been imposed upon them. And since it is even more impossible for men to do the commandments of God by their own efforts than it is to do the commandments of men, God's law soon sinks in their estimation, even below the precepts of men.

All this is the natural and inevitable tendency of a failure to see Christ in the writings of Moses, and to understand that whatever ceremonies God ever gave were intended by their very emptiness to impress upon the people the absolute necessity of depending only on Christ, in whom alone is the substance.

THE USE OF A LIKENESS

One word further as to the shadow and the substance. As we have seen, the law delivered to the people in the wilderness of Sinai was but the shadow of the real law, which is the life of God. This is often urged in depreciation of the law; many people seem to think that since the law is but the shadow of good things, therefore we should choose that which is as opposite to it as possible. Not so do men argue in temporal matters. If we have a photograph - a shadow of a man whom we wish to find, we do not light on a man whose features bear no resemblance to the likeness, and say, "This is the man." No, we find a man of whom the photograph is the exact likeness, and then we know that we have the one we seek. Now the real law is the life of God, and the law delivered to the children of Israel - the shadow of good things - is the photograph of God's character.

The one man in the entire world who in every particular meets the specifications of that photograph, is, "the Man Christ Jesus," in whose heart is the law. He is the image of the invisible God, but the living image - the Living Stone. Coming to Him in faith, we also become living stones, having the same law written in us that is in Him, for His Spirit transforms us into the same living image; and the law on the tables of stone from Sinai will be the witness that the resemblance is perfect. But if there is in any particular a deviation from the perfect photograph, lack of resemblance will show that we are not of the true family of God.

The Present Truth 12, 52 (December 24, 1896), pp. 819-821