

The Law Made Nothing Perfect

"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us, for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree"—Gal. 3:13

THE Law, says Paul, was "holy, just and good" (Rm.7:12). He says it was "ordained unto life" (Rm. 7:1.0). Like David (Ps.119:77, 97), he said he "delighted in the Law" (Rm. 7:22). But elsewhere he calls it a "ministration of death" (2 Cr. 3: 7), a "ministration of condemnation" (2 Cor. 3:9) and a "yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1). He notes this apparent paradox (Rm. 7:7-13)—
"Is the Law sin? ... Was that which is good made death unto me?"

Can we blame the Law of God for sin and death, and for the failure of man to attain to the life which was ordained by the Law? In both cases he immediately answers, "God forbid!" (more correctly, "Let it not be!"). Do not entertain such a God-dishonoring thought, for the Law was a holy ordinance of God. He says—

"We know the Law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin."

The Law was ordained to Life; it was man who failed. The Law had its perfect fulfillment in Christ. It was designed for him, and he for it. But the Law could not give life to even a perfectly righteous man without first an atoning death. This arose from a condition previous to the Law, which the Law was powerless to overcome. At the very moment of birth, the Law recognized the condemnation and defilement that man was born into, and the penalty he came under, as part of the condemned race.

Even for the birth of Jesus, Mary must be unclean and in the process of purifying 40 days, and then offer a sin offering—

"A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."

Those turtledoves under the Law had no efficacy except in the true sacrifice they foreshadowed beyond and above the Law. "The Law made nothing perfect" (Heb.7: 19)—it just signified and symbolized the way by which perfection must come.

Christ himself came under the curse of the Law, for—

"Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13).

This is one of the marvelous details of the working out of God's wonderfully intricate plan, but here again, it was sin, and not the Law, that was to blame. This particular ordinance of the Law was perfectly just: only especially evil sinners were to be hanged. But sin banded together and hanged a perfect man. The Law did not contemplate the hanging of the innocent: only sin could do that. The obvious spirit and intention of the Law was—

"Cursed is every one that is deservedly hanged on a tree."

Christ personally in character was free from the slightest shadow of a stigma of this curse in its true intention. Did he then just come under the letter and not the spirit of the curse, and forfeit the life to which the Law was ordained by an unjust legal technicality? This would not be a fitting ingredient in God's great and glorious plan. His death was to declare the righteousness of God, and this could not be done by merely fulfilling the letter in violation of the spirit. We must look deeper than this. God's arrangements are not technical and mechanical, but living and just.

As a strong, sinless, acceptable, voluntary representative of the defiled race, and covering for his weak but humble and repentant brethren, Christ's sacrifice was beautiful and just. He became a curse for us, not merely when the technicality of the curse of the Law was fulfilled in the actual hanging on the tree, but when he freely and voluntarily submitted in obedience to the Father's will that he nailed the body of sin to the cross.

"He bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24)

"Our OLD MAN is crucified with him" (Rom. 6:6)

There was no mere technicality about the curse on this "old man," or about the justice of his hanging. The crucifixion on the cross was the symbol and climax of a lifelong victory in the crucifixion of the flesh. That flesh came under the just condemnation of the Law as sin-defiled, and hung upon the tree in perfect justice.

These thoughts arise from a consideration of Deut. 22. With David we are led to exclaim (Psa. 119: 18)—

"Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy Law."

Dt. 22:1—"Thou shalt not see thy brother's ox or his sheep go astray, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt in any case bring them again to thy brother."

"Brother" here has the same broad, liberal meaning that Christ gave the word "neighbor," for in Ex. 23:4 the same command is—

"If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it to him again. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help him."

Could a law of this character be found in force anywhere in the world today? This was a binding, legal, national precept. What of the modern nations who considered their laws so much more enlightened than the Law God gave through Moses? What have they got to compare?

It is the principles behind the commands that we must grasp and apply. The Law was holy, just and good. Christ came, not to destroy it, but to fulfill it in all its beauty. "Do we then make void the Law?" asks Paul (Rm. 3:31). Again that same emphatic "God forbid—Let it not be so!" "Rather, we establish the Law." And he explains that God, through Christ—

"Condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us" (Rom. 8:3-4).

The principle in this first command in Dt. 22 is identical with the principle of Jesus' beautiful words on the Mount—

"Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you."

This is the new-old commandment that Jesus brought, and perfectly exemplified—new in that it had (and has) so rarely been understood and used; old in that they had had it 'from the beginning.'

Dt. 22:5—"The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth to a man, neither shall a man put on woman's garments; for all that do so are an abomination unto the Lord thy God."

The word "abomination" is a very strong term. It denotes utter abhorrence. The principle here is crystal-clear: each sex has its proper place in the all-wise arrangements of God, and each in its place is beautiful and fitting and a glory to God. But for either to attempt to fill the position that God has designated for the other is intensely displeasing to Him. The world, in a misguided zeal for what it terms equality, uses all its powers to destroy the individuality and distinction and complementary harmony that God has created in making man and woman. In all its works, the world knows not God. Unless we study deeply, and take great care, we are inevitably influenced and contaminated by the world's views.

Dt. 22:8—"When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house"

The principle? Responsibility. We are our brother's keeper. No man liveth to himself. We are responsible for others to the extent that our actions do or could affect them, for good or ill. We think of Jesus' solemn words (Mt. 18:6)—

"Whoso shall offend—or cause to offend—one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea."

And Paul's inspired commentary on this (Rm. 14:21)—

"It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak."

"If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth" (1 Cor. 8:13).

We cannot run away from this heavy and ever-present responsibility. Every action, and every failure to act where action is called for, will have its inevitable effect upon others for which we must answer to God. It is easier, and cheaper, to build a house without a parapet around the roof. It has certain advantages. We may feel (and be) quite safe ourselves. But God says that in whatever we build, the protecting wall must be there for the sake of others who may not be as surefooted or as quick to perceive the danger as we.

Dt. 22:9—"Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seed, lest the fruit of thy seed which thou hast sown, and the fruit of thy vineyard, be **DEFILED**. "

"The seed is the Word of God," said Jesus. And Paul says—

"If any man preach any other Gospel, let him be **ACCURSED!**"

Hard words indeed, but they are not ours: they are the necessary words of life and death from God. In all the world, there is no hope of life except in the true seed—kept pure. Whoever contributes in the slightest way to the contamination of that seed is a murderer, however good his intentions may be. Very, very few things in this world really matter or are important, but here is one that is vital. Whoever we cannot conscientiously meet with around the table of the Lord has another Gospel. We dare not encourage them in their course, nor bid them Godspeed. It is neither kindness to them, nor faithfulness to God, to allow the seriousness of the issues to be lost in a haze of ill-advised fraternization. We are stewards and custodians of something far more important than ourselves. Great plainness of speech is called for, although at the same time great kindness and forbearance.

It is always easy to condemn and destroy, but to build takes time and work. Those who by nature are firm have a natural tendency to be harsh and bitter: those who by nature are soft have a tendency to be weak and compromising. Whatever comes naturally to us must be distrusted, for in our flesh dwelleth "no good thing." There are no natural virtues. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit." To pride ourselves on our natural reactions—what ever they are—is to glory in our shame. We are only safe when we are consciously restraining nature and following the Spirit's express and flesh-crucifying instructions contrary to nature.

Dt. 22:10—"Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together."

An ox and an ass: clean and unclean: a true believer and one with another gospel (or no gospel). Can they plow together? Can they have joint activities? Can they join hands in anything and expect God's favor and blessing? What saith the scripture?

Dt. 22:11—"Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts, as of woolen and linen together."

A variation of the same basic principle, with certain different aspects. What could possibly be wrong with a mixture of weaving materials?—combining the best features of both. God is simply driving home the same old lesson: purity, separation, holiness—over and over again, even to the point of not mixing materials in their weaving. A mixed covering, a mixed protection, a mixed dependence: wool and linen—the natural fleshly animal covering, or the Spirit's glorious white garment.

If God is our covering, it must be God alone. We must choose, and be faithful to that choice. How often that lesson is repeated, and still it is so hard to learn!

— G.V.Growcott, *The Berean Christadelphian*, May, 1975