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CHRISTIANITY AND THE LAW

– MAY 19. – MATT. 5:17-26. –

"He that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the Law." – Rom. 13:8.

JESUS AND HIS APOSTLES expounded the harmony between Christianity and Judaism, nevertheless comparatively few Christians today seem to grasp the subject clearly. Today's study aims to make clear their distinctions and harmonies.

The Great Teacher declared that He came not to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfil them. While the Law was spoken of as Moses' Law, it was really the Divine Law given to Israel as a basis for the Divine Covenant with that nation, and Moses merely stood as mediator of that Law Covenant – that agreement by which Israel was obligated to keep the Law, and God was obligated if they did so to grant them everlasting life, Divine favor and the glorious privilege of being His instruments for the blessing of all nations, under Messiah's Kingdom.

The failure of even the most sincere Israelites to gain the promised everlasting life proved, not that God's Law was an unjust one, which would need at some time to be set aside as unworkable, but that Israel, like the remainder of the world, shared by inheritance Adamic weaknesses, [R5006 : page 118] which so impaired their moral quality that they could not keep God's perfect Law – in its spirit; the spirit of the Law our Lord defined to be whole-hearted love for God and "Golden Rule" love for the neighbor.

The Gospel of Jesus magnifies the Jewish Law by admitting its righteousness, its reasonableness and by admitting that the fault is entirely with humanity. The proposition of Jesus in respect to His followers is this: He, being perfect, was able to keep the Mosaic Law perfectly, and He had a right, therefore, to everlasting life, and needed

not to have died; but instead of retaining His life He laid it down sacrificially, as a part of the great Divine Plan for human redemption. That sacrifice will bring to the world the blessed privileges and opportunities for eternal life which, it has been promised, Messiah's Kingdom will bring. But meantime the Redeemer, carrying out Jehovah's plans, offers an imputation of His merit to any who have His spirit – that of full consecration to do the Father's will by laying down the present life sacrificially, to gain with the Redeemer a heavenly, spiritual life, glory, honor, immortality, the Divine nature, as Messiah's joint-heir in His Kingdom. All who would thus do would be counted as a part of the spiritual Seed of Abraham, through whom all the families of the earth will eventually receive their blessing.

This offer was made to the Jew first; but, after gathering all the willing and obedient of that nation, the call was extended to the willing and obedient having ears to hear and hearts to obey regardless of all national lines. To all these the terms of discipleship were made clear – terms of self-sacrifice unto death: "If any man will be My disciple let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me; and where I am there shall My disciple be."

This class was promised everlasting life, even though they were unable to keep in every particular the spirit of the Mosaic Law. The Jews reasoned that this was a setting aside of the Law; Jesus and the Apostles answer, No. These disciples or followers of Jesus sacrifice their earthly interests and rights and thus become reckonedly dead to earthly things. God accepts their sacrifices and begets them of the Holy Spirit. Thus they become New Creatures in Christ. These New Creatures are not under any Law of sin and death, nor have they any imperfections. "The Law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made them free from the law of sin and death." – Rom. 8:2.

But, the objector asks, how could God accept a blemished offering? and, furthermore, are not these New Creatures held

responsible for the conduct of their *flesh*, so long as they live – until their sacrifice is completed?

The Scriptures answer. The great High Priest, who presents these offerings as part of His own sacrifice, covers their imperfections and blemishes by an imputation of the merit of His own sacrifice, which is already in the hands of Justice waiting for application on behalf of the sins of the world. When this High Priest thus presents us to God, covered with His own merit as a robe, we are assured that the sacrifices are "holy and acceptable unto God." – Rom. 12:1.

As for subsequent weaknesses of the flesh, the New Creature is indeed held responsible for its mortal body, but since our High Priest tasted death for every man and for all sins of heredity, therefore these New Creatures in Christ are assured that all their trespasses, whether of ignorance or weakness, may be forgiven, and that the Redeemer, their Head and Representative in glory, will upon application impute His merit for the cancellation of such imperfections, that they may thus be maintained in their standing with the Father, "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing." – Eph. 5:27.

Thus are the demands of Divine Law met in respect to the Church. But the Church's covenant means more than merely the observance of the Law; it is a covenant to *sacrifice*, and Justice, the Divine Law, could not demand sacrifice. The Church's covenant, which she shares with her Lord and Redeemer, is an agreement to sacrifice all earthly interests in the doing of the Divine will at any cost. The reward for the keeping of this covenant will be obtained in the First Resurrection change to heavenly glory, honor and immortality. The terms of this covenant read: "Gather together *My saints* unto Me, saith the Lord, those who have made a covenant with Me *by sacrifice*." – Psa. 50:5.

FULFILLING THE PROPHETS ALSO

To the Jew it seemed as though the Gospel invitation would make void all the Prophets, of whom Saint Peter said that all the holy

Prophets since the world began had spoken of restitution times and blessings at the coming of Messiah. (Acts 3:19-21.) To the Jew it still seems as though there must be some mistake, that if Jesus were the [R5007 : page 118] Messiah He should have begun a work of restitution, a work of social, moral, intellectual and physical uplift for mankind, using Israel as His channel, His agency. The Jew points to the eighteen centuries of Christian preaching, and says if Christians be right it makes void all of the prophecies of the past. What is the answer to this?

Jesus gives the answer, saying that the prophecies are being fulfilled. The prophecies tell not only of Jesus but also of His brethren, the "little flock," the Bride class; and that class must be selected before other features of the prophecies can be fulfilled. "I will declare Thy name unto My brethren." (Psa. 22:22; Heb. 2:12.) This is the present work – the work of selecting the class mentioned by the Psalmist, saying, "I have said ye are gods, all of you sons of the Highest; but ye shall all die like men." – Psa. 82:6.

The Law and the Prophets point out the necessity of a Priestly class under the High Priest – of a sacrificing class which would become a Royal Priesthood. These prophecies are in process of fulfilment; neither the Law nor the Prophets are being ignored. Soon this feature of the Divine Plan will have been accomplished; the Church will be glorified with her Lord, and then those features of the Law and the Prophets which dazzle the eyes of Israel will begin to be fulfilled, and will bring them blessing, and through them blessing to the world, far beyond their highest conceptions.

If therefore any of the followers of Jesus should violate the Ten Commandments and teach men so to do, it would manifestly be done through ignorance and misunderstanding, and he would thus mark himself as a follower of Jesus on a low plane – one of the least in the Kingdom. This would apply amongst the Lord's followers at the present time: the Church is the *Kingdom* in *embryo*, and any brother

in such an attitude should be considered by the brethren as weak and should not be given a position of prominence in the service of the Church.

THE PHARISEES' STANDARD LOWER

In Jesus' day the Pharisees prided themselves on their zeal for the Law and found fault with Jesus' disciples and with Himself for healing the sick on the Sabbath. Instead of admitting their claims Jesus repeatedly showed them to be fallacious. They were particular respecting the little requirements of the Law, but were careless respecting its spirit of love. This Jesus termed hypocrisy; He declared that unless His followers would be nearer right in heart than were the Pharisees they would not get into the Kingdom at all. (We must remember the difference [R5007 : page 119] between the embryo Kingdom which was inaugurated at Pentecost and the glorious Kingdom into which the faithful will be ushered by the First Resurrection change.)

Unless His followers would have more of the spirit of the Divine Law than the Pharisees they would not be fit for the begetting at Pentecost – none but those who love righteousness and who thus have the spirit of the Divine Law are acceptable at all in the Church – "the Church of the First-Born, whose names are written in heaven."

The Pharisees held the letter of the Law and said, Beware lest you kill a man, for that would subject you to judgment or trial before the council, or local court of your town; but Jesus taught that hatred is murder, even if it do not go to the length of killing. So high is this standard amongst the Lord's consecrated people that for one of them to be even slightly angry would be a serious matter; and if he were angry enough to call a brother Christian "*a fool*" it would imply that he were in serious danger of the second Death – *Gehenna*. All Christ's followers, therefore, must not only guard their actions but also their lips and the very thoughts of their hearts, that even in thought they shall be in fullest accord with the very spirit of the Divine Law of love;

and if on approaching the throne of grace they find any other spirit in their hearts they should go no further toward God, but first be reconciled to their brother. Under a parable of arrest, condemnation and imprisonment our Lord teaches His disciples that if they have a wrong feeling toward a brother they should make great haste to settle the matter. Every moment of delay endangers their spiritual standing with the Lord and makes it more difficult for themselves in their relationship with God.

The intimation is that if we have wronged a brother and delay to make the matter right and the case come before the Lord for settlement, we will be obliged to suffer the full penalty of our neglect, "the uttermost farthing," before we will be fully restored to Divine favor and fellowship.

GOD'S INHERITANCE

EPHESIANS 1:18.

And can it be
That God designs with you and me
Forevermore to dwell?
Can His great might
Secure for us the right
To be His Israel?
A people chosen to proclaim His worth,
To sound the praises of His glory forth,
To lead the van of an adoring earth?

This poor, weak clay
Can He transform in such a way
That it shall yield Divinity?
This sin-stained mind
So cleanse that He in us shall find
Affinity?

Th' abode of His eternal rest,
That habitation which He loveth best,
His chosen Zion? City ever blest?

If this be so,
Not all the wealth this world can know
Will me suffice:
Nor name, nor fame, nor power, nor pleasure here below
My soul entice.
How poor these transitory things of earth
Beside this treasure of unending worth,
This Heavenly fellowship, this Royal birth!

And can it be
That down throughout succeeding ages He
With ardent longing waits
Th' eventful day
When – sin all purged away –
We'll sit within His gates?
Can we be subjects of our God's desire?
Doth He our loving fellowship require?
And to this height may such as we aspire?

How good to know
His never-failing Word proclaims it so!
Here, Lord, I give myself to Thee,
Work out Thy gracious purposes in me
Until in Heaven Thy blessed Face I see,
And dwell with Thee through all eternity.

WM. W. JOHNSTON. – Africa.

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